WHAT IS RADICAL?

For the central roundtable of this anniversary issue, we invited a diverse group of scholars, critics, artists, and theorists to reflect on the role and possibilities for radical art historical scholarship and artistic production under the conditions of crisis and social upheaval that characterize our times. We asked what it means today to be, or to act, "radical" and to rearticulate scholarship, knowledge, pedagogy, and art in order to address the excesses of late capitalism, amplified by the inequalities and uncertainties of a global pandemic; the accelerating threat to the environment caused by climate change; and the rise of right-wing nationalism, racism, and xenophobia all over the world. At a time when neoliberal ideologies have instrumentalized knowledge, we hope to encourage a critical renewal of the radical practices of humanistic thought, and reinvigorate attention to the many ways in which a renewed commitment to radicalness might change our relationship to the past.

To this end, we asked the following questions: What does it mean to think and act radically, and how does this relate to forms of radicalism connected to earlier moments, for example, in the 20th century? What can be the role of radical art and scholarship under the conditions of late capitalism? More generally, how can art and artists serve the

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ongoing struggle for social justice and the agendas of emancipatory social change? Finally, what kinds of art criticism and art historical scholarship are necessary to address the great challenges of our uncertain future? The wide-ranging responses to these questions are presented in the pages that follow.

ALEXANDER ALBERRO
Barnard College/Columbia University

Any contemplation of what it means to think and act radically today must remember that institutional structures *order* the human subject and play a fundamental role in constructing subjectivity. All institutions, all symbolic orders, work in this way. Humans initially—passively, so to speak—learn to perform a variety of the structure's practical deeds or rituals. Through those performances, which negotiate a structure's rules and prohibitions, humans become subjects. In getting a sense of the performed deeds, they also get a sense of their lives—of who and how they are. Mimetically repeating, performing, and *re*performing acts and/or rituals are the mechanisms through which structural practices achieve their authority. They are also the operations through which humans acquire the individual subjectivities they possess.

The human subject's reliance on repeating already-established practices and conventions renders subjectivity precarious. "We are . . . social beings from the start," philosopher Judith Butler writes, "dependent on what is outside ourselves, on others, on institutions, and on sustained and sustainable environments, and so are, in this sense, precarious."[1] The conditions that enable us to function within society are those that keep us precarious. Factors beyond our actions constitute our agency. This theorization is a large and complicated extension of the traditional subject-object relationship. The problem of subjectivity ceases to be only a question of personal experience, as the ontology of individualism would have it, and becomes part of a more considerable sociopolitical concern.

To theorize the subject as precarious in this way is to acknowledge the relationship between the institutional environment and agency. The subject starts from already established protocols and then excavates and questions what makes these codes and conventions possible. In this sense, subjective experience is a given. One must search elsewhere—in the surrounding environment, in the preexisting institution, in the historical *a priori*—for its conditions of possibility. Theorizations attentive to the relationship between the institutional environment and

1 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 23.

agency foreground the ways human subjects both shape and *are shaped by* the institutional structures in which they circulate. The subjects that the institutions bring into being enable the institutions to function.

The world is not a static space in which our activities take place. It is an entity actively produced by our actions. Social reality, especially in its ideological form, is a construction. We create the world, and it creates us. A feedback loop between our activity and our material and institutional surroundings characterizes our social condition. The environments produced by our actions set powerful constraints upon subsequent actions. Take the city where I am presently writing this text. Initially, it might seem little more than a large cluster of buildings, streets, schools, parks, and businesses. This description is exceptionally partial, however. The city only becomes a reality as people navigate it to work, study, shop, socialize, rest, and play. We cannot adequately comprehend the city without considering the people who go about "producing" it day after day. But the city also shapes human activity: the city's physical and institutional structures create the conditions under which people go to work, study, shop, socialize, rest, and play. Our activities produce the city, which shapes our activities. This circuit elucidates the agency we mobilize to create the world in which our actions have meaning. When I write this text and publish and circulate it on an institutional platform such as the one you are reading, I take part in a discussion that informs my own thinking.

Yet, if one accepts my claim that our actions contribute to the production of our surrounding environment, then one must also acknowledge how this applies to our institutional surroundings and how one participates in the production of our world. To intervene in a genuinely liberatory manner in the world in which we live entails producing an environment in which our agency could emerge. Therefore, radical intervention's essential task is to reconfigure the social realm's relations and apparatus to reinvent the institutional environment in ways designed to maximize human agency. If institutional structures, like regimes of power, function through repetition and ritualized performances, then in the possibility of swerving or *queering* these mimetic performances is a space for agency to emerge. Structures may constrain us, but we, as human subjects, by performing otherwise can act in ways that could lead to transformation of these structures, and in this manner, open an entirely new field of subjective experience and an expanded range of radical social and political possibilities.

Literary theorist Eve Sedgwick reminds us that identification—"to identify *as*"—is never seamless or unilateral but always includes "multiple processes" of identifying *with* or *as against*. The relations implicit in identification with are "fraught with intensities of incorporation, diminishment, inflation, threat, loss, reparation, and disavowal."[2] Identification, then, according to Sedgwick, is never a simple project. It is always relational and situated. To identify with a culture, lifestyle, religious orientation, or political philosophy means simultaneously and partially to counter-identify, or only somewhat identify, with different facets of the social and psychic world.[3]

Beyond the politics of identification and counter-identification is what performance studies scholar José Muñoz refers to as "disidentification."[4] This strategy neither assimilates nor strictly opposes socially prescriptive patterns of identification. Instead, it repeats and actualizes preexisting conventions but transforms them from within by repeating them slightly differently. To disidentify, Muñoz explains, means "to work on, with, and against [the operation of] a cultural form."[5] It is a strategy that visualizes identities and culture alike as a loose assemblage of disparate fragments and resists a conception of power as being a permanently fixed discourse. It negotiates resistance within the flux of discourse and understands that, like discourse, counter-discourses can always fluctuate for different ideological ends. To develop differentiating and deviating moments within a nexus of convention and discourse, today's radical agents must cultivate the ability to adapt and shift as quickly as power does. To think and act radically today is to swerve preexisting conventions tactfully. It is, in a word, to *disidentify* with the dominant discourse and power.

Alexander Alberro teaches in the Department of Art History at Barnard College and Columbia University.

2 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 61.

3 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 8.

4 Ibid., passim.

5 Ibid., 12.

HOMI BHABHA
Harvard University

In the "Life and Arts" section of the *Weekend Financial Times* of May 9, 2020, Gillian Tett, chair of the paper's US editorial board, published a front-page article titled "Against the Odds." In the midst of quarantine cabin fever, Tett pries open the porthole to speculate on the risks of a post-lockdown future. Tett asks, "How will governments and individuals weigh the difficult daily decisions facing us when we leave lockdown"? As we juggle with "supposedly neutral data, risk models and forecasts," Tett argues, we will have to come to terms with "psychological biases, cultural assumptions and inconsistent incentives" because "medical science can reveal death-rates and frame mortality risks, but models cannot tell us when and how we might feel safe." In a place like America, Tett concludes, it is also possible to imagine a rebellion "whereby the burden of risk is handed back to the individual."

Tett refers, of course, to COVID-related deaths; and the post-lockdown rebellion she imagines would most likely be staged by Trumpian ethno-nationalists for whom wearing a facemask is apparently an affront to their First Amendment rights. In the mired politics of "post-truth"-cum-conspiracy theory, it is difficult, at times, to distinguish liberty from lunacy. Tett's speculations on the risk to human life in the aftermath of the lockdown, read in the wake of the mortal risk to Black lives on the public highway at the hands of the police, have led me to reflect further on the language of risk and the nature of rebellion as part of the post-lockdown predicament.

We were cautiously expecting to emerge from lockdown to embrace some version of our public lives and reclaim something of the shared freedoms of public spaces. What we were quite unprepared for was the tragic resumption of public life as a result of an unwarranted and unprovoked public death. Instead of converging on neighborhood streets and maintaining the hygiene of "social distancing," bystanders in the Powderhorn district of Minneapolis witnessed the curbside killing of George Floyd—all 8 minutes 46 seconds of asphyxiating agony—as Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, extinguished a life with the pressure of his knee. Despite Floyd's repeated pleas for mercy—"I can't breathe"—and witnesses imploring Chauvin to desist, he dug his knee

into Floyd's neck. Several hundreds of thousands of protesters across the world risked the ravages of COVID-19 to exercise their right to protest against a system of criminal injustice that would enable a routine procedure of law and order to result in a brazen act of public execution. Americans were as "unprepared" for the viral pandemic as they were for the pandemonium of racial policing. According to the Pew Global Survey published on June 12, 2020, "The levels of interest in the protests nearly match the shares of Americans who were following news about the coronavirus outbreak in late April, before Floyd's death."[1]

The ubiquitous use of the phrase "being unprepared" in the media and public discourse is not merely a matter of words. Unpreparedness is descriptive of events and encounters that the subject experiences in the present; but it is also a term that signifies a collective predicament of *predictive precariousness* that shapes the people's consciousness of their future. What does it mean to *be unprepared* for something that has a long history of happening: pandemics have occurred for several hundred years; police killings of Black American men and women, in avoidable and unjust circumstances, are part of a recurrent cycle of institutional racial violence. And yet, the moment of "being unprepared"—for the video that recorded the last 8 minutes 46 seconds of George Floyd's life, for instance—is rarely recognized as a significant feature of public, historical life. It is *too quickly* absorbed into normative narratives of cause and consequence, reason and risk, symptom and structure, and so on. Is "unpreparedness" solely or even principally an affective response, with a limited political or ethical effectivity?

In these circumstances I want to suggest that "being unprepared" may be an inflection point, one that primes you for becoming an effective agent by first "taking you aback" and then giving you the opportunity to recover and "right" yourself (ethically "upright"?), to stand up against the illegitimate uses of power and the abuse of authority. Thought of in this way, the panicky moment of unpreparedness might well prepare you to live up to the responsibility of taking action under pressure, and making decisions in relation to risk. Unpreparedness may appear to be a pre-political moment in the life of the subject and citizen,

1 Amy Mitchell, Mark Jurkowitz, J. Baxter Oliphant, and Elisa Shearer, "About Four-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Following News about George Floyd Protests Very Closely and Discussing It with Others Often" (Pew Research Center, Journalism and Media, June 12, 2020), https://www.journalism.org/2020/06/12/about-four-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-following-news-about-george-floyd-protests-very-closely-and-discussing-it-with-others-often/#fn-81127-2.

but it may also be a quality of time necessary, in the midst of flux and fire, to decipher an ethical predisposition that leads to deliberative political action.

Unpreparedness is a resource of the human experience of time—however anxious, uncertain, and provisional it may be—that, ironically, entertains the human side of political affect and aspiration—ethical affiliation based on ambivalence, fear, doubt, disappointed hope. To be open to being "unprepared" for the political moment is to develop a capacity to engage in the ethics of mutuality and equality, and to be committed to the modest art of listening and of learning from cultures of difference and disadvantage that are at the heart of the democratic experiment. Such is the revolution in ethical conduct and political consciousness that James Baldwin, my closest friend in these fragile times, has unforgettably invoked in "the negative way": "The price of this transformation is the unconditional freedom of the Negro; it is not too much to say that he, who has been so long rejected, must now be embraced, and at no matter whatever the psychic or social risk. . . . And the Negro recognizes this, in a negative way. Hence the question: Do I really *want* to be integrated into a burning house?"[2]

Protesters the world over who were *unprepared* to witness another "law-and-order" racial killing decided to risk their health and, in some cases, their livelihoods, to stand up—as upright citizens—for issues of global inequality, injustice against minorities, and the tyranny of ethno-nationalist leaders democratically elected who, in these current crises, have played fast and loose with issues of public health and state violence.

Yes, the moment of "unpreparedness" is as significant a measure of time as is a "period," or an "age," or other such markers of *longue durée*, through which we construct the meanings of events and their social and historical outcomes. But the "unprepared" carries with it the affective charge of a political or historical moment of "suddenness"—a stunning illustration of emotion leading to cognition, and uncertainty leading to action. It is this very temporality of suddenness that marks the advent of both COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter as global phenomena. We knew all about the science of pandemics and the racialization of police power, but we were unprepared for the *suddenness* and the severity of both, dovetailed and entangled in our everyday lives.

2 James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International, 1993), 94.

The importance of acknowledging the suddenness of contemporary crises as they overwhelm us, and of being prepared to negotiate with their unprepared present-ness as grounds for transformative change, has a long philosophical genealogy. Søren Kierkegaard, author of *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) and *The Sickness unto Death* (1849)—could there be more timely titles for our times?—has this to say: " 'The moment' is a figurative expression, and therefore it is not easy to deal with. . . . What we call the moment, Plato calls *tó exaiphnes* [the sudden]. . . . For freedom, the possible is the future, and the future is for time the possible. To both of these corresponds anxiety in the individual life."[3] In Kierkegaard's sense and Baldwin's spirit, I argue for the risk of freedom caught in the sudden moment. We are compelled to come to terms with freedom's possible futures as they fly past in present time, half-understood and never fully seen. *How long will this protest last? How far will this movement go?* These are absolutely the right questions to ask, so long as we don't believe that there is a right answer to them. In asking these questions we prepare ourselves for a political temporality of speech and action, for which we may as yet be unprepared, but which enables us to act beyond the "long-lasting" policies of evolutionary reform—health-care reform, police reform, criminal justice reform—that are, all too often, afflicted with short memories and broken promises. This intimation of the *future's present* is often an untimely moment; it disturbs our sense of historical duration and political direction; it bewilders us and renders us belated. At the same time, it is from within such disruption and disorientation that we move closer to Frantz Fanon's complex call to resistance, framed for his moment and ours in *The Wretched of the Earth*: "each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity."[4]

Homi K. Bhabha is a professor of the Humanities at Harvard University. He is the author of *The Location of Culture* (1994; 2004) and curator in residence at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He is a regular contributor to *Artforum*.

3 Kierkegaard, Søren, Thomte, Reidar, and Anderson, Albert B. *Kierkegaard's Writings, VIII* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 87–91.

4 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1st ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 145.

ALEJANDRA CASTILLO
Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias
de la Educación, Santiago, Chile

We live in fast-paced times. Everything glimmers and disappears with the same speed as the images that pass before us on our mobile devices. *Surface*, *speed*, and *interchangeability* are words that best describe the scopic regime that organizes our screens. Images on mobile devices address one another on a surface where nothing is inscribed or remains. These are surfaces of extreme speed, surfaces on which "everything happens" according to an algorithmic command.

The temporality of screen images is that of an absolute present—the law of an absolute presence, of spectacle, as well as of specularity, saeculum, and screens. The visual regime that rules itself by this law—that makes the eye and the gaze an absolute principle of enlightenment and a kind of meta-optics or theater of self-observation—is also a regime of temporality, a way of administering time based on the principle of obsolescence. Absolute presence and obsolescence superimpose themselves on one another in the immediacy of screen images. Images dictate time—a time that, despite this, always announces itself in the present and in the presence of images.

This temporality threatens to vanquish each and every area of life as an archive teletechnologically described. One must not forget that the absolute present is allied with neoliberal capitalism and the "now" of web-based platforms. The "now" of criticism, of the politics of resistance, of transformation also appeals to the present as defining the temporality of intervention and change, which leaves us with a double-edged problem. On the one hand, it is possible to observe that critique and the politics of resistance take place with the same speed as images and therefore meet the same fate: presence, superposition, interchangeability, and precisely for this reason, obsolescence. On the other hand, one also often observes that critique and the politics of resistance take place by appealing to a time to come. However, the masculine gaze and body of these methods are also perceived as obsolete, by making recourse to the same archive of androcentric resistance.

From a slightly different perspective, the time of devices is marked by its end in planned obsolescence. As strange as it might seem, machine time does nothing but re-create, time and again, the

temporality of the end of the world in the figure of an absolute present: there is no future, but there is also no past. This temporal condition constitutes subjectivities and modes of relation; in other words, it describes an affective order.

Without a doubt, we find this problem among contemporary feminisms. We see a symptom of it in the multiplication of temporal particles that, for a while now, have preceded the word "feminism": trans, de, and post- are markers of a time that aims to accommodate the untimeliness of feminism or, more precisely, the body that constitutes it. This politics of naming is necessary when it reveals the conservative nodes that persist among the practices, politics, and genealogies of contemporary feminism. However, when the politics of naming—which is also a form of temporality—vertiginously seeks to embrace an absolute present that is always forward-looking, searching for obsolescence in each and every one of the practices that differs from its own name (and identity), it fails to upset the body of telamatic neoliberalism. To the contrary, many times it runs the risk of becoming one of neoliberalism's folds.

So then, how can feminism unsettle the time and body of neoliberal capitalism? How can it—or we—disquiet the bodily archive of criticism and the politics of resistance that, in most cases, do nothing but use other means to reproduce androcentrism? One possible alternative would be to describe the temporality of feminism in a complex way. For example, consider such a temporality at the crossroads of two zones: body and archive. Feminism is a form of politics that intervenes in the present tense, disrupting the bodies of both feminism and the dominant social order, which implies animating other marginal (archival) presents that hegemonic narratives have erased or forgotten. Following the same line of thought, the radical nature of the feminist gaze is not to be found in the gesture of rapidly advancing "forward"—like the time of the screen image on which nothing remains—but rather in deviation and obliqueness. The complex temporality of feminism allows us to disrupt areas that regularly remain untouched by feminism, as is often the case with the production of knowledge and its institutions. Above all, feminism brings visibility to other bodies and to feminist genealogies for the purpose of contemporary struggles. These detours and oblique passages do not try to complete the past but rather to articulate politics in the figure of a double contemporaneity: from one present to another.

Perhaps what is radical today is not found in the provocative temptation to advance toward an indeterminate future at top speed, decrying obsolescence at every turn. Instead, radicality has more to do with disrupting the temporality, gaze, and archive of emancipation while proposing a feminist body politic in the same gesture.

TRANSLATED BY KAREN BENEZRA

Alejandra Castillo teaches in the Department of Philosophy at the Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación, Santiago, Chile. She is the author of *Adicta imagen* (2020), *Matrix: El género de la filosofía* (2019), *Imagen, cuerpo* (2016), and *Ars disyecta: Figuras para una corpo política* (2014).

KETI CHUKHROV
Higher School of Economics, Moscow

The first days of the pandemic brought about a dimension of eschatology—the catastrophic abnormality intervening into the daily life of semio-capitalism. This eschatological abnormality oscillated between regrets about the inability to commit acts of mourning under the conditions of self-isolation (Giorgio Agamben) and the global lockdown consensus. Quarantine had the effect of an uncanny inevitability. The lockdowns brought the yet unknown suspension of major forms of consumption and of libidinally grounded desires and habits; they evoked the moods and attitudes that could have evolved into experiencing contemporary temporality eschatologically. The initial expectation was therefore that the lockdowns could entail the necessity of capitalist circulation's radical suspension and bring us to reconsider the habitual forms of production, consumption, and distribution. Although certain kinds of consumption immediately moved to the virtual economy—monetizing the hitherto free online space—there was also a clear premonition that the basic correlation of supply and demand would change in the post-pandemic economy, sequestering the excesses of consumption. Thus, we immediately heard numerous voices calling for an economy of basic need and frugality, which has always been the core of the political-economic systems of historical socialism. For example, Franco Berardi called for the use-value economy.[1] Slavoj Žižek acknowledged the necessity of nonalienation in his text "Why Are We Tired All the Time?," calling for a world "with flat basics"—a stance that previously would have been difficult to imagine him taking.[2]

Yet, as we saw with the second wave, the suspension of capitalism's libidinal logic failed. It's clear that the reason it failed was because neoliberal governments and businesses would not choose their own suspension or reconstitution. Libertarian businessmen all over the world accused authorities of destroying economies, whereas governments had

1 Franco Berardi, "Beyond the Breakdown: Three Meditations on a Possible Aftermath," *e-flux conversations*, March 31, 2020, https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/beyond-the-breakdown-three-meditations-on-a-possible-aftermath-by-franco-bifo-berardi/9727.

2 Slavoj Žižek, "Why Are We Tired All the Time?," *The Philosophical Salon*, April 2, 2020, https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/why-are-we-tired-all-the-time/.

to obey the needs of capitalist production. That this production must remain sustainable is clear, too. When people work and produce, they earn and consume. An overall suspension of production and consumption would be catastrophic. Yet neither civic nor artistic institutions ever questioned the possibility of a consumption sabotage that could be an attempted alternative to the capitalist logic of libidinal economics based on surplus value, overproduction, overconsumption, entertainment, and luxury. The principal mood, on behalf of emancipatory discourse standing for freedoms and liberties, was *against* any suspensions, including the suspension of cultural entertainment. Suffice it to mention the anti-lockdown protests or the lifestyle that Paul Preciado describes in his excellent text "The Losers Conspiracy."[3] Here, he calls for libertine disobedience and the crash of all digital networking, thus identifying the necessity of restricting governments' despotic needs. Sadly, libertarian businessmen who decry their profits often coincide with progressive critical theorists in their rhetoric of anti-quarantine disobedience.

This means that lockdowns were associated mostly with the restrictive regulations imposed by the authorities from above; they were not envisaged as a tool for recalibrating the modes of production and communication, *but as a device for reconstituting the general imaginary of needs*. Basic income was positioned as the agenda, but basic need was not. This inability to differentiate between basic income and basic need is evident in a monologue by Yanis Varoufakis titled "What Comes after Capitalism?"[4] His answer to the titular question invokes basic income but does not question the plausibility of universally posited basic need. Varoufakis envisages the post-capitalist commons as an equalized distribution of income and of surplus value. He departs from the assumption that in digital capitalism we all produce value for Google, WhatsApp, Amazon, and so on. Consequently, all users that create value for those mega-companies should have a chance to obtain shares and income from it. Such an attitude to political economy confines itself to the redistribution of the excesses of income, but does not dispute the ethics of production and consumption that hinge on libidinality and capitalist desire.

Therefore, it is interesting to inquire the extent to which desire is deeply and unconsciously inscribed in capitalism, as well as how we

3 Paul Preciado, "The Losers Conspiracy," *Artforum*, March 26, 2020, https://www.artforum.com/slant/paul-b-preciado-on-life-after-covid19-82586.

4 Yanis Varoufakis, "What Comes after Capitalism?," DiEM25, May 21, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMRowgDoZZs.

imagine emancipation, freedom, and civic agency. It is even more interesting to ask ourselves whether our dependence on the libidinal regimes of desire generates our reckless attitude to the eschatological dimension of the pandemic, even despite and alongside our adherence to emancipatory discourse? This is to say that in the conditions of semiocapital, the exemplary body of emancipation often happens to be a narcissistic body unable to terminate the logic of the libidinal economy.

In Jacques Derrida's "Circumfession,"[5] a poignant autobiographical text triggered by his mother's death, the intonation of confession presupposes the circumcision of all previous modes of living in the name of the event of mourning. Circumcision is an ethical act involving the retention of libidinality, but if castration is treated as the restrictive termination of desire, circumcision is a qualitatively and ethically different act. It suspends the regimes of desire not out of any external prohibition. In circumcision, the suspension of the libidinal is caused by the event that retranslates being into a new dimension whereby previous habits and desires, treated hitherto as normal, disappear. Life in this case is transferred into an eschatological dimension, replacing the homeostatic submergence into "mere" life.

The term *mere life* (*blosses Leben*) was first used by Walter Benjamin in his text "Regarding the Critique of Violence" (1921) to refer to daily life with no other horizon than the private interest of living; such life does not attain the dimension of the divine. Indeed, the term *divine* in Benjamin's understanding did not pertain to the sphere of religion, but instead delineated the sphere of the eschatological (circum)cessation of life's regularities in the name of the revelatory forms of living and politics. It is under the conditions of the pandemic that the imaginary regarding "basic need" and the suspended "normalities" of the libidinal economy have revealed themselves as not only the political-economic, but also the eschatological, dimension of sociality.

Keti Chukhrov teaches at the School of Philosophy & Cultural Studies at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. Her latest book, *Practicing the Good: Desire and Boredom in Soviet Socialism* (2020), deals with the impact of socialist political economy on the epistemes of historical socialism. Her books include *To Be—To Perform: "Theatre" in Philosophic Critique of Art* (2011), *Merely Humans* (2010), and *Pound &£* (1999).

5 Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession," in *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

T. J. DEMOS
University of California, Santa Cruz

The term *radical* may not possess specific political valence beyond indicating the desire for fundamental societal transformation, and indeed, its associations with both leftist and rightist tendencies demonstrate its flexibility. But insofar as it entails the structural analysis of current conditions, that analysis can lead only, in my view, to opposing colonial and racial capitalism, which today is devastating people and the planet everywhere. As such, radicalism carries both methodological implications (thinking and practicing structural analysis rather than superficial liberal critique) and an intersectionalist demand, given capital's inextricable relations to colonial and racial oppression, according to which the abolition of racism requires the abolition of capitalism.[1] By extension, ecosocialism is not merely implied by *radical*'s etymology—*radix* in Latin meaning "root"—but rendered imperative when capitalism is destroying the more-than-human world and any notion of a sustainable future for all.

Critical humanities scholarship provides a wealth of resources in relation to such thinking. Indeed, there's no shortage of visual cultures and art histories; critical race and ethnic studies; decolonial, feminist, and LGBTQ+ theories; and political ecologies that delve deeply into the current crises, analyze dominant conventions critically, and provide ways to reinvent the world as we know it—even though it's also true, as Boots Riley has recently observed, that class-based analysis and struggle (especially in the US) has largely fallen by the wayside over the last sixty years, beginning with the New Left's ascendance in the 1960s.[2]

Reinvesting in class analysis so as to comprehend and contest today's unprecedented levels of economic inequality and their many social implications, however, still leaves unaddressed the institutional

1 As Saidiya Harman contends, "the possessive investment in whiteness can't be rectified by learning 'how to be more antiracist.' It requires a radical divestment in the project of whiteness and a redistribution of wealth and resources. It requires abolition, the abolition of the carceral world, the abolition of capitalism." "Saidiya Hartman on Insurgent Histories and the Abolitionist Imaginary," *Artforum*, July 14, 2020, https://www.artforum.com/interviews/saidiya-hartman-83579.

2 See "Boots Riley on Why the Left Abandoned Class Struggle," November 30, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSQ18mmL538&feature=share.

appropriation of any and all critical theory, where radical articulations—whether made in artistic form, humanities scholarship, or pedagogy—end up serving the extractive machinery of the university, museum, or media outlets that compose some of the dominant institutions of capital. Such articulations do so even as critical practitioners struggle endlessly to amplify radical perspectives.

But that's still not enough—as if it ever was. As Walter Benjamin said long ago, at another moment of fascist threat, it's incumbent on cultural producers to position themselves *within* the struggle, within "the relations of production," rather than simply comment on them. He realized full well that "the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate astonishing quantities of revolutionary themes . . . without calling its own existence, and the existence of the class that owns it, seriously into question."[3]

Today, it's not simply that we must relearn the necessarily collective basis of struggle (rather than trying to base it on individual subjective consciousness); we must address—yet again—the institutions that powerfully limit the scope of transformative energy even as they appropriate any and all radical content. Updating the terms of Benjamin's own critique, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten explain how the current "fantasy" of "subversive criticality" is belied by the "regulatory" functions of the institution, according to which the university acts as a "credential-granting front for finance capitalism and a machine for stratification." For them, radical intellectual labor provides "a surplus" that is readily "extracted, (re)conceptualized and financialized by and for the businesses," with critical content being channeled into a "managed insurgency" from which springs a "steady stream of capital."[4]

Even while doing battle in this war of appropriations, academics

3 Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," his 1934 address to the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris, reprinted in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Vol. 2: 1927–1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 770 and 774. Also see Okwui Enwezor, "The Artist as Producer in Times of Crisis" (2004), www.darkmatterarchives.net, which redeploys Benjamin's essay in relation to contemporary art but largely defangs the earlier work by not mentioning Benjamin's affirmation of proletarian solidarity and socialism.

4 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, "the university, last words," FUC, July 9, 2020, https://www.fuc-series.org/. As the organizers of this site explain, "FUC is a weekly online series that hosts conversations around labor, labor movements, de-commodified knowledge, and the future of the university and higher education. It is facilitated by rent-burdened graduate students at the University of California in solidarity with the [2019–20] COLA [Cost of Living Adjustment] movement."

contesting the manifold crises of late capital within the university are arguably losing ground. Denouncing structural racism in the context of recent #BlackLivesMatter protests, universities have called for greater diversity, but these calls are accompanied by top-down management's austerity budgets, generating symbolic statements of equity that fuel systems of predatory inclusion. Chris Newfield observes that this system, at the public University of California, defines the current terms of institutionalization, in which it's entirely possible to be at once antiracist *and* complicit in the workings of structural racism (which, for instance, offer ever fewer resources and increasing options of indebtedness to growing populations of students of color).[5] Undoubtedly this reflects a global pattern, one characteristic of all neoliberal institutions, making for an increasingly glaring contradiction. This means: there can be no "critical renewal of practices of humanistic thought," as the editors of *ARTMargins* propose—whether through innovative theorizations, expanded canons, more inclusive histories, or other means—if that renewal remains complacent within the neoliberal university and, more broadly, capital's institutions.

The answer cannot be superficial reformism—already on the shakiest of grounds, as liberal political elites have systematically abandoned the working class, generating precarity and fear, all of which worsened by pandemic and answered by reactionary identity politics, white supremacy, and emergent fascism (with some 74 million people, just under half the voting electorate, opting for Trump in the recent election). As Harney and Moten contend, "the enslaved didn't seek the reform but the elimination of the plantation." How did they do that? "Via the patient, breathed accretion of the general strike, they advanced the long project of eroding it from the inside, which, now, we must extend, because the plantation never died but multiplied."[6]

Extending the general strike requires organizing—*the most meaningful radical act today*. This includes challenging individuated academic and cultural labor, opposing the regulated market forces that manufacture competition and adjunct precarity, and rejecting extractive power

5 Chris Newfield, "When Are Access and Inclusion Also Racist?," Remaking the University (blog), June 28, 2020, http://utotherescue.blogspot.com/2020/06/when-are-access-and-inclusion-also.html.

6 Harney and Moten.

operating as a weapon of mass indebtedness.[7] It requires challenging the corrosion of faculty governance, with its ever-lessening transformative power in the shadow of administration, while building emancipatory institutions of collective power within and beyond capital's institutions. It requires disidentifying with the neoliberal university, and more broadly with all capitalist institutions, according to a socialist horizon, as Benjamin and many others have argued. It means learning from recent student labor movements and their radical efforts to "decolonize, democratize, queer, and abolish the university."[8]

"Fuck the future of the university," Harney and Moten advocate—in other words, let's reject the university as we know it. That is, even as we seek to claim the capacity to satisfy our needs otherwise, let's take the fruits of that capacity seriously as collective "wealth" on our path to "self-sufficiency," they say. But not wealth in the capitalist sense. Rather, Harney and Moten reference Marx's *Grundrisse*, but without specific citation—perhaps they have in mind the passage that describes how real wealth is generated from the "universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces, etc.," and "the absolute working-out of creative potentialities," "producing [the subject's] totality . . . in the absolute movement of becoming," which makes "the development of all human powers as such the end in itself."[9]

Remaking the university's future to that end—and expanding it further to encompass the non-anthropocentric imperatives of multispecies justice—can only be achieved through class struggle waged against capital's institutions. In the face of current fascist threat, we can no longer afford to operate merely as radical content providers. The times demand

7 For resonant accounts of "the artist as organizer," now "in the creation of a new collective assemblage of authorship, audience, and distribution networks embedded in political struggle," see Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (London: Verso, 2016), 26; and Jonas Staal, *Propaganda Art in the 21st Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019).

8 As the organizers of StrikeU explain further, "we envision a non-hierarchical space powered by cooperative learning. We see education as a communal activity that is grounded in uplifting others and having compassion for your fellow human beings. We aspire to take the stressful and competitive aspects of learning out of the picture and replace those burdens with systems of support and empathy. Community building & empowerment are values we center with every event." https://strikeuniversity.org/About-Us.

9 Karl Marx, "Notebook V, 22 January—Beginning of February 1858, The Chapter on Capital (continuation)," in *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (1861), https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch09.htm; see also David Harvey's gloss on this passage, "Why Marx's *Grundrisse* Is Relevant Today," October 22, 2020, http://davidharvey.org/2018/11/new-podcast-david-harveys-anti-capitalist-chronicles/.

nothing less than building collective power within anticapitalist and socialist organizations—for instance, the Democratic Socialists of America, Socialist Alternative, the Movement for Black Lives, the #MeToo movement, The Red Nation, and the Progressive International—dedicated to multiracial working-class solidarity and the dismantling of the dominant sociopolitical and economic order that is destroying the world. Cultural production's measure of value will be found in the degree to which it contributes to that goal.

T. J. Demos teaches in the Department of the History of Art and Visual Culture at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and is the founding director of its Center for Creative Ecologies. His books include *Beyond the World's End: Arts of Living at the Crossing* (2020), *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and Political Ecology* (2016), and *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today* (2017). He coedited *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change* (2021), was a Getty Research Institute fellow (spring 2020), and directed the Mellon-funded Sawyer Seminar research project *Beyond the End of the World* (2019–21). A member of the editorial board of *Third Text*, he is also the chair and chief curator of the Climate Collective at the Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology (MAAT) in Lisbon, Portugal.

KEYNA ELEISON
School of Visual Arts at Parque Lage,
Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro

What is radical?

Run on a day of heavy rain with the umbrella open.

This sentence sums up a few possible radical acts and at the same time one of my favorite actions.

Run when people teach me to be careful and go more slowly. The rains leave the paths and the places with the most compromised visibility, but this state of opacity brings comfort, protection. Transparency is not always a resource that everyone can reach. More times I have to understand what is not seen, is not shown, what does not exist, what is not.

Have a vague idea for visibility. Leave what I see in the background. But not unimportant.

Eloah Mendonça. Untitled, 2021.

Let me go
I need to walk
I'll go around looking
Laugh so you don't cry
If someone asks me
Say I'll just come back
After you find me
Candeia

I can run when everyone is being careful and afraid to step. I already know what walking in that state is like. And often on a sunny day, when everything is clear. . . . But I have always heard that I cannot

take all the paths I want, some are not possible and for these speeches I choose not to listen. So running in the heavy rain is possible.

For it is in the rain, in the pouring rain that you can hear me smiling, without fear of being where the lightning may fall. Best time to put your feet on the ground and follow the tortuous path. Follow in doubt firmly.

Be sure to print speed, with an umbrella, precisely because it is not right and even more because I understand that the umbrella will push me back or break, depending on whether I am for or against the rain wind.

This walk, with a clenched fist holding something that can prevent me from going on and still wield with joy and speed, was it meant to protect me, or not? I choose as I please.

Eye addiction lowers in these situations, I exercise the musculature of other senses to decide the path. The low vision caused by the surroundings is a gift, the smell of the street changes, the traces are instantaneous.

And have fun—the order—if I keep laughing, water can come in through my mouth and so a piece of heaven, a little bit of somewhere and people who have gone through that water . . . that thought can bring different flavors to strange perceptions, rare, and remain open to them.

Being able to choose to reach the end of the race completely soaked or dry. In and out.

But never go unpunished.

Nobody gets away with such a race.

But nobody ever did it with me . . . this race, although lonely can be shared by the experience. It's an invitation.

Run on a rainy day with an open umbrella. Without worrying about being seen.

Keep being only my choices. And never stop asking if the radicalism is over. More than seeking the answer I want is to seek.

Keyna Eleison teaches at the Free Teaching Program at the School of Visual Arts at Parque Lage and is co-artistic director of the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro. She is a member of UNESCO's African Heritage Commission, which was responsible for naming the Valongo Wharf region as a World Heritage Site. She curated the 10th International Biennial of Art (SIART) in Bolivia. She is a regular contributor to the magazine *Contemporary and América Latina* (C&AL).

IRMGARD EMMELHAINZ
Mexico City

What is art good for when death and chaos surround us? When our means of making a living are threatened? When the COVID-19 pandemic reveals itself to be part of a series of concatenated challenges: unprecedented economic crises; climate change disasters such as fires, floods, and storms; along with the intensification of racist criminalization, brutal immigration policies, gender violence, wealth inequality, and social polarization? Having captured life, language, and attention, leading to fascism, hatred, and neuro-totalitarianism, extractivist capitalism—enforced through government policies, corporatization, and the digitalization of social infrastructure—is giving shape to and managing life, producing and intensifying harm, giving way to neofeudalism. Based on a model of profit-making, digital platforms are disseminating toxic information that destroys the public sphere without accountability. Governments and corporations have produced racialized redundant populations across the globe that live with pollution, poverty, disease, and violence. Five hundred years of colonialism, moreover, have imposed structures that have destroyed any interdependent means for communal survival. Having subsumed every aspect of life to the market, capitalism has disrupted how we connect to each other. Communal life is gone, and substituted for it have been the abstractions of the "individual" (citizen or noncitizen) and "society," the subjects of the nation-state. We are living in the most alienated societies in history, and this is making our lives even more precarious: to survive, we are socially isolated and depend on self-exploitation, toxic health, food, relationships, and energy systems that are hostile to life.

If the COVID-19 pandemic is the beginning of the future, could we say that it has made the culture industry redundant? The images that come to my mind are the sinking scene in *Titanic* (2000) where the orchestra keeps on playing until the end, or the moment in Steve McQueen's *Twelve Years a Slave* (2013) when the main character is forced to play the violin. In his 1937 text "The Theater and the Plague," Antonin Artaud writes that when life is drowning, before we speak about culture, we need to discuss hunger, because "culture never saved man from the preoccupation of living better and the world from being

hungry."[1] Yet, for Artaud, culture is the very thought system that gives shape to our lives: culture rules our most subtle acts—even our decisions about how to feed ourselves—because it is "the spirit present in things." This notion of culture stems from the Enlightenment, which gave reason sovereignty: bestowing on art, science, and the humanities the task of leading humanity to illumination and progress, while endowing critical vision with the potential to lead collective emancipation, and human rights with the power to achieve equality.

Currently, in Mexico, a brigade of *promotores*, or state-sponsored art educators, work tirelessly in so-called *semilleros*, or cultural production centers in marginal rural and urban communities that teach art to children and youth. The goals of the *semilleros* are to decentralize art production, to bring young artists and their communities together, and to establish culture as a site for individual healing, communal dialogue, and interaction.[2] At the same time, neoliberal and extractivist processes are intensifying, while amplified counterinsurgent war techniques are being applied under the guise of the so-called "War on Drugs" in the context of massive militarization of the Mexican territory and the proliferation of extermination camps. According to many observers, this form of war is servile to the global capitalist system and to maintaining transnational capital power. Paradoxically, the intensification of state and para-military violence and extractivism is occurring during a formally democratic moment, including the democratization of culture. Furthermore, neoliberalism in culture means that art has the mandate to be useful and do something, to perform criticality, to weave back together the social tissue destroyed by violence, to be a solace for drowning individuals and communities.

In this context, and deriving from the emancipatory power the Enlightenment and modernity conferred on culture, artivists, artists, and activists have produced a cultural politics of opposition, creating images and sounds of emancipation and decolonization—translated to maps of exploitative interests, of government's complicities with financialization, of inequality and dispossession—denouncing the betrayal of popular sovereignty, visualizing the workings of extractivism and real

1 Antonin Artaud, "Theatre and the Plague" (1933), in *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 39.

2 See Laura García Jiménez, "La batalla contra el monstruo verde: crónica de un viaje a través de diez semilleros," *Revista común* July 2, 2020 available online: https://revistacomun.com/blog/la-batalla-contra-el-monstruo-verde-cronica-de-un-viaje-a-traves-de-diez-semilleros/.

estate speculation, and even capturing the traces of the ghosts of the Anthropocene that are haunting us. All this has been done under the premise that beginning to right wrongs is to critically make something visible. But aside from the fact that art practices represent a fragmented, rather than a systemic, panorama of how the world's concatenated crises are being lived, what is obviated here is that predation is at the core of Western modernity. Predation (as coloniality) is the blind spot of modern and Enlightenment values that have become the ideology of capitalism. And culture, once thought to be a luminous mirror for humanity, is now being threatened by the ubiquity of mirrors where even the ghosts of the Anthropocene do not dare to appear.

Will we be able to maintain art and the humanities as radical and visionary sites for thinking about our futures (quickly catching up with us)? Perhaps being "radical" means throwing away the Enlightenment dreams of culture as a site for emancipation. The task of rising to the challenge is enormous, and we need to acknowledge that when we are living to survive, it is impossible to act radically. When polarization is the order of the day—at the tip of our fingers, in our classrooms, in private conversations with family or friends—criticism only adds to the toxicity. We are living in times of emergency, of acute crisis, and perhaps we need to act strategically rather than radically. Acting radically today means sharing things, putting time and resources into caring for the most vulnerable; it means reproducing life rather than producing surplus value and visibilities. And perhaps, beyond exposing extractive projects and their collateral damages elsewhere, we need to figure out how we came to live in an intoxicated world that disseminates cancer, asthma, diabetes, mental illness, self-destruction, addiction, and environmental and social devastation. To become un-modern, rather than to de-colonize.

Can cultural producers serve contemporary struggles for social justice and territorial defense? Yes, by occupying sacrifice zones, by demanding the accountability of digital platforms through boycott and exodus, by being dissidents in the fossil fuel economy, by aspiring to Greta Thunberg's coherence, and by fighting for a politics of soil and land use. Clearly, rather than counter-information and the romance of decolonization, we need to disseminate new narratives, stories not of the science fiction kind, which are capable only of imagining intensified dystopic versions of our current world. We need to tell stories beyond the myths that we repeat to ourselves: that nation-states guarantee

human rights, that men and women are equal, or that humanity can progress through science and culture. The challenge is to find spaces we have in common so as to imagine the future, learning from each other and together, as well as finding ways to create noninjurious forms of interdependency. But first and foremost, we need to acknowledge the emotions that come with predatory ways of inhabiting the world—fear, panic, and anxiety, along with mistrust of others—as well as the pathologies of corruption, lack of accountability, and abuse. Then we must acknowledge that the unbeatability of capitalism is grounded on the fact that its flows originate in our libidos. The question is: How do we change not just how we live, but also how we feel? Storytelling and radical imagination might be a start.

Irmgard Emmelhainz is an independent translator, writer, and researcher based in Mexico City. Her work about film, the Palestine Question, art, culture, and neoliberalism has been widely translated, and she has presented her research at an array of international venues. Her books include *El cielo esta incompleto: Cuadernos de viaje en Palestina* (2017), *Jean-Luc Godard's Political Filmmaking* (2019), *The Tyranny of Common Sense: Mexico's Postneoliberal Conversion* (2021), and *Toxic Loves, Impossible Futures: Feminist Lives as Resistance* (2021).

DARBY ENGLISH
University of Chicago

One fine day last summer (2020), a season stained with loss and anguish, I was on a walk when I heard myself say, "They can't have this." Unlike everything else, the splendid atmosphere of the instant felt unprecarious. A pained voice interceded, "What do you mean? It isn't for us." My assured retort—"I'll bet Amy Cooper didn't ruin Christian Cooper's day"—surprised me.

What little I think I know about Christian Cooper centers on a fragment of a follow-up story about the assault on him in the Ramble. I hold it close to my heart. While Cooper speaks the expected lines addressing systemic racism, he interrupts himself repeatedly to mark the arrivals of starkly colored birds.

> A northern rough-winged swallow alighted on a branch and Mr. Cooper, 57, trained his lenses on it for a while. Then he resumed. "If we are going to make progress, we've got to address these things, and if this painful process is going to help us address this—there's the yellow warbler!?" Mr. Cooper said, cutting himself off. . . . At length, he turned his eyes away from the tops of the London plane trees and continued where he had left off: "If this painful process—oh, a Baltimore oriole just flew across!—helps to correct, or takes us a step further toward addressing the underlying racial, horrible assumptions that we African-Americans have to deal with, and have dealt with for centuries, that this woman tapped into, then it's worth it."[1]

These eruptions of Cooper's passion—a flurry of transient enchantments, marked with brown, perky yellow, and brilliant orange—are delightful in themselves. Catching up with Cooper proves to be no simple task, indeed: he's deep in a self-world relation rooted in a curiosity racism has failed to scare out of him. As so often, here the flutter of the actual interrupts something felt to be urgent. Cooper's narration evinces how

1 Sarah Maslin Nir, "The Bird Watcher, That Incident and His Feelings on the Woman's Fate," *New York Times*, May 27, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/27/nyregion/amy-cooper-christian-central-park-video.html.

its precise effect is, or can be, to break the continuity between self and script, a continuity that subjects of an identity-obsessed culture unstintingly maintain and exact, as though nothing were possible without it. Total personal continuity of existence is the service Cooper fails to render.

As Cooper's lesson seeps further, the risk that curiosity poses to settled identity (or any single politics "of" it) becomes clearer. More pointedly, I would say it is crucial not to renounce curiosity—no matter how much, how cunningly racism pleads with you to hand over the reins of desire. Above, the statement "They can't have this" spoke my desire, against which racism struck by condemning as utopian the act of imagining a socially various and peaceable place where "this" isn't a possession. Racism provides lavishly for black objects, because they're readily zoned and shelved, or sold off. But it says "no" to the enchantment of black people because it is so protean, liable to erupt at any time and lead us anywhere.

The Ramble is the only section of Central Park with the look and feel of wilderness. Olmsted planted the Ramble thickly with large and smaller trees, shrubs, flowers, and groundcovers, praising his result as "the perfect realization of the wild garden."[2] Lush and intensely local, its thirty-six acres are the earthiest, most verdant in the city. Giving shape to an experience of the Ramble, making it a place of mystery and delight, are winding woods and a maze of irregular and interlacing paths. Add in the birds whose migratory paths include the park and you have a beloved theater of surprise.

This season's anti-black spectacles brought fresh shocks and despair, but no surprise. The society in which I write has made surprise into an aberration. A birder caught—twice!—freely desiring and pleasuring in the id of the city brought the surprise. Existent for millennia, the black naturalist entered historical consciousness *as a diminishment of itself*, via representations that exchange Cooper's enthusiasm for a clear image of misery. It is a great work of racism to have made a freak out of the black naturalist. A way of saying-without-saying we have no business being in the woods, nothing to see there. Never mind Audubon's own Haitian roots, which make "birding while black" still more absurd than it sounds. If you want, birding *is* black.

2 See F. L. Olmsted, quoted in Clarence Cook, *Description of the New York Central Park* (New York: F. J. Huntington, 1869), 107, 131, 354. For evocative contemporary accounts of the Ramble, loosely interpolated here, see T. Addison Richards, *An 1866 Guide to Central Park* (New York: James Miller, 1866), 50–51 and 52; and Cook, 104–9.

Fanny Howe writes, "A signal does not necessarily mean that you want to be located or described. It can mean that you want to be known as Unlocatable and Hidden. This contradiction can drive the *I*."[3] Similarly, the more you are and do, the more likely you will dissatisfy a politics proper to your demographic, the more you may need a politics of plenty. I specify *my* Christian Cooper to state plainly my ignorance of his actuality and from respect for my delusion. Cooper is real and more than real, an escapee to cheer on. Cooper thrives without having chosen one thing to be. Whether this makes him politically useless or ecstatically human depends entirely on a quality in our attitude as observers. But it would be a failure of antiracist intellectual work, I think, not to consider what ramblers bring to the situation. Sometimes a figure before us is difficult to work out, radical for the very reason that it makes a demand on the mind for work.

Darby English teaches modern and contemporary art and cultural studies at the University of Chicago.

3 Fanny Howe, "Bewilderment," in *The Wedding Dress: Meditations on Word and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 6.

PATRICK FLORES
University of the Philippines, Diliman

"As long as I could stand it without breathing."

These are the inciting words of Salud Algabre, firebrand of a rebellion in the 30s in the Philippines, who refused the Commonwealth of the United States and demanded immediate and total emancipation. She would hold her breath under water to elude arrest by the imperialist military, to later resurface: "Then I would rise for . . . fresh air."[1]

Intuitively, in a history such as that of the Philippines, shaped by three successive colonialisms, the radical may well pertain to rupture, condensed in the desire to end that which exceptionally refuses as it captures. Counterintuitively, the radical can also, in nearly the same vein, evoke protraction, a delay in the effort to end this extreme refusal and capture, amid unnerving colonial continuities, resistances to the radical, and the routine cycle of natural calamities. Translated into the realm of praxis, to be radical is to engage in the project of revolution, a necessary moment of going berserk, a transcendent, unerring force of a full turn, as it were.

The Philippine historian Zeus Salazar traces the word *revolution* in Tagalog, *himagsikan*, to *bagsik*, which mainly means "severity" or "vehemence," cruelty inflicted by either weather or tyrant. There is rigor in this energy that unleashes cataclysm in a political climate, a


FACE TO FACE
with the "GENERALA"
By D. Pablo T Anido

"Face to Face with the 'Generala'," *Sunday Tribune Magazine*, Manila, May 12, 1935.

1 Quoted in Ma. Luisa T. Camagay, "Salud Algabre: A Forgotten Member of the Philippine Sakdal," in *Women in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements*, ed. Susan Blackburn and Helen Ting (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013), 139.

breaking of ground and an uprising. This is one phase of the radical that may have as its telos the collective, an encompassing kinship in the form of nation, class, freedom, or republic. In fact, in this history, both *revolution* and *collective* bear the same metonym: the *Katipunan*. Such practices aspired ultimately to well-being, or *ginhawa*, which is breath, or the air, itself.

Salazar, however, points to another level of the radical as signified by *bagsik*, and here he implicates a culture-specific syndrome called the *meng-amok*, as embodied by (usually Malay) men who in a paroxysm kill all in their path. Furthermore, the *amok*, as an embodiment of an unhinging, is linked to another supposedly wayward subject, the *juramentado*, the suicidal Philippine Muslim man who executes infidels in the name of the Islamic faith. Surely these frenzied strikes are explained by colonial and racialized psychopathology, symptoms of a formidable gestural force beyond the rational pale of the Enlightenment and well within its prejudice. It is at this point of inflection that Salazar's *bagsik* dissipates in the conception of potency: that something as radical as a revolution can only by infused with potency, a virtue or efficacy inscribed in either a talisman or a pharmakon. It is this potency that complicates the radical or the revolutionary, redistributed across the animate subjectivity and, more specifically in Philippine historiography, the discourse of the *Pasyon*, the native Passion of Christ that has transmogrified to some extent from an exegesis of sacrifice and salvation into a grammar of insurgency. Finally, potency relates to possession in ritual, in which the spirit migrates from vehicle to vehicle, overcoming the inhibitions of the *socius*.[2]

I would like to release the radical into this speculation on intensity and intimacy and be attentive to the procedures of persistent unhinging. I am interested in the register of rootedness in the contemplation of the radical, one that thrives successively, though not necessarily progressively, from its seminarium, or breeding ground. I am drawn to its emergent nature and to the rhythm by which it gathers vitalities, like a storm or an exasperation that springs up or spirals away when provoked.

2 For elaboration, please refer to the monographs: Zeus Salazar, "Si Andres Bonifacio at ang Kabayanihang Pilipino," *Bagong Kasaysayan* 2 (Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Palimbagang Kalawakan, 1997); and Zeus Salazar, "Wika ng Himagsikan, Lengguwahe ng Rebolusyon," *Bagong Kasaysayan* 8 (Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Palimbagang Kalawakan, 1999).

"Face to Face with the 'Generala'," *Sunday Tribune Magazine*, Manila, May 12, 1935.

Exemplary in this regard is the political sensibility of Salud Algabre, the militant seamstress. While the valiant campaign of the *Sakdal*, her social movement, was quelled quite quickly, she remained expectant of things, or the world, to come. She believed in an undiminished inspiration to do what is right. As she put it, "No uprising fails. Each one is a step in the right direction." The negation of a supposedly failed uprising recasts the problematic of the radical as it affirms contingency in pursuing what is right. Hunted for seizing a town in the name of sovereignty, Algabre thrust herself into the river and stayed under water as long as she, in her own words, "could stand it without breathing." This is the radical for me, the *longue durée* of breathlessness for what the millenarians in Philippine insurrectionary history called *per omnia saecula saeculorum*, a world without end, at once a prayer and a call to arms.

To inspire the history of art, which is simultaneously the history of colonialism, with this permeating and tireless sense of the radical is to nurture a certain immune system through which to mediate forces that may encroach on breathing bodies or subjectivities. In the Philippine language, this internal defense mechanism is called *naturalesa*, which

conceives of nature as essentially tropic in the broadest range: what is immanent and what is honed over time as character, disposition, or life force.

Algabre's belief in a willed and decisive iteration of the self toward a rightful condition shifts the valence from agency, whether liberal or avant-garde, to the patience of holding one's breath if necessary, and of carrying on in relays of prolonged struggle within the lively quotidian and the extensive local. What may well be key in this modality of engagement with an intellectual apparatus like the study of art, which is thought to be alienating, are the calibrated scales of an operation that does not invest solely in event, heroism, or stature, but rather in the always incipient and therefore incremental intervention, by anticipating that certain formations will transpire subtly but also with intermittent exuberance. I offer a tactical method that nimbly interposes in alternating currents to defy exhaustion and to continually renew in the face of a given terrain. Algabre's ability to hold her breath under water is an instance of alacritous but intractable presence within the realm of mimicry, where she resembles the liquid state of nature as the constabulary hounds her on earth. But this is a tentative disguise that mutates promptly, as should the encounter with art: part skirmish, part waiting. The intervals are critical because this is where "things change," in between writing and exhibition, critique and complicity, activism and ethnography, community and teaching, institutionality and the curatorial, emergency and melancholy—in other words, in performing a gamut of political work that foils the instrument, challenges the reduction, and suffers the inclusion. As a corollary, this approach tempers ideological righteousness and nuances the materialist imperative, so that the untenable "colonial" is bedeviled alternatingly by the exigencies of beloved prefixes and their hyphens: anti-, de-, post-.

In the formativity of the material and its sociality, with the attendant language of its annotation, lies the promise of this indefatigable resistance that professes to no first or final triumphs and conquests. For me, Gaston Bachelard's explication of the "problematic" and the "poetics of space," as well as the enigmatic "psychoanalysis of fire," prevails as being constitutive—the "roots, basics, beginnings," in the words of the artist-curator-thinker Raymundo Albano—of any conversation on the subject of the affective or the sensible, the terms according to which an anxiety is raised around the lacuna—or better still, the path of light,

again from the *Pasyon*—within and through which the unhinged and, at last, the breathtaking initiates those deliberate steps in the right direction.

Patrick Flores teaches in the Department of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines, which he chaired from 1997 to 2003, and is curator of the Vargas Museum in Manila. He is the director of the Philippine Contemporary Art Network. He was one of the curators of Under Construction: New Dimensions of Asian Art (2000) and the Gwangju Biennale (Position Papers) (2008). His books include *Painting History: Revisions in Philippine Colonial Art* (1999), *Remarkable Collection: Art, History, and the National Museum* (2006), and *Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia* (2008). He was the artistic director of the 2019 Singapore Biennale and is the curator of the Taiwan Pavilion for the Venice Biennale in 2022.

JENNIFER A. GONZÁLEZ
University of California, Santa Cruz

Cassandra, a priestess of Apollo, uttered true prophecies but was never believed. Apollo cursed her existence on earth after she refused to perform the sexual favors he requested as payment for her gift of foresight. Cassandra was destined to speak the truth, and for that she was eternally punished. Or, if we consider another interpretation, those who refused to believe her prophecies to their own peril were ultimately those who suffered. Cassandra was, in her own time, a *parrhesiastes*. Michel Foucault defines the *parrhesiastes* thus,

> . . . the *parrhesiastes* says what is true because he knows that it is true; and he knows that it is true because it is really true. The *parrhesiastes* is not only sincere and says what is his opinion, but his opinion is also the truth. He says what he knows to be true. The second characteristic of *parrhesia*, then, is that there is always an exact coincidence between belief and truth.[1]

But *parrhesia* is not just any truth uttered, it must be a truth that also puts the speaker at risk or in mortal danger. Witness the example of another woman, Creusa, the Athenian princess who is raped by Apollo and later forced to abandon her illegitimate son in Apollo's temple. Eventually, she publicly accuses the god of his misdeeds, saying "O you, who gave the seven-toned lyre a voice which rings out of the lifeless, rustic horn the lovely sound of the Muses' hymns, on you Latona's son, here in daylight I will lay blame."[2] The one who stands accused is much more powerful than the one who is speaking, yet the speaker knows that her words are true and must be voiced. Foucault writes,

> There is a contrast drawn between the music of Apollo, with his seven-chord lyre and the cries and shouts of Creusa (who cries for help as Apollo's victim, and who also must, through shouting malediction, speak the truth the god will not utter). For Creusa

1 Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 2001), 54.
2 Foucault, *Fearless*, 54. Latona is the goddess of night, of darkness and light, and also the mother of Apollo.

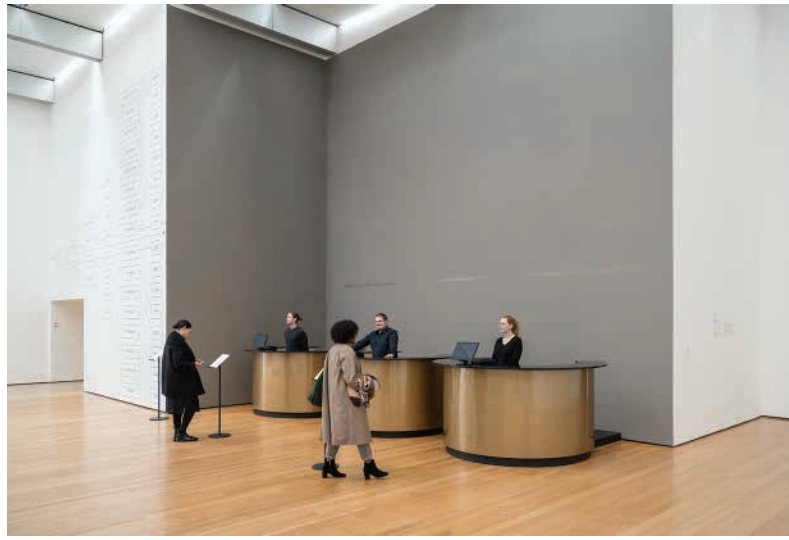
delivers her accusations before the Delphic temple doors—which are closed. The divine voice is silent while Creusa proclaims the truth herself.[3]

Foucault's recuperation of the Greek concept of *parrhesia* in 1983, during the early years of the AIDS crisis, when marginalized communities were fighting for the right to speak and be heard, was particularly apt. He died of AIDS in 1984, a time when the doors of the medical and political institutions were still closed to the truth.

To think radically is to pursue the truth. To act radically is to tell the truth. Among the more unexpected social sculptures of the past decade, Adrian Piper's *The Probable Trust Registry* (2013) invited participants at the Venice Biennale to join a contractually created community of those who promise to speak the truth. Deploying the formal conceit of a bureaucratic office, the artist staged an art installation that resembled the lush but austere interior of a law office. Behind three shining reception desks, nattily attired assistants helped audience members to sign one, two, or three contracts that stated: "I will always be too expensive to buy," "I will always mean what I say," and "I will do what I say I am going to do." Above each desk, one of the phrases appeared in gilt lettering on dark gray walls. I participated in this work in Venice, but since then it has appeared in numerous other locations, including Piper's 2018 retrospective at MoMA. When the project ends, the contact information of all participants is privately shared, creating a strange artificial community of "probable" trust. Artist and critic Chlöe Bass observes that if we choose to remember and live by these declarations, we will question the relationship between our actions and their veracity at nearly all times.[4] The way Piper frames the project, it may appear to be a game, but nothing could be more radical or serious than producing an alternative community where there is a commitment to truth telling, to forms of speech that cannot be bought or sold, and a clear dedication to taking action. The absolute self-knowledge and unassailable truth of Foucault's *parrhesia* and the cautious optimism in *The Probable Trust Registry* create a productive conceptual tension. *Parrhesia* is an event, a speech act; it is about revealing a specific truth in the present, in the

3 Foucault, *Fearless*, 55.

4 Chlöe Bass, "Adrian Piper Binds Us with Impossible Trust," *Hyperallergic*, May 21, 2014, https://hyperallergic.com/127622/adrian-piper-binds-us-with-impossible-trust/, accessed January 1, 2021.



Installation view, Adrian Piper, *The Probable Trust Registry* at MoMA, March 31, 2018–July 22, 2018. Photograph by Martin Seck. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

face of threat or jeopardy. Piper's project is a promissory note, temporally figuring the future, requiring the work of anticipatory imagination and ongoing self-consciousness by the project's participants.

The promotion and protection of *parrhesia* might be the key role of art and humanistic scholarship under the conditions of the neoliberal state and the rise of religious fundamentalisms, white nationalism, and wealth disparity. Activists, artists, humanists, and scientists are frequently astute and clear-eyed observers, speaking as the *parrhesiastes* of the moment. The dangers faced are real, and systems of power do not easily yield. Cassandra's fate becomes a cautionary metaphor in our age of the Me Too movement, Black Lives Matter, patriarchal dissimulation, and fake news. In March 2021, Mursal Wahidi, Sadia Sadat, and Shahnaz Raofi were killed in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, simply for being female and daring to work at a radio and television media outlet. Why is the voice, the *parrhesia*, of women so threatening?

Creusa's denunciation of Apollo reminds us that truth requires light, specifically light that shines outside the temple, in the public eye. Universities, art galleries, museums, archives, theaters, and other cultural institutions host many a *parrhesiastes* and serve as precious bulwarks against a culture of misinformation. When working well, they

serve both the immediacy of the truth-telling event and the promissory structure of a commitment to future truths. We must ensure that they do not become unassailable temples, however. Too often cultural institutions serve powerful masters and master narratives; too often they forget the full range of human and nonhuman life; too often they perpetuate hierarchical and intellectually narrow outcomes. Let us imagine an art history and art criticism that begins with the feminist example of Creusa, who faces injustice with the courage and truth of her own voice. But let us not stop there. We also have to reimagine the temples, bring to light their baser histories, open the doors and stand not outside, but inside, when we speak truth to power.

Jennifer A. González is a professor in the Department of the History of Art and Visual Culture at University of California, Santa Cruz, and a faculty member of the Whitney Independent Study Program, New York. She writes about contemporary art and has published in *Diacritics, Camera Obscura, Bomb, Open Space, Art Journal, Aztlán*, the *Archives of American Art Journal,* and others. Her books include *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (2008), *Pepón Osorio* (2013), and *Chicano and Chicana Art: A Critical Anthology* (2019).

BORIS GROYS
New York University

To be radical means to go to the roots, to destroy everything that separates us from our origin, to reach this origin and begin anew. Thus, to be radical means to make a revolution. And the re-volution is a re-turn. Of course, it is not a return to something that remained in the past. Rather, it is a return to something that is always there. At least since Marx and Nietzsche, this something has been understood as "life." Indeed, to be able to think, act, work, and create, one has to be alive. Life is the origin of everything that we do and that is done to us. Life has no meaning; it is the source of every meaning. Thus, radical art since the beginning of the 20th century has always viewed itself as a war in the name of life, a war against the powers of death that have their kingdom in the historical past. This has been referred to as "exploding norms," the "destruction of traditions," and the "breaking of taboos." And people have been ready to die in this battle for life against death. Marinetti described it well in his Futurist manifesto: "Nothing at all is worth dying for, other than the desire to divest ourselves finally of the courage that weighed us down!"[1]

This is obviously also true in the case of Dada and Surrealism. And the Russian avant-garde, which looks rational because it looks geometrical, is not an exception in this regard. The most famous exhibition of the Russian avant-garde, which took place in 1915—the one where Malevich's *Black Square* was shown for the first time—was called 0,10. This title was supposed to be a reference to the fact that the ten artists exhibited in the show had passed through the zero point where all familiar representations were dissolved and, since they had nonetheless survived as artists, they had consequently conquered death. In his early writings, Kazimir Malevich repeatedly noted that people and animals look dead in traditional, mimetic, realistic paintings, because they do not move. By contrast, pure forms and colors on canvas seemed to him to be alive, because their own living power created an effect of immediate presence as soon they had been relieved of the obligation to depict

1 Philippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Manifesto of Futurism," in *Critical Writings* (New York: Macmillan, 2006), 11f.

dead people and dead things. Everywhere the avant-garde art movements positioned themselves, above all, through their opposition to the art of the turn of the century, which they saw as decadent and exhausted—the expression of both a fear of death and, at the same time, the desire for it. People are afraid of the future because the future ultimately offers only death, understood as the dissolution and decay of all living bodies, including one's own body. The Futurists, on the other hand, loved the future precisely because in their art they had already gone beyond this zero point of dissolution and decay—and remained alive.

Thus, radical art could easily be associated with the political revolutions that mobilized the vital energies of the masses. The Russian October revolution is a good example. This revolution reduced the political, social, and economic order in Russia to point zero. Under such conditions, practicing living art meant for most of the artists in the orbit of the Russian avant-garde to take an active part in building the new society of the future. Not only the art of the past but all autonomous art—that is, nonutilitarian art created solely for contemplation—was declared dead. The only living art was said to be that directly serving life, then and in the future. Art, in order to be considered living, was supposed to give a new form to life itself. It was a triumph of art understood as a specific mode of the *vita activa* (active life), while the *vita contemplativa* (contemplative life) that was traditionally associated with art was understood to be synonymous with death.

This transition from autonomous art to artistic activism that the Russian Constructivists proclaimed and promoted after the end of the civil war has influenced artistic thinking and acting until now. However, the following question emerges: to what degree can activism, including artistic activism, be considered a manifestation of life? In our technological world, not only people and animals but also machines "act." In fact, from its beginning, Futurism glorified the machine. Even the energy of the working class was thought to be machine-like. Indeed, radical avant-garde artists understood the worker as acting in symbiosis with a machine, in contrast to the bourgeois, who only consumed the products of industrial civilization. Today, all of us act in symbiosis with digital media. We are connected not by vital energies but by electricity. Accordingly, our culture looks more and more decadent. It is fascinated by art that has replaced *la belle dame sans merci* of classical decadence as the ultimate image of desired death. The machine is a figure of eternal

acting-beyond-life that is promised us by our current civilization, in the place of Plato's eternal contemplation.

This figure upends the symbiosis between man and machine. If the machine can exist and act without man, the two part ways. The traditional avant-garde mode of activism has to be put in question and redefined. And that takes time. Only recently has the word *life* begun to resurface in political and art activist movements that have the explicit goal of defending one or another particular identity inscribed into living human bodies. However, in fact these movements manifest the return of life as such to the contemporary political and cultural agenda. Basically, we see here a revolt of life against the dead weight of technology and against the technologically based social order. Here we can see the promise of a new radical art that turns to life as its actual root.

Boris Groys is a philosopher, essayist, art critic, media theorist, and an internationally renowned expert on Soviet-era art and literature, specifically, the Russian avant-garde. He is a professor of Russian and Slavic Studies at New York University and a professor of philosophy at The European Graduate School / EGS. His most recently published book is *Logic of the Collection* (2021).

TOM HOLERT
Harun Farocki Institut, Berlin

> Jolene: "I'm gonna be a radical."
> Beth: "Didn't know that was a career choice."
> Jolene: "It will be."[1]

Inadvertently or not, the question "what is radical?" raises the issue of one's own radicality. To what extent could my practice as a scholar, writer, or curator be called "radical"? From where and to whom do I speak when I respond to this question (by repeating it)?

Language already complicates things. In German, for example, the term has meanings that do not necessarily correspond with the sense of "radical" (or "liberal," for that matter) known in the context of the English language, particularly when those words pertain to politics and the humanities, or more precisely, a *politics of the humanities*. Commonly complying with Marxist, Anarchist, and other critical traditions of social change and abolition, it appears to me that in such contexts as political theory, social science, cultural studies, art history, and so on, the term has attained a self-evidence that renders attempts at its definition somewhat redundant.

By contrast, the German word *radikal* has hardly made it into the lexicon of academic writing, and if it is used it remains squarely confined to certain, limited realms of politics and aesthetics, recalling a variety of traditions, from Luther or Rousseau to the default radicalness of modern art.[2] Potentially, *radikal* may even evoke memories of the *Radikalenerlass*, the polemic term used to denote the highly controversial 1972 law mandating that state employees be screened for their loyalty to the constitution, in a West Germany living in the wake of the 1968 protests, and during the heyday of Baader-Meinhof/RAF terrorism. In my own critical practice, particularly when writing in German, I rarely use *radikal* other than as an occasional descriptor of historical

1 *The Queen's Gambit*, episode 7, directed by Scott Frank (United States: Netflix, 2020).

2 See, for example, the thematic focus on *Radikalität* (radicality) in Ralf Konersmann and Dirk Westerkamp's special issue with that title, *Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie* 6, no. 2 (2012): 261–338.

phenomena or actions and hardly ever as a self-directed attribute, although I would consider myself a "radical" scholar.

Contemplating the question of this roundtable I thus wondered to what extent the specific political and historical semantics of *radikal* in a West German context have prevented me (and others) from embracing the term more wholeheartedly—despite my awareness of the empowering and self-assuring effects its use can engender in Anglo-American and other English language international discussions. Consquently, I am straddling my awkward relation to the term and the address to the readership of *ARTMargins* that, I imagine, self-identifies as radical.

Unsurprisingly, the success of the notion of radicalness as a rallying semantic-ideological device of the left in politics, art, and academia, has always entailed pernicious reactions. In the United States of late, the far right has been pushing the notion of "radical" in a direction that, in many ways, resembles the German meaning of *radikal*—something that is synonymous with "extremist" or "terrorist." In the infamous first presidential debate on September 29, 2020, Donald Trump made ample use of the term to denigrate protests against police violence and anti-Blackness, as well as Joe Biden's "radical supporters" on the so-called "radical left."[3] Utterly unable to control the debate, moderator Chris Wallace at one point nevertheless posed a pertinent question. He asked the president why his administration had directed federal agencies to end racial sensitivity training that addressed white privilege or critical race theory. Trump retorted, "I ended it because it's racist. I ended it because a lot of people were complaining that they were asked to do things that were absolutely insane, that it was a radical revolution that was taking place in our military, in our schools, all over the place." Wallace replied: "What is radical about racial sensitivity training?" After which Trump started complaining about the "hundreds of thousands of dollars" that are being paid "to teach very bad ideas and frankly very sick ideas. And really, they were teaching people to hate our country."[4]

I would wrench the "sick idea" trope from such far-right parlance and turn it around until it acquires a meaning that is empowering rather than destructive, until it makes sense as a transformative battle

3 USA Today staff, "Read the Full Transcript from the First Presidential Debate between Joe Biden and Donald Trump," *USA Today*, last modified September 30, 2020, https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/09/30/presidential-debate-read-full-transcript-first-debate/3587462001/.

4 Ibid.

cry rather than as dismissive speech. In vernacular language, "sick" has long been a word to denote what is exceptionally cool. Clearly, to create "sick ideas" and "insane things" is exactly what is needed right now. "To hate [y]our country" may be as valid a base on which to build the kind of scholarship that the current historical moment calls for as the "radical revolution" of racial sensitivity training.

In the early 1980s the philosopher of science Gonzalo Munévar proposed a notion of "radical knowledge" that was structured around the idea that "at an elementary level the experiences of an organism are the result of an interaction between its biology and its environment."[5] This idea led him to "a relativistic conception of reality, and a far closer relationship between philosophy and science than analytic philosophers are prepared to admit."[6] Some forty years later, no proposition of a radical epistemology would be taken seriously if it were limited to Munévar's brand of relativism. On the other hand, the issue of the interaction between an organism's biology and its environment has certainly gained in relevance since then.

Radical knowledge that moves in the realm of "sick ideas" should be resourceful with regard to matters of the organism, of viscerality and vibrancy—in particular, where it concerns the limits and pedagogies of affects and sensitivities, as well as the inequalities of race among them. The quote used as the epigraph of this text is taken from *The Queen's Gambit*, a Netflix miniseries based on Walter Tevis's eponymous 1983 novel, which aired in the late stage of the 2020 US presidential race. It involves a fictional dialogue between two women who reunite in 1967, years after they became friends in a Kentucky orphanage in the early 1960s: Beth, a white woman and emerging international chess champion, and Jolene, a Black activist and paralegal, both in their early twenties. Their brief exchange about the prospect of Jolene becoming a "radical" as a potential future "career choice" is a telling instance of how differently radicality and radical politics can be perceived, and of the degree to which the energizing and empowering impact of these concepts depends on one's place in history, as well as the intersection of race, class, and gender that one inhabits.

For Jolene, the radical politics she aspires to is about combatting

5 Gonzalo Munévar, *Radical Knowledge: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Nature and Limits of Science*, foreword by Paul K. Feyerabend (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 20.

6 Ibid.

the realities imposed and defined by white supremacy. In 1968, the year after her fictional encounter with Beth, the English translation of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* would be published. The "sick" idea that is truly radical never loses sight of invention, of Black invention—which, in the words of David Marriott (referencing Fanon), "opens up a fracture or hole in History."[7] Here, in the event of Black political invention, the " 'political' attempt to retrieve a sense of rebellion" should not be confused with spontaneity and its pitfalls, since for Fanon (via Marriott) "vengeance and indiscipline" entail the kind of "immediacy which is both 'radical and totalitarian.' "[8] From this—sick and sickening—sense of radicality, so omnipresent and so suppressed in the present historical moment, the source code of a future *indisciplined humanities* and research is to be derived.

Tom Holert works as a writer and curator. He is a member of the executive board of the Harun Farocki Institut in Berlin. Recent publications include *Knowledge beside Itself: Contemporary Art's Epistemic Politics* (2020) and *Politics of Learning, Politics of Space: Architecture and the Education Shock of the 1960s and 1970s* (2021).

7 David Marriott, "No Lords A-Leaping: Fanon, C. L. R. James, and the Politics of Invention," *Humanities* 3 (2014): 519.

8 Ibid. The phrase "radical and totalitarian" is quoted from Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 105.

ANDREAS HUYSSEN
Columbia University

As New Yorkers were dancing in the streets in early November 2020, the other side was busy constructing its stab-in-the-back myth of a stolen election. At a time when 21st-century fascisms are still rising in many parts of the world and when Google offers a six-month career certificate in lieu of a four-year liberal education, in this moment of danger, we need to rethink what "radical" means. How to confront the political attack on democratic institutions (the "deconstruction of the administrative state," in the words of Steve Bannon) and the algorithmic attack on the value of humanities education? Thinking back to the 1935 Paris International Congress for the Defense of Culture that advocated an international popular front against fascism, we are made all the more aware of the fact that no such endeavor is even possible today.

For those of us engaged in the study of transnational memory politics, the current conjuncture seems especially depressing. How can we not see the renewed rise of fascisms and racist nationalisms across the world as our failure, if not our defeat? Memory studies' critique of both the state's and the public's amnesia about crimes committed in the past was radical in the beginning. It was radical in its aim to recognize and establish historical facts, as well as its acknowledgment of the gaps and vicissitudes of the very structure of memory, the incompleteness of archives, the resistances to critical views of one's nation, one's parents, and oneself. It pushed societies to cope with accountability and responsibility within more extended time frames than those of 24/7 news or the next election cycle. Once traumatic memories came to be institutionalized, however, they were in danger of becoming a mantra and a cliché. Skepticism about the critical effects of memory politics took hold, while new right-wing counter-memories emerged, reviving everything memory studies had fought to overcome. Yet the current prevalence of attacks on factual truth claims, energized by reactionary revisions of history, makes such critical memory work even more urgent today, when much more is at stake than simply recognizing the crimes and injustices of the past.

I find it difficult to generalize about what is politically radical today beyond the radicalism of the current counter-Enlightenment, which

threatens democracy itself. Let me turn instead to the arts, which I consider indispensable for the sustained training of the imagination in matters of time and justice, borders, and space.

I see radical aesthetic projects embodied in the critical memory work of two artists whose trajectories over time have countered their respective cultures of amnesia and the erasure of a past of state violence that continues to this day. One is Doris Salcedo's creation of works that allow mourning for all the victims of the decades-long Colombian civil war; the other is Nalini Malani's feminist rebellion against the colonial/postcolonial violence toward women in India, from the Partition to the present. Both these artists' works are all the more remarkable because neither country—unlike perhaps Argentina, Chile, or Germany—has strong institutions that frustrate the social desire for forgetting by supporting memories of past violence. On the other hand, it might be precisely this absence of official institutionalized memories that justifies calling the projects radical. But there is more to such a claim than that. An innovative interpenetration of aesthetic practice and political intervention characterizes the work of both artists. The artists give credence to Adorno's statement that art is both autonomous and a social fact, but they take it beyond Adorno's aesthetic of negativity. Both artists expand their respective basic practices of sculpture, drawing, and painting into installation and performance, drawing liberally on European and American (post)modernist practices—a kind of appropriation in reverse that transforms their material practice in such a way that new forms of transnational art emerge that speak to international art audiences beyond Colombia and India. At the same time, their work remains emphatically embedded in its own historical and political contexts without ever becoming either "national" or "global."

One of my two paradigmatic examples, both of which are part of long-term artistic trajectories stemming from the late 1980s to the present, is Salcedo's recent project *Fragmentos*, an art exhibition space in Bogotá whose entire sculpted floor is constructed with the steel of Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) weapons melted after the signing of the peace treaty between the previous government and the guerrillas. The second project is Malani's *In Search of Vanished Blood*, a video/shadow play that draws on repressed memory of the violence that erupted during the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan and that still resonates in post-Partition India. In tune with an ethics of viewing, violence is never represented directly in these works;

it is mediated through the materials used, assembled, and montaged through aesthetic strategies that do not shun the sensual enjoyment of viewing, while articulating political critique. Both works are locally embedded but also critical of the prevailing national condition. They force and seduce the Western viewer to not just recognize, but think affectively with the situatedness of the postcolonial world, which is umbilically intertwined with Western capitalist societies. The works do so by immersing the viewer as participant in a spatial installation that simultaneously requires the slow and extended processing of what is being seen. Bodily and intellectual immersion are held together by the pleasure of viewing as challenge to thought. Thinking about and recognizing the local politically is paradoxically coupled with denying borders aesthetically. It is as if the 1930s debates about modernism and realism, with their constitutive linkage of aesthetics and politics, had found a productive new ground in parts of the Global South.

Salcedo and Malani are examples of a trend in contemporary memory art from the "periphery." In negotiation with, and as part of a simultaneous distancing from, metropolitan modernism and the historical avant-garde, there has emerged an alternative art praxis that may strike us as radically avant-gardist in its self-conscious coupling of aesthetics and politics. But it is an avant-gardism quite different from that of the historical avant-garde. This avant-gardism is not a model of progress/utopia dependent on the experience of shock, or on the most advanced, cutting-edge state of the artistic material, or on the disavowal of realisms. Rather, this avant-gardism challenges us to think politically through spectacular, sensuous installations that affect on both the local and the global stage. It is, in other words, not the programmatic destruction of traditional notions of autonomy and the work, but an insistence on the *Eigensinn* (stubbornness) and specificity of aesthetic work. Salcedo and Malani's work reinscribes and marks a boundary between artistic practice and the presentist culture of quick consumption and careless forgetting. The remembrance of historical trauma and contemporary politics is mediated aesthetically in such a way that deep structures of domination and social conflict in our world are illuminated for the spectator. In this sense, the two artists' work is political through and through. Their use of traditional, even obsolete techniques of representation marks a turn against a presentist technological triumphalism that privileges only the digital. What anchors this kind of avant-gardism is no longer a philosophy of history but, on the contrary, a

sustained doubt regarding technological progress combined with a political critique of a failing present that has not redeemed the promises of modernity. And in this way—here comes a final twist in my argument—this avant-gardism from the "periphery" offers an intriguing paradox: it actually implodes the very distinction between tradition and avant-gardism, since it transforms the radical critique of modernity, which was always already part of European avant-gardism, for a postcolonial, decolonizing world.

Andreas Huyssen, retired from Columbia University, taught in the Department of Germanic Languages and the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society. His most recent publications are *William Kentridge and Nalini Malani: The Shadowplay as Medium of Memory* (2013) and *Miniature Metropolis: Literature in an Age of Photography and Film* (2015).

AMELIA JONES
University of Southern California, Los Angeles

Art—its practices, discourses, and institutions—implicitly forwards an idea of the "radical" that is, in fact, culturally and historically specific, linked to European modernism and modernity. In arts discourse, the radical is often connected directly to the idea of the artist as avant-garde (aligned with the "advanced guard" of military formations), which was invented in early-19th-century France and eagerly extended into 20th-century Euro-American modernism. Given this history of the dominant concept of the radical, do we want to continue to apply it as if it were transcultural and transhistorical? Such an assumption is Eurocentric and veils over a tendency within art and academia, but often also politics, to assume that "radical" only means *left* radical, and that it involves overturning a conservative or right-wing status quo. In accepting this assumption that radical is *only* leftist—meaning (in our minds) "progressive"—we are, in fact, allowing the far right to win an argument before we even engage with it. In US mainstream politics, the danger of this mistake is clear: in their romance of maintaining ("conserving" per the conservative US Republican Party) the mythical time when America was supposedly "great," members of the political right continually claim that *their* judicial appointees are sober guardians of the Constitution, while any moderate or left judge is a legal activist or "radical." The latter will thus betray the putatively static meanings of the Constitution, set in stone in that mythical era of American "greatness." Many brilliant legal minds have exposed this lie and shown how far-right judges are often more activist in manufacturing new legal justifications for old oppressions and overturning precedent with "radical" and newly oppressive rulings (such as their stripping away of voting protections in 2013). "Radical" can be reactionary and violent as is evident with the events of January 6, 2021, at the US Capitol building. In art and its related discourses, we need to rethink the entire concept of the radical, self-reflexively questioning our lazy tendency to align it with progressive causes without attending to the specificities of each case.

If the "radical" is articulated as working against the "status quo," then what is the status quo? To reiterate, we continually make assumptions in art and political discourse of all kinds that the radical is progressive—

namely, that we (artists, curators, professors) are all working for the same goals linked to various progressive values linked to economic stability for all, equal opportunities across society, and the overturning of exclusionary laws, attitudes, and institutions that work to marginalize key voices in society. But this assumes that we are not part of the problem—an assumption that is increasingly being exposed in all its inequity and hypocrisy under the economic and cultural pressures of the COVID crisis, with art institutions laying off workers and underpaying artists so that their routine privileging of trustee interests over those of creative communities becomes all the more obvious. The status quo is all too often exemplified by art and its institutions, including academic fields supporting the visual arts. So what is radical in this context?

The assumption in calling art "radical" is often that it can solve problems directly, thereby playing a role in larger movements that seek radical political change. But no form of political activism, no matter how direct, changes society directly. In the West, generally speaking, politically driven protests, arts programming, art performances, and art discourse all labor to produce new trajectories in thought, rather than to overturn governments. The common complaint that Occupy Wall Street was not successful, for example, misunderstands what "success" *is* in activism (whether enacted as street protests or artworks). Occupy Wall Street changed discourse in and beyond the United States toward acknowledging the gross economic disparities between the 1% and the rest, a conversation that the United States in particular had not had since the 1930s (not to mention the fact that a tone-deaf millionaire, Mitt Romney, would have become US president without that shift in discourse). The Māori/Jewish filmmaker and artist Taika Waititi mused in a 2010 TED talk on creativity: "Can art solve impoverishment? No, it can't, unless it's made of food."[1] Waititi went on to say that he makes films about outsiders, and if these inspire others, so much the better. If not, he will move on to something else. It's a gentle approach to the radical, which can sneak up on us, as with Waititi's 2019 *Jojo Rabbit*, a whimsical film telling a bizarre tale about Hitler entrancing a little boy in mid-20th-century Germany. But the film insinuates itself charmingly into our psyches, reminding us (in the age of political leaders such as

1 Taika Waititi, *The Art of Creativity: TEDX Doha*, 2010, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pL71KhNmnls.

Trump, Erdoğan, Duterte, and Putin), via the thrum of violence occurring while Hitler cavorts with the boy, how easily individuals, constituencies, and nations can slip into a deadly fascism. The film ends with the boy kicking Hitler unceremoniously out of his window, having grown up just enough to see through the seductions of fascism.

Art is not a solution in and of itself; it can only work in intimate relation to society and social systems; it is an extension of them, sometimes an ideological arm of them, sometimes a challenge to them. For example, from 1970 onward, Hans Haacke became the maestro of directly exposing the collusion of the art world with the toxicities of late capitalism by making visible its exploitation of labor, exclusionary real estate practices, and support for dictatorships and racist regimes. In 1970, Haacke's *MoMA Poll*, mounted at the Museum of Modern Art, allowed visitors to answer a question connecting MoMA board member Nelson Rockefeller to then-President Nixon's imperialist Indochina policy. However, the "radical" in Haacke's work—as discerning art critic Ben Davis has noted—lies not just in the exposure of art-washing tactics. Davis points out that, at least in the US context, where museums are largely not state-controlled, art institutions have become more interested in embracing "radical" works such as Haacke's that expose their own complicity in capitalism, racism, colonialism, and imperialism under more overtly reactionary regimes. As Davis concludes, Haacke's epiphany in the "particularly inflamed moment of late-'60s protest [was] that art needed to interface somehow with the events shaking the world outside of the institution if it were to be relevant."[2] This connection in turn emphasizes the only way in which art can ever make a difference—by acknowledging and foregrounding its interrelation with, and contingency in relation to, bodies and structures of power and value operating in and beyond the art world, including money.

What is progressively "radical" in art, curating, and criticism is contingent on what is happening beyond, around, and within the art world. Period. Currently, the most energizing efforts I have engaged with in the visual arts world are being articulated in alternative spaces and with strategies drawn fairly directly from political activism explicitly aligned

2 See Ben Davis, "When Art Fails to Make a Difference on Its Own," *Artnet.com*, last modified November 18, 2019, https://news.artnet.com/opinion/hans-haacke-all-connected-new-museum-1695825.

with changing specific legal and economic policies. Thus the Crenshaw Dairy Mart, a new alternative space for community and arts programming in South Central Los Angeles, cofounded by Patrisse Cullors, noé olivos, and Alexandre Dorriz, is aimed toward amplifying specific political causes, such as defunding the police and destroying the prison-industrial complex. For example, Cullors, who is also a cofounder of Black Lives Matter, extends here her longstanding activism in these political movements into the realm of individual performance and artworks, as well as progressive curatorial and community arts programming. The programming at Crenshaw Dairy Mart over the past year has included the "Care Not Cages" competition, giving prisoners an opportunity to produce works promoting this theme; community events and parties, pulling people together to rejoice but also to work directly toward improving the chances of community members to survive and thrive by providing supportive networks; and an exhibition, curated by Dorriz and Autumn Breon Williams, called Yes on R! Archives and Legal Conceptions. This show produces a hybrid aesthetic/political experience outlining the history of arts and political activism (including Cullors's work) that led to Los Angeles County's Measure R jail reform initiative being successfully ratified in 2020. Understanding art and politics as ideally being mutually supportive, the curators describe the point of the exhibition in this way: "In an effort to both bend and twist linear time which misrepresents Afrocentric political organizing, the exhibition looks to artwork exhibited today, yesterday, and tomorrow as . . . prototype[s] for using community participation to engage with both ballot measures and political organizing."[3] With no time wasted engaging in internal art-world arguments about formal, aesthetic, or political radicality, the curators simply assert the direct interrelation of art, activism, and cultural programming, an interrelation that is doubly confirmed by Cullors's own ongoing work as a "both/and" artist and activist, just as easily producing performances that pay homage to slain rapper Nipsey Hussle as leading a Black Lives Matter rally. If Haacke's work in some ways epitomized the potential of art to actualize leftist "radicality" directly within the context of mainstream art venues in the 1970s and 1980s, then Crenshaw Dairy Mart—focusing on the local—

3 "Yes on R!," Crenshaw Dairy Mart, last modified February 29, 2020, https://www.crenshawdairymart.com/yes-on-r.

might be seen to epitomize what can be done politically through art and its discourses today. This kind of initiative, to my mind, offers the most exciting versions of progressive radicalism—if indeed that is, in the current Euro-American context, what we mean by "radical" in the arts today.

Amelia Jones is professor and vice dean at the Roski School of Art & Design at the University of Southern California. Recent publications include *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (2012), *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories* (2016, coedited with Erin Silver), *Queer Communion: Ron Athey* (2020, coedited with Andy Campbell), and *In Between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (2021).

DAVID JOSELIT
Harvard University

The *radical* refers to a root, and the root of art is alterity. Alterity is not monolithic; it is what illuminates the monolith. It is the golden blaze of Christ Pantocrator in a domed concavity, or the strobic flash of Nam June Paik's videotapes erupting from a field of monitors. There is no single form of alterity. It cannot, for instance, be defined as *light*, as my two examples might imply. Alterity is indicated rather than represented.

What is Christ? An alterity whose susceptibility to representation has been tested through time in paint, wood, plaster, and stone. What is absolutism? An alterity that the 17th-century French painter Charles Le Brun brought to bear upon the body of Louis XIV at Versailles. What is revolution? Consider the Soviet avant-gardists Varvara Stepanova and Lyubov Popova—they investigated the intimacy of revolutionary alterity through the reinvention of everyday life. The history of art is drawn from such socially embedded performances of alterity—each iteration activates singular effects of power that range from consolidating despotism to challenging white supremacy. The temporality of these effects is distinct from the rhythms of conventional politics. Alterity's agonism does not take place in the exclusively human realm of the state, or of civil society—its special capacity is to assemble multiple registers of experience (the spiritual, the terrestrial, the abstract, and the material), not to remain embroiled in the questions of any one experiential dimension. Art *has the capacity to activate alterities*. This capacity has always been coveted because the colonization of alterity can realize or legitimize power: to assist in becoming a pope, or becoming an absolutist king, or becoming the avant-garde. But alterity can never be thoroughly objectified or commodified: it can only be temporarily appropriated, not exhausted.

Art's alterity may inhere in spiritual, historical, or aesthetic effects, but it must be materialized, which makes it susceptible to enclosure as a form of property: something that can be transposed into a format (painting, photograph, performance, digital file) that can be acquired, accumulated, appropriated, stolen, repatriated, bastardized, or misused. Dana Schutz could get her hands on Emmett Till, but at the same time Kara Walker can gather up the Sadean shit show of the Antebellum

South. In each case there is a different sort of claim on alterity as value, which results in very different worldly effects.

This ratio—between property and alterity—is the one that I excavate in my recent book *Heritage and Debt: Art in Globalization*.[1] Under conditions of globalization, the neoliberal enhancement of human capital works hand-in-glove with the accumulation of art capital: one form of value defines and enhances the other in the global competition among different localities to attract investment, tourism, and soft power. My objective in *Heritage and Debt* is to tell the history of how distinctly different genealogies of modernism—the postcolonial, the Socialist Realist, and the underground—were synchronized with the Euro-American canon in the 1980s and 90s to produce what we call global contemporary art. What is globalization? It is a market of alterities, a worldwide struggle over the possession and dispossession of cultural properties.

The radicality of art cannot therefore be found in any particular form or content, but rather in its capacity to exist simultaneously within and outside of history. In the realm of politics, Massimiliano Tomba has called this quality "insurgent universality." In other words, artworks, like radicals, refuse to be subjected to history; indeed, they constitute their own material histories of perception. As Tomba writes, "The universality that I call insurgent has to do with the democratic excess that dis-orders an existing order and gives rise not to chaos . . . but to a new institutional fabric."[2] The universality that I am calling art's alterity does something analogous within regimes of seeing and sensing. I think we should avoid *capturing* this alterity for our own interpretive purposes as art historians and choose instead to remain as long as possible with art's excess, in order to glimpse its radical futures.

David Joselit teaches in the Department of Art, Film, and Visual Studies at Harvard University. He is the author of five books, including *Feedback: Television against Democracy* (2007) and *Heritage and Debt: Art in Globalization* (2020).

1 See David Joselit, *Heritage and Debt: Art in Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, October Books, 2020).

2 Massimiliano Tomba, *Insurgent Universality: An Alternative Legacy of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 21.

JOAN KEE
University of Michigan

I am probably one of the least qualified people to answer "what is radical?" Since the death of George Floyd, I have abandoned academic work to return to my juridical roots as a former attorney. I have been finding my way once more around the obtuse language of ordinances and other rules premised on the abstract concept of public safety, that all-purpose justification often deployed to prevent unruly bodies from speaking truth to power. I measure my days in terms of prohibitions: yesterday was about trying to get a mobile phone and a pair of sneakers returned to a young protestor that somehow went "missing" at the time of arrest. Today revolves around an emergency curfew ordinance announced by the mayor of Detroit, which was used to arrest protestors of color under the pretext of a curfew. Did enforcement of this curfew violate the constitutional rights of citizens to be informed of what they can and cannot do? Ignorance of the law may be no defense, but the law commits its own offenses by making itself willfully unknowable to those least prepared to know how it operates.

Legal work is routine, distinctly unglamorous, and frequently tedious. It requires a lot of searching on databases and even more parsing of language so vague as to constitute its own form of harm. And sometimes all I do is just watch the protests, as a legal observer. Yet I somehow feel more useful here than in my academic day job—I've always been a firm believer that a year or more of public service should be mandatory for humanities graduate students, particularly given how many humanities faculty have not had sustained professional experience outside academia. This isn't a radical suggestion by any means. But living in a country with an unfathomable number of brilliant minds who are, as of yet, seemingly unable to purge the nation of the forces that led to the election of Donald Trump and his cronies, I wonder how we might imagine radical change through the moderate multitude.

For me, "radical" brings to mind childhood memories in pre-democracy Seoul, where it was routine to close our school bus windows to stop the tear gas fumes from wafting into our little metal cocoon on wheels. I was too young to grasp what was happening, but being a child makes you sensitive to seismic changes in a way best described as

Junfu Han. Untitled street photograph, 2020. © Junfu Han/ Detroit Free Press via ZUMA Wire.

visceral. Our staid, reticent neighbors who I saw in their salaryman uniforms would join the marches in downtown Seoul (equipped, of course, with face masks, protective gloves, and packs of cigarettes). That even the most risk-averse citizens felt compelled to join these commons of dissent has always inflected how I think of radicality. And it is these commons that I sensed again these past few months in my adopted hometown of Detroit. I think quite a lot about a photograph taken by Junfu Han, a young Chinese American freelance photographer. It resembles a history painting of sorts, of Black youths grappling against white teenagers in front of a Nike store. The photograph's caption tells us that one group is defending the store against another, although it refuses to disclose further detail. While Detroit is among the cities to have escaped property destruction and looting, this is less the point than the bodies in action. I think about this image from time to time, as the faith I have in my occupation ebbs in lockstep. It is not just about the failure to act but about the inability to act at all or enough, if radicality means changing the current order.

In *Models of Integrity: Art and Law in Post Sixties America*, I argue that contemporary art is both a history of capitalism and a history of artists who modeled a different view of politics rooted in polity enablement.[1] That artists who have actually foreshadowed situations in need of genuine regulation stand out, such as Yoko Ono whose 1969 film

1 Joan Kee, *Models of Integrity: Art and Law in Post Sixties America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019).

Rape harrowingly demonstrated stalking to be a crime decades before legislators would even countenance such a connection. Or Jay Jaroslav, who showed just how easy identity theft could be well before the term entered everyday conversation. Art can also venture forth where the law dares not tread, or where the law fails to deliver upon its promises. It can be weaponized as a form of necessary justice, to expose, shame, and haunt those whose deeds continue to harm even as the perpetrators are exonerated or released from the law's hold. In his article "Revolutionary Lawyering," William Quigley cautions against blind action and instead urges his jurist audience to focus on changing values.[2] The humanities are well-positioned to encourage such change, particularly in the form of symbol construction that can not only unify groups but also create a visible threat to those who seek to trample upon such unity.

We continue to live in a world where those who make the decisions do not bear most of the political, social, or economic consequences of their decisions. How, then, to right this imbalance? I think of Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals*, where he warns that "the price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative. You cannot risk being trapped by the enemy in his sudden agreement with your demand and saying 'You're right we don't know what to do about this issue. Now you tell us.' "[3] In proceeding on the radical path, should we ask whether it is acceptable for some parties to be more satisfied than others, or whether all parties should be equal in the partial-ness of their satisfaction? Maybe being radical is thinking about what the most generative kind of risk would be and then acting upon it. Or maybe being radical entails acting against habit and toward sacrifice instead. I don't know. But I do know that in the time I've responded to this question, a protestor has asked for help dismissing improperly written tickets. So that's where I'll begin.

Joan Kee is a professor in the Department of History of Art at the University of Michigan and a lawyer based in Detroit. Her books include *Contemporary Korean Art: Tansaekhwa and the Urgency of Method* (2014) and *Models of Integrity: Art and Law in Post-Sixties America* (2019).

2 William Quigley, "Revolutionary Lawyering: Addressing the Root Causes of Poverty and Wealth," *Washington University Journal of Law & Policy* 20 (2006): 101–68.

3 Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 130. Originally published in 1971.

NICHOLAS MIRZOEFF
New York University

To be radical, Angela Davis has often said, is to go to the root of the problem. Black art activists and their allies have created a range of such radical projects, including Sarah Elizabeth Lewis's Vision & Justice Project (ongoing), Nicole Fleetwood's book and exhibition *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (2020), and Rachel Nelson and Gina Dent's "Visualizing Abolition" series, with its accompanying exhibition Barring Freedom.[1] How might there be similar in-depth and considered engagements with white supremacy by people identified or identifying as white (PIW)? The endless calls for debate on "difficult questions" have not succeeded in changing white opinion or white ways of seeing. As I edited this piece, the guilty verdict in the Chauvin trial came in. Let's hope that this marked a start to undoing police brutality. Considered systemically, whiteness is not only a set of concepts or embodied differences but a material infrastructure. To adopt a question deployed in Mabel O. Wilson's 2021 exhibition Reconstructions, at the Museum of Modern Art: how can PIW in the margins of the art world contribute more broadly to "processes of 'unbuilding' structural racism," especially whiteness?[2] How can PIW learn to think about a material unbuilding of whiteness, inspired by the Black (Indigenous, Brown, Asian) radical tradition without appropriating it, and without claiming to speak for the Black experience? Listening, learning, humility. Some of the unbuilding is fun, like throwing statues in the sea. Much of it will depend on persistence and organizing, which is what militancy means.

Across the *longue durée* of settler colonialism, a set of infrastructures has been created to support and sustain whiteness as a segregating and erasing vision. Frantz Fanon described this infrastructure of coloniality as a "world of statues."[3] Since the 2015 Rhodes Must Fall

1 Sarah Elizabeth Lewis, ed., "Vision & Justice," special issue, *Aperture*, no. 223 (2016); Nicole Fleetwood, *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020); Rachel Nelson and Gina Dent's project is at barringfreedom.org.

2 Sean Anderson and Mabel O. Wilson, eds., *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, February 27–May 31, 2021), exhibition catalog, 16.

3 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 15.

Mark Loughney. *Pyrrhic Defeat: A Visual Study of Mass Incarceration (2014–present)*, 2020. In the exhibition Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration. Image courtesy of MoMA PS1. Photo by Matthew Septimus.

movement inspired activists in Charlottesville to question why a statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee was in the heart of their city, that "racial regime,"[4] to borrow Cedric J. Robinson's formula, has become visible across the United States, and indeed the world. This unbuilding has created further questions: Is this infrastructure a grid, like the electrical system, that will fail once a certain number of components have been removed? Or is it a distributed network, designed to keep functioning even in the event of attack, like the Internet? If, as seems likely, it is closer to the latter, many more than the estimated 160 Confederate, Columbus, conquistador, and other racist statues that were removed during the George Floyd uprising will have to go. Around 700 Confederate monuments remain standing, as do many depicting Columbus and other heroes of settler colonialism. It's not a simple task. For example, although in early 2021 Charlottesville won the court case to remove its Confederate monuments, the city had to find $10 million to remove them by means of a special appropriation. Note, too, that the "world of statues" in Fanon's analysis also comprises neoclassical architecture, museums, triumphal arches, tombs of the unknown soldier, national parks (understood as monuments), universities, zoos, and all other means of sustaining racialized hierarchy and its segregated spaces.

4 Cedric J. Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II* (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 10.

Accordingly, across New York City, where I live, the NYPD stood guard in front of statues and monuments to Christopher Columbus, George Washington, Theodore Roosevelt (even though this last is slated for removal), and others for months into the Biden administration. They left the Columbus monument on April 21, 2021. This was one of the few policies both Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo supported. Anthropologists Nika Dubrovsky and David Graeber identified the connection: "Police are, essentially, the guardians of the very principle of monumentality—the ability to turn control over violence into truth. . . . The forms of the sacred appropriate to the police order remain the same: public monuments, museums, and the art world."[5] Defunding the police would, then, be to defund the art world as such—not by defunding cultural production, but by unbuilding all the aristocratic apparatus by which it is now distributed, displayed, and exchanged. Removing monuments is therefore directly connected to challenges to museum boards and systems of administration. By storming the Capitol on January 6, 2021, the militant forces of white supremacy undertook a monumental act. It inadvertently demonstrated that the monuments movement was working.

Nicholas Mirzoeff. *NYPD Guarding the Washington Monument, Washington Square Park, NY*, June 1, 2020. Photograph. Image courtesy of the author.

Unbuilding whiteness cannot be a single-issue campaign. Restitution of colonial loot has long been called for and is now beginning to happen. In the case of the Benin "bronzes," looted by the British punitive expedition of 1897, the work of Dan Hicks, in close coordination with parties in Nigeria, offers a model.[6] The art was taken as an act of counterinsurgency. In his campaign for restitution,

5 Nika Dubrovsky and David Graeber, "Another Art World, Part 3: Policing and Symbolic Order," *e-flux Journal*, no. 113, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/360192/another-art-world-part-3-policing-and-symbolic-order/.

6 Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

Hicks has not focused on the British Museum, the main repository of Benin art. Rather, restitution has begun from smaller museums and institutions, creating a momentum that will ultimately be difficult for the British Museum to resist. In the terms of the Bay Area's Center for Convivial Research and Autonomy, this strategy can be understood as "counter-counterinsurgency." In texts like Callwell's *Small Wars* (1896),[7] widely recirculated in the wake of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, imperial counterinsurgency always aimed at drawing its opponents into an all-inclusive battle. Counterinsurgency forces know that this tactic favors them, whereas a long-term strategy favors the resistance. Cultural counterinsurgency is no different. As Cedric Robinson reminds us, "the first attack is an attack on culture."[8]

These material campaigns need to be connected to an unbuilding of the immaterial gatekeeping of white supremacy. The pandemic created an unanticipated opening. Many universities and schools set aside SATs, GREs, and the other gatekeeping instruments. No crisis resulted, and higher numbers of historically underrepresented groups applied and were accepted. Once open, these gates should not be closed. Everyone knows that, more than anything else, the standardized tests test your ability to pay for prep classes. Enough. How else can learning, knowledge, and study be made open? In the last major moment of conjunctural shift, in the 1970s, free universities were established in New York and London, following the example of the free learning space at the University of Woodward Square, Port of Spain, Trinidad, from 1954 to 1970, where Prime Minister Eric Williams often taught. The pandemic-driven rise of autonomous learning spaces, like 16 Beaver's "Testing Assembly," now entering its second year online, shows that there are options that don't involve expensive buildings. This morning I tried to read a book review in a journal. For a reader without institutional access, the corporate publisher wanted $45 just to allow reading the review once. Everyone who can should publish open access, and if fee-charging journals solicit your work, insist on open access. If you review for tenure and promotion or screen job openings, give people credit for this move.

7 Colonel C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1896).

8 Cedric J. Robinson, *On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism and Cultures of Resistance*, ed. H. L. T. Quan (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 71.

There's much to do, then. Let me end on something of an optimistic note, despite the continuing police murders and mass shootings that are the distributed form of the January 6 uprising. If and when the pandemic begins to be contained, not just nationally but globally, corporations and others will issue a cry of "back to normal." Let us work to see that Bartlebys around the globe will respond: "I would prefer not to." The George Floyd uprising, the womxn's strike in Argentina that legalized reproductive rights, and countless local acts of what artist Claire Fontaine has called the "human strike" have shown that distributed refusal works. Enough with the normal, because so often "normal" is a synonym for "white." Following Claire Fontaine, the question is not "how do we get back to normal?" but "how do we become something other than what we are?,"[9] where what makes us "us" is shared whiteness.

Nicholas Mirzoeff is a professor in the Department of Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University. He is also the 2020–21 Mellon-ACLS Scholars and Society fellow in residence at the Magnum Foundation, New York.

9 Claire Fontaine, "Human Strike Has Already Begun," in *Human Strike and the Art of Creating Freedom* (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2020), 114.

PETER OSBORNE

Kingston University London,
Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy

There was a time not so long ago when the question "what is radical?" would provoke on the left a routine citation from the early Marx's Feuerbachian-humanist critique of Hegel: "To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself" ("*Radikal sein ist die Sache an der Wurzel fassen. Die Wurzel für den Menschen ist aber der Mensch selbst*").[1] Today the second sentence would be more likely to be translated as, "But the root for people is humanity itself." But even so, in this stylistically amended, gender-neutral version, the sentence is still problematic if we understand it, as Marx did, to identify a stable theoretical ground for an emancipatory politics, understood as a politics that treats humanity as the "highest being":

> The criticism of religion ends with the teaching [*Lehre*] that *man* [*humanity—der Mensch*] *is the highest being* [*das höchste Wesen*] *for man* [*people—den Menschen*], hence with the *categorical imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man [humanity—*der Mensch*] is a debased, enslaved, despicable being . . .[2]

The mixing of metaphors (the root is the highest?) is a symptom of the rhetorical overextension of the discourse, and the inference is, sadly, dubious.

Not only did the subsequent philosophical-political history of Europe throw a harsh light on the ontology of "roots" (Heidegger's fascism and other nationalisms), but the distribution of the human across "the continent" of history—opened up by Marx himself not long after the completion of the text cited above—immeasurably complicates the problem of its unity. One way to chart the transformation of the conceptual space of left politics might be to trace the disintegration of humanist uses of the metaphor of "the radical," the dubiously "ground-

1 Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction," in *Collected Works, Volume 3: Marx and Engels 1843–1844* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 182; Karl Marx, "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung," in *Die Frühschriften: Von 1837 bis zum Manifest der kommunistischen Partei 1848* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1971), 216.

2 Ibid.

ing" function of which is not mitigated, but reproduced, by its rhizomatic version.

As a political concept—the affirmation of a movement for fundamental change, wherein the fundamental character of the change is denoted by its "radicalism"—radicalism dates no farther back than the revolutionary period in Europe at the end of the 18th century. And despite this genealogy, it is famously politically indeterminate. There is a radical right, born of the counterrevolution, just as there is a radical left. This further problematizes the concept within left political cultures, especially during periods in which the left comes to believe that it owns the idea of change. At times of conservative revolution, radicalism can soon become a relay between left and right. Perhaps, in its abstraction from determinate political principles, radicalism is better thought of as a practical impulse of modernism—the affirmation of the temporal logic of the new—than as the name for a political position; better thought of as a term that is politicizing and depoliticizing in equal measure under different political conditions[3]—hence, its affinity to modernist and avant-garde artistic practices with equally contradictory political inflections (Futurism, for example) and its manifestation in psychological investments in change per se.

The political-intellectual question today is not the general one of "what is radical?," but "how can oppositional or anticapitalist ideas achieve some kind of social effectivity at the level of historical change?" In this respect, the historically and geopolitically distributed character of "the human" points toward a rather different structure of relations: not a categorical imperative to be true to a shared being, but sets of social differences and divisions, connections, dependencies, freedoms, and forms of domination, which one has to work hard to articulate in their processual totality, as conditions of the reproduction of different forms of life.

Intellectually (and academically, insofar as universities remain possible sites of critical intellectual labor, which is rapidly diminishing), this means two things: one, a constitutive transdisciplinarity, and therefore, two, a greater practical recognition of the necessarily collective

3 Cf. Peter Osborne, "Radicalism and Philosophy," *Radical Philosophy* 103 (September/October 2000): 6–11, 7–8, https://www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/article/radicalism-and-philosophy/.

character of knowledge production. A self-consciously problematizing transdisciplinarity is required, especially between the arts and the social sciences, in opposition to the reduction of the idea of the "life sciences" to biochemistry. This is a transdisciplinarity that is constitutive, in particular, in relation to art, where the so-called "contextual" is better named "constitutive," and where practices can be properly characterized as historical only by surpassing their conditions, on the basis of those conditions. The collective character of such knowledge production implies collaborations that exceed or reject the dominant individualizing logic of academic careers. Para-academic practices and alternative institutions remain the privileged sites of critical thought.

Peter Osborne is the author of *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (1995; 2011), *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary* (2013), *The Postconceptual Condition* (2018), and *Crisis as Form* (2022). From 1982 to 2016 he was a member of the editorial collective for the UK journal *Radical Philosophy*.

JOHN ROBERTS
University of Wolverhampton

On a practicable level, "what is radical?" is impossible to answer in any strict sense, without falling into platitudes or wishfulness, insofar as the plenipotentiality and multiplicity of "radicalness" in art makes it difficult to define in strictly utilitarian or functional terms. Indeed, we might say this indeterminacy is the nontranscendental condition of our times; the radical is what is radical, according to variable conditions and circumstances, and so on. In other words, "radicalness" is produced and tested through the mutable conditions of art's production and reception. So, even if we prioritize certain strategies, fronts, alliances, sets of resources, we cannot attribute any stable set of privileges to these positions and actions without loosening the relationship between context and art, and thus undermining art's necessary fluxions and self-negations. Even collective participation and collaboration offers no guarantees here.

Radicalism in art, as such, is a heuristic and contextually grounded category, and not a moral position defined by the urgency of certain political challenges and expectations. If it were the latter, art would be confidently defined by notions of "effectivity" or transparency that we could all agree on: "this is what we should do." This is why the hypertrophic and breathless accounts of the incorporation of art into political praxis and into a renewed notion of the public carnivalesque in the post-Seattle protests and post-Occupy movement period is limiting, to say the least. The creativity of the many in such demonstrations is exhilarating and uplifting, and it remakes resistance under aesthesis (sensuous stimulation) newly compelling—but turning resistance into a massive pullulating version of an Allan Kaprow happening cannot define the post-art state of art, nor should it.[1] The transformation of the demonstration may redefine what we want from manifestations of public resistance, but it settles nothing for art and politics as such. We can see the limits of this state of affairs in relation to the proliferation of critical standpoints, theoretical constructs, methodological innovations, critical

1 For a reflection on these questions, see Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (London: Verso, 2016).

axioms, social perspectives, and utopian horizons that have, overall, defined the "social turn" in art over the last twenty years, a superabundance of viewpoints that fly in the face of any simple deference to immediacy and spontaneity and that are extremely difficult to sort out into any order of would-be-preferential radicalness and efficacy, given their critical range. Indeed, what this recent plenipotentiality and multiplicity realizes is a striking interdependence between political theory, cultural critique, art theory, and philosophy that in many ways is unprecedented in its inventiveness, given the aporias of art and politics and art as political praxis.

This theoretical proliferation and upsurge, in fact, is evidence of a renewed *thinking through* of these aporias, constraints, and failures in a period of deepening crisis for capitalism. One might say, then, that a key part of this upsurge is a reflection on the prospects of art under these aspects as the *very condition* of "going on." This is not to say that we should give up making judgments in lieu of the nontranscendental condition of art now, and therefore be simply thankful for all this activity; rather, we need to recognize that it is important that we acknowledge the way in which these standpoints and positions reveal how much art remains bound to speculation as a fundamental condition of art's extra-artistic promise (in contrast to the activist and socially interventionist notion that its promise has arrived already). The temptation, therefore, to turn against both activism *and* the sociotheoretical extension of art, as in the growing influence in the art schools of object-oriented ontology *aestheticism*, as a "radical" counter-move to the "social turn," is a *fundamental mistake*.[2] The "social turn" in art over the last twenty years will prove to be, not so much a failed re-encounter with art praxis and the "end of art," but an extraordinary shift in art's potentiality and reach and an *expansion* of the meaning of art's autonomy, as opposed to its curtailment or demise. Therefore, it is also all the more crucial to see where aesthesis and a new (radical) folk/street art fit into the emergent public culture of resistance, and where they can't and shouldn't, given these wider considerations on multiplicity—that is, first and foremost, the importance of art's speculative extension of the link between cognition and praxis as a form of *emancipatory technique*. By this I mean, if there are no privileged *modes* of radicalness and use-value in art, art's emancipatory promise does nonetheless fall into normative

2 See Graham Harman, *Art and Objects* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

consideration in relation to questions of art's resistance to the libidinal economy, the capitalist sensorium, and the general logic of disinhibition. The defining struggle at the social, cultural, and artistic levels remains one of *attentiveness*, and consequently is attached to the creation of new forms of socialized individuation and critical self-affection that encourage and secure the noetic as desire. Antitheoretical modalities of "spontaneity" invariably diffuse this connection, replicating capitalist expectations of pleasure as the path of least resistance.

Here are a number of recent standpoints and positions that mark out, in very different registers, the radical reflection on extended cognition and praxis—some are familiar, some less so: (1) cultural practice as "hetero-poiesis"; (2) the avant-garde as the "conceptualization of a universality beyond today's biocapitalism"; (3) cultural practice as "onto-cartography," namely the creation of maps of human-inhuman topography in order "to produce a possible [livable] future"; (4) cartography as "cognitive mapping," in order to "[connect] the abstractions of capital to the sense-data of everyday perception"; (5) art as "a form of experimental activity overlapping with the world"; (6) cultural practice as a "new critique and conceptualization of the human-inhuman" as a creative de-alienation of technology and of humans as technical beings; (7) cultural practice as the "possible 'becoming artist' of anyone and/or everyone . . . [through the development of] new tenses of combination, new spaces of collectivity"; (8) art as the progressive "movement towards a 'universal address' reconsidered as a matter of cognitive navigation, and enabled by . . . the aesthetic and conceptual as inextricably intertwined"; (9) cultural practice as a "Promethean constructivism" that will "engineer new domains of experience"; (10) art and cultural practice as "not merely imagining, aspiring to, or hoping for possible worlds, but of determining the conditions for their construction"; (11) revolt as the production of "new forms of itself—that . . . must be experimental and creative (if not outright artistic)."[3]

3 (1) Bernard Stiegler, *The Neganthropocene*, ed. and trans. Daniel Ross (London: Open Humanities Press, 2018), 83; (2) Marc James Léger, *Vanguardia: Socially Engaged Art and Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 213; (3) Levi R. Bryant, *Onto-Cartography: An Ontology of Machines and Media* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 266; (4) Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2015), 7; (5) Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso 2012), 284; (6) Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 248; (7) Stevphen Shukaitis, *Combination Acts: Notes on Collective Practice in the Undercommons* (Colchester, UK: Autonomedia/Minor Compositions, 2019), 5, 9; (8) Robin Mackay, Luke Pendrell, and James Trafford,

Not all of these positions and standpoints share the same political and philosophical traditions. Moreover, few of these positions and standpoints have a working relationship to actual artistic practices. In a number of the instances above, we await the work that might be produced under their conceptual guidelines. Nevertheless, all these positions and standpoints do share a certain "constructivist" viewpoint—that is, under the new conditions of resistance and the de-attachment of art from the de-socialized containments of art's formal extension, art's resources and external reach have to be rebuilt as a kind of experimental base from the ground up. This work is necessary not in order to mimic the hard sciences and social sciences—although some positions above do defer, problematically, to these fields, by reintegrating an expanded conception of art into a techno-capitalist functionality—but, more fruitfully, as an imaginative "training" in post-capitalist modes of engagement and living. This is why the meaning of "constructivist" is not given here. Art needs to resist submitting its extra-artistic agency to the current vogue for a de-subjectivized "administration of things," identifiable with liberal and left accelerationism. Artists may be multitasking technicians these days, but they are not engineers or corporate "contractors."

In this sense, the range of positions and standpoints provides a provisional space for thinking the new confluence of extended cognition, praxis, and experimentation, as the secular and emancipatory promise of art's plenipotentiality and multiplicity. As such, when the concept of the "radical" is so easily exhausted today, the radicality of this emergent space is vital.

John Roberts teaches at the University of Wolverhampton, and is the author of a number of books, including *Photography and Its Violations* (2014), *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (2015), *The Reasoning of Unreason: Universalism, Capitalism and Disenlightenment* (2018), and *Capitalism and the Limits of Desire* (2021).

"Introduction," in *Speculative Aesthetics*, ed. Robin Mackay, Luke Pendrell, and James Trafford (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), 6; (9) Ray Brassier, "Prometheanism and Real Abstraction," in *Speculative Aesthetics*, 77; (10) Robin MacKay, "Introduction," in *Construction Site for Possible Worlds*, ed. Amanda Beech and Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2020), 1; (11) Richard Gilman-Opalsky, *Specters of Revolt: On the Intellect of Insurrection and Philosophy from Below* (London: Repeater, 2016), 114–15.

NIZAN SHAKED
California State University, Long Beach

We already know what is radical. We have centuries of experience, a massive bibliography, and some recent victories that demonstrate what can be done.

The George Floyd protests bring the horizon of possibility closer to the foreground. They evince the potential of a mass movement. Calculated as a threat by the right wing and liberal center, while celebrated on the left, their outstanding scale and force has led to police-defunding proposals that a few years prior would have been considered unrealistic. This is because mass protests have exponentially more power than any other means of petitioning the government. The mass protest is woven from ever-shifting fabrics of activism and mutual aid. For this reason, I reject the definition of the radical as a synonym for the fringe or the extreme, and instead want to elevate its work as a total reorganization of life modes on the level of the mundane, the ongoing, and the unheroic. I also reject the distinction between reform and revolution. All societies have an administrative edifice and have some form of an economy. Even permanent revolutions have cycles of before and after events. Revolution is neither separate from, nor a substitution for, administrative transformations, before and after. There will never be a chance to invent utopia from scratch. To reemerge from under the domination of life by a market economy into the possibility of a society that merely has a market, where humans subordinate the system to their need rather than the system subordinating humans to serve others, we need to change our modes of social relations and reproduction. When this is concrete action rather than an imaginary exercise, the radical entails negotiations between heterogeneous groups with varying political convictions and demands.

The best arena to negotiate goals and strategy is mass protest. Mass protest has radical potential not because it is revolutionary or reformist—it can be either, or both—but because it is the ground-level laboratory for rebuilding society on the personal, communal, and social levels. It is the beta version of replacing the state with a society where the abolition of the police and of the carceral state will meet with social

organization beyond wage and charity relations. Smaller or cause-oriented street action keeps the pilot light of mass protest burning.

The most significant aspect of the current politics is the potential to rearrange the left/liberal divide in new ways. Historically, the liberal bloc had made its compromises with the right, not with the left. Barely tolerable under liberal governments, such compromises turned disastrous under fascism. The question of which way larger societal blocs lean is existential for us now.

This response is being written during a political coup, as the 45th president of the United States, Donald Trump, has not conceded to president-elect Joe Biden, who won both the popular vote and the electoral college by a decisive margin. Although this is most likely a *failed* coup, it is nevertheless proof that our governmental structure is fragile, which is also to say that it is malleable. This makes the stakes of the strategy debate very high. We cannot afford for the liberal bloc to serve, consciously or unconsciously, the position of the right. This was a critical element in Hitler's rise to power. While today's liberal culture is starkly opposed to totalitarian Trumpism, the danger of liberal culture is that it serves capitalism nevertheless, which we can say, beyond any reasonable doubt at this point, serves the right in its turn. One problem is that the world of art and letters is full of individuals who are theoretically leftists but politically liberal. Therefore, it is not surprising that a large swath of the liberal art world is calling for the restoration of "normalcy" in one way or another. The Trump regime exposed a complicity with exploitation that is easier to hide when neo-liberalism puts on its nice face. Liberals want to go back to their peace treaty with capitalism.

But radical constituencies keep the truth on display. The multi-pronged attack on museums for their dependency on the blood money of donors and for their abysmal labor practices is a case in point. Elite institutions are now being judged for their identification with, and service to, the ruling class. Protest by artists and art workers from within is being joined by activists from without. What is truly remarkable about this is the fact that a precarious workforce that has been losing power under neoliberalism is bringing down a goliath. This success is the outcome of radical politics, but it is also due to a coalition formed with a liberal contingency that has ceased to identify with the ruling class. We should apply this success to our politics. The argument that the left should move to the center to counterbalance the right misreads

the balance of forces. We need to pull—and hard—to the left, but significantly, we need to sustain a mass in order to tip the scale.

Most of the left are finally over the formalist dogma that had categorically rejected identity politics, and they have recognized that radical, bourgeois, and right-wing variants of identity politics exist. Necessarily, the mass protests we have been seeing are an amalgamation of a wide array of social factions, otherwise they would not have been so large. The #BlackLivesMatter movement brought mainstream attention to abolitionist ideas and has been actioning them, both by using the system's own mechanisms and by working against them. The movement—as a whole, not its corporate faction—has built upon the work of radical Black and other modalities of activism that existed before. Ongoing negotiations, debates, and controversies are part of the ordeal, but it is evident that mass-movement visibility has allowed for some groups to increasingly foreground their Marxist roots in Black radicalism and anticapitalism. This has led to one of the most powerful popular movements we have known—a movement that is ongoing.

Black women made this movement work. Whether radical or not, it is not the left that made it work, but identity politics. "It" is a work in progress, but we know for sure that "it" entails the abolition of white supremacy, which, as a large mass now recognizes, necessitates the abolition of capitalism. Although identity is not solidarity, we need both forces in order to make the movement work. To be radical, identity politics must remain on the anticapitalist side of the divide. To be radical, anticapitalism needs to accept the incredible tools that members of our society have been trying to offer all along.

Nizan Shaked teaches contemporary art history, museum, and curatorial studies at California State University, Long Beach. She is the author of *The Synthetic Proposition: Conceptualism and the Political Referent in Contemporary Art* (2017) and *Museums and Wealth: The Politics of Contemporary Art Collections* (2022).

TERRY SMITH
University of Pittsburgh, European Graduate School

I take the question "what is radical?," as it addresses the practice of art history and visual culture studies, to be a "what is to be done?" challenge to practice in the present situation. I take "radical" in its two primary senses: of relating to one's roots and to the origins of that which is in question—in this case, art, visual culture, and writing history. That is to say, I take it as being at once deeply committed to those roots and unrestrainedly critical of their currently dominant manifestations. The contrast, an utterly orthodox kind of art history, was pictured by Theodor Adorno when, with cynical condescension but some accuracy, he included art historians in this (egregious) list of timidities: "There is to be found in African students of political economy, Siamese at Oxford, and more generally in diligent art historians and musicologists of petty-bourgeois origins, a ready inclination to combine with the assimilation of new material, an inordinate respect for all that is established, accepted, acknowledged."[1]

I suggest that a radical practice today has at least four priorities—or better, points of re-origination: (1) learning from Indigenous art and culture; (2) being or becoming antiracist; (3) in the field of art historiography/methodology, radical revisionism and contemporary engagement; and (4) in visual culture, intervening in the ongoing image wars. Other critics will have different priorities, according to their world situation, but I hope those priorities will be of a similar kind and have a similar interdisposition. Whatever they are, they cannot, of course, be invented *ab initio*. They are already in historical train. One seeks to work within them precisely in order to radically transform them—that is, through constructive intersection with other political work. Everything must be for this larger purpose: arousing planetary consciousness, building the radical rootedness to come.

"Always Was, Always Will Be" is the slogan I hear all around me as I write, here in Sydney, on Gadigal land of the Eora nation, during this week of Australia-wide celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

1 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life* [1951] (London: Verso, 2020), 56. This passage was written in 1944, while Adorno was exiled in the United States.

Islander peoples. The slogan acknowledges the elders—past, present, and to come—of the First Peoples, here continuously for 65,000 years, millennia before the British colonists came to the continent just over two centuries ago. Such deep-time rootedness, such ontological priority, means that any "acknowledgment" that I, as a descendent of Irish settler-workers, might make is a small, necessarily humble thing. This acknowledgment begins with an apology for unearned, undeserved presumption, and for the degradations wrought by my ancestors, as well as for those I might have unknowingly also wrought. It then becomes an offering of what I can contribute to the constant struggle of Australia's Indigenous peoples to clear some psychic, social, and physical space—against what continues to be a colonizing culture—to grow and share their traditions, to keep on renovating them, to invent new ways of world being, and to share all of this with other peoples. During the past fifty years, thousands of Indigenous artists in Australia working in remote desert and wetland communities, in the coastal cities, and through the international art world have created and sustained a remarkable art movement that is at once traditional, modern, and contemporary. It has generated a "between-cultures" field of accommodation and differentiation, accountability and possibility, that is unmatched elsewhere. It has prevailed against systemic racism, bad faith, mystification, and greed. Helping shape the effectiveness of the invitation these artists offer and the critiques they mount, supporting the art world and wider cultural currency of their art—these are the immediate tasks for committed curators, critics, and historians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Less pressing, but equally important in the longer run, is arguing the case for this art's place in broader art historical narratives and canons to come.[2]

Art historians working today, whatever art they study, have a rich set of methodological resources that have greatly expanded the discipline we inherited, from both founders like Vasari and Winckelmann and modern system-builders such as Wölfflin, Riegl, and Panofsky. Art historical writing since the 1970s seems to me less a matter of what was then called "new art history" than of radical revisionism. It is devoted to exploring the *roots* of the art that it studies: the psychic, social, economic, cultural, and political embedment of art, including art's critique,

2 Terry Smith, "Country, Indigeneity, Sovereignty: Australian Aboriginal Art," in *Art to Come: Histories of Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 156–97.

or othering, of its own situatedness. It does so in the name of the need to radically transform the disabling inequities that have evolved within colonizing modernity, extractive capitalism, statist socialism, patriarchy, abstracted rationality, neoliberal globalization, and neo-feudal fundamentalism. Wide-scale political movements, from feminism through postcolonial struggle to current queer and antiracism activism, resonate through art historical practice, as have the various revolutions in critical thought: New Left critique, semiotics, poststructuralism, deconstruction, and decoloniality.

The history of the discipline is sometimes understood and taught as if these developments had created styles that replace each other, like avant-garde "isms" within the standard story of 20th-century modernism. I see them, instead, as modes of self-critique, amounting to a kind of revisionism that is not about compromise but about root-and-branch testing of the validity of radical interpretation and reinterpretation. In this spirit, the critiques accumulate their strengths and shed their weaknesses, with the remainder becoming what we use as we take on the tasks that the wider world demands. Although, for art historians, each initiative was triggered most directly by the challenges to the interpretation of historical modernism in French art, as well as those posed by how late-modern art in Europe and the United States was itself responding to its contemporary social settings, this radically revisionist approach, I argue, has become globally relevant—and increasingly more relevant through time. More than a "multiple modernities" project, radically revisionist art historical writing expanded and was honed by the specifics of the situation for art, wherever and whenever that art was and is made.

Visual-culture studies and *Bildwissenschaft* both emerged, again in the 1970s, as radical steps away from the limitations of institutionalized art history, from its failure to deal with the obvious relevance of visual imagery to everyday life, scientific research, commerce, and political discourse. Today, much art is even more distant from the lives of people than it was, but much more art is even closer, more immersed in shared image use through online and direct person-to-person exchange. The art that is made within art worlds is distributed through what I call the *visual-arts exhibitionary complex*.[3] This institutional setting, constantly

3 Terry Smith, *Curating the Complex and The Open Strike* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press for Sternberg Press, 2021).

re-energized by its deinstitutionalizing drives, is itself a constellation within clusters of others: commercial, media, industrial, military, tourist, and so on. Ranging across these settings are several economies—that is, symbolic and actual ordering systems. One, which I call the *iconomy*, deploys visual imagery as its currency.[4] A radical practice toward the study and critique of these nodes and networks treats art as a definable set of closed and open forms that circulate along with other kinds of visual images within this iconomy. Like the other priorities I sketch here, the iconomy is a highly contested domain, in which we are obligated to intervene if our practice is to claim a contemporary kind of radical purpose. An obvious example is the latest phase in the ongoing war of images that has filled the public sphere in the United States for decades.

Amidst the plethora of imagery that, during 2020, swarmed on all the media that carry the constant construction of the world's self-picturing, three constellations eclipsed all others: (1) the graphic illustration of the coronavirus, (2) the media events staged by and around the figure of Donald J. Trump, and (3) the cell phone video of a police officer kneeling on the neck of George Floyd until he died. The first was the signal that information about the current and future state of the global pandemic was about to be announced. The second acted as the volatile epicenter of much reactionary political and cultural agenda-setting, both in the United States and across its worldwide reach. The third propelled into ubiquitous visibility a social insurrection that is profoundly shifting relationships between the races, and those between citizens and police, in the United States and elsewhere. The latter also radically changed the media presence and social impact of both the coronavirus and the forces of the radical right personified in President Trump. Against this conjunction of deadly constraint and unhinged misgovernance, a huge collective effort to imagine an equitable society premised on antiviolence is becoming visible: on the streets; in the composition of the crowds; in the slogans on their banners; in their costumes and performances; in the murals and graffiti that are transforming many neglected neighborhoods; in the monuments being deposed and those being proposed, not in the removed monuments' place but in their own right; in the videos being streamed; and in the images being posted. Some of the values

4 Terry Smith, "Iconomy, Iconoclash ≠ Iconomics," *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 30, no. 61–61 (2021): 172–194.

motivating this effort are even penetrating Congress and the Biden-Harris White House. Arthur Jafa, Postcommodity, Ursula Biermann, and George Gittoes are among the still small but fast-growing ranks of artists who are making a significant contribution to this viral counter-spectacle.

Taking up the four priorities I have highlighted—Indigenous learning, anti-racism, radically revised art historiography, and study of the image wars in visual cultures—as if they were traditional art historical topics will not guarantee radical practice. Engaging their demands, however, requires nothing less than such a practice.

Terry Smith teaches philosophy, art history, and critical thought at the University of Pittsburgh, the European Graduate School, and the School of Visual Arts, New York. His books include *What Is Contemporary Art?* (2009), *Contemporary Art: World Currents* (2011), *Talking Contemporary Curating* (2015), *One and Five Ideas: On Conceptual Art and Conceptualism* (2107), and *Art to Come: Histories of Contemporary Art* (2019).

KRISTINE STILES
Duke University, Durham, North Carolina

Radical is. Radical is, as in "to be." Radical is being in continuous action/motion, the present and past continuous. Radical is, for its continuity in being, implicitly precarious and implies inconsistent change, for better or worse.

The mythical figures Medusa, Janus, and the Hydra all represent aspects of "what is radical" in legacies of contradiction, duplicity, and danger. Medusa was at once a Greek guardian protectress and a being so lethal that her mere glance could become a weapon for defeating her opponent. In Freud's imagination, Medusa was devastatingly malevolent, with the diabolical capacity to symbolically "decapitate," namely castrate, men. For 20th-century feminists, Medusa represented women's commanding authority and a powerful counterbalance to insufferable male arrogance and dominance.

The Roman god Janus, a double-faced male symbol of passages, transitions, and change, had the ability to see into the past and future and to prognosticate beginnings and special transitions between seasons and events, including passages from peace to war to peace. He could also render injurious omens. The Janus figure was sometimes associated with witches and the Devil, as represented in the figure of a male priest dressed in a double mask. In the early 1960s in the United States, the "Janus Society" was established to fight for gay rights, and the Society of Janus, founded in San Francisco in 1974, chose Janus to represent the duality of the dominant and submissive aspects of human nature in sadism and masochism. Indeed, the duplicity inherent in the Janus figure has captured the imagination of radical thought in literature, art, and film, as well as in science, where special types of nanoparticles, or microparticles that possess two distinct physical or chemical properties, are called Janus particles.

As for the many-headed Hydra, the giant water snake (gendered female) attests to the truism that monsters are often presented in the form of a "she," which is—after all—a testimony to the innate radicality of women in a universe still run by men. Putting that bit of "what is radical" aside for now, no matter how many of the monster's heads were severed, the Hydra grew two more. Predictably, it took a man of hercu-

lean strength, indeed Hercules himself, to bring her down and defeat her, at least until the Greek tragedian Euripides reinvented the monster's capacity to rejuvenate when it grew back two heads for each one Hercules had severed. This spontaneous regeneration took a different turn in Plato's dialogue *Euthydemus* (ca. 384 BCE), where Plato critiqued the Sophists' logical fallacies by introducing the metaphor of a story told by Socrates, who is presented with two fictive brothers, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. It is the brothers' capacity to invent two arguments for every one refuted, to stage their supposed theoretical superiority, that brings the Hydra back into focus. Using this quality, Plato compares the superiority of Socratic argumentation to the fallacious arguments of the Sophists.

At this point, I come to more direct responses to the question "what is radical?"

Radical is a pretense and a purpose. It can be bold, fierce, and principled as much as it can be fickle, undependable, and shifty. It is simultaneously active and passive, and the latter sometimes represents the best of radicality—if, that is, the heroic, nonviolent radicalism of such figures as Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, John Lewis, Rosa Parks, and the Dalai Lama really does matter.

The radical can be inconsistent and undependable, but then solid as a rock.

The radical can be inhabited by irresponsible, ineffective, reckless, feckless, ruthless, and narcissistic individuals, by those who are superficial, trendy, self-concerned, and self-constituted by a show of particular phrases, reading matter, jargon, clothing, and association with others they perceive to be fashionable, informed, and powerful.

Money is radical for both crime and virtue.

The radical can also mark those who make great sacrifices, who are unswerving, steadfast, and humble. Such actions are often quiet, moving forward with stealth, and often without recognition, toward realizable goals. This type of radical is in for the long haul, the prolonged effort, the innocuous, steady commitment. These radicals, more often than not, are unsung, modest heroines and heroes whose efforts last.

To be useful is radical, and forgiving is useful.

Love is not radical; commitment is. Hate is not radical; change is. Dogged persistence is radical, whether for good or ill. Teaching and preaching can be radical or not radical. Waiting is radical, for better or

worse. Science, art, music, and literature can be radical for good or ill. To take time to ponder is radical.

To care is radical, especially when faced with the disquiet, anxiety, uncertainty, responsibility, maintenance, and solitude of caring.

Trees, plants, earth, water, sunlight, animals, insects, microbes, viruses are all among the most radical entities on earth.

Radical understands that everything has meaning and that meaninglessness does not exist.

Such are the Medusa, Janus, and Hydra tentacles of the radical.

Kristine Stiles is a professor of Art, Art History & Visual Studies at Duke University. She holds an Honorary Doctorate of Arts from Dartington College of Arts/ University of Plymouth, England. She specializes in artists' writings, global contemporary and experimental art, and trauma studies. She has authored over 100 articles, and among her books are *Concerning Consequences: Studies in Art, Destruction, and Trauma* (2016) and *Theories & Documents of Contemporary Art* (1996, 2012). She has curated exhibitions, including States of Mind: Dan & Lia Perjovschi (2007).

MING TIAMPO
Carleton University

If we have learned nothing else in the past months, it is that we are interconnected. A single breath on one side of the world travels to all four corners, and we all breathe as one planetary organism—one diseased with inequality.[1] In our present moment, to be radical, and to be radical in art history, is no longer to position oneself at the tip of the charge, the avant-garde ahead of the pack, but rather to acknowledge our entanglements, to engage in co-constituting murmurations, rhizomes, and worlds. To be radical, therefore, is to seek a poetics of relation, as Édouard Glissant writes, and to be aware of the fact that we have no other choice.

. . .

To be radical is to see that we are entangled, from the scale of microorganisms to the planetary, from local heterogeneities, communities, and historical layers to global intersections and movements.

To be radical is to think beyond the disciplinary logics of art history, rooted in 18th-century nationalism, nation-building, the creation of national collections and national archives, and even the logics of national competition enshrined in large-scale biennials. It is to imagine new scales of analysis, to seek new ways of building art histories, to find new connections and resonances, and to imagine new structures of filiation. To be radical is to find new modalities that enable us to read archives against and along the grain and to understand their absences in order to tell stories that have been suppressed, forgotten, or never imagined to have existed. It is to seek the transversal articulations of urgencies that appear parallel, the relational comparisons, the decenterings, and the worldly affiliations that help us think imaginatively about how we are connected rather than forced apart; it is to dig deep into the scorched ground to reveal the invisible

1 I am here inspired by comments made by Paul Goodwin, Wayne Modest, and Alice Ming Wai Jim about breathing in the context of COVID-19 and George Floyd, in a conversation convened by Goodwin for a project that we co-led entitled *Worlding Public Cultures: The Arts and Social Innovation*. In this conversation, we discussed Achille Mbembe, "The Universal Right to Breathe," trans. Carolyn Shread, *Critical Inquiry* (April 13, 2020), https://critinq.wordpress.com/2020/04/13/the-universal-right-to-breathe/.

mycorrhizal networks that link our roots, *radici*,[2] the radical foundations of our art histories.

These entanglements are temporal as well as spatial, and if we wish to have a liberatory politics of the present and of the future, we must interrogate the past, which haunts the now. We must seek to understand the ways in which we have been historically enmeshed and how colonial histories have sought to disentangle our pasts in order to extract purified narratives that justified conquest of other peoples and of the planet.

Furthermore, we must understand the palimpsests of histories and cultures that constitute place beyond nationalist rhetoric. If we are to understand the complexities of localities, we need to delve into the histories and present tenses of conquest, migration, trade, circulation, conflict, war, and colonization that create complex cultures in the most unlikely places. In imperial and artistic centers, both major and minor, we must seek to unearth the suppressed stories of colonial subjects and the lateral networks that they created in those centers, as well as the ways in which they contributed to these new ecosystems. In settler-colonial nations, we must grapple with the occupation of unceded lands and find new treaty relationships of mutual respect and co-constituted cultures that reflect the heterogeneity of our communities that live and breathe together.

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In her world-making research on mycorrhizal systems—the networks of soil fungi that co-relate trees below ground, allowing them to communicate warnings and share resources even across species—ecologist

2 Notable models of such practices include Salah Hassan and Iftikhar Dadi eds., *Unpacking Europe: Towards a Critical Reading* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2001); Sonal Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations: Artistic Practice, National Identity, and Modernism in India, 1930–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Partha Mitter, "Interventions: Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery," *Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (December 2008): 531–48; Shu-mei Shih, "Comparison as Relation," in *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, ed. Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Sanjukta Sunderason, *Partisan Aesthetics: Modern Art and India's Long Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020); Ming Tiampo, "Transversal Articulations: Decolonial Modernism and the Slade School of Fine Art," in *Postwar—A Global Art History, ca. 1945–1965*, ed. Okwui Enwezor and Atreyee Gupta (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming 2021); Liz Bruchet and Ming Tiampo, "Slade, London, Asia: Contrapuntal Histories between Imperialism and Decolonization 1945–1989 (Part 1)," *British Art Studies* 20 (2021), doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-20/tiampobruchet; Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and Reiko Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness: International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016). Saloni Mathur points out that the etymological origins of the word *radical* come from *radici*, meaning "roots." Saloni Mathur, *A Fragile Inheritance: Radical Stakes in Contemporary Indian Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

Jin-me Yoon. *Untunnelling Vision*, 2020. Video still, single channel 360° and 4k video, 21:26 minutes © Jin-me Yoon. Image courtesy of the artist.

Suzanne Simard asks, "How do trees collaborate?"[3] In seeking to understand the subterranean networks that enable lateral systems to grow and to generate discursive ecosystems, we as scholars, curators, and artists must also learn to collaborate, to build structures and reform existing institutions to enable cooperation.[4]

A relational art history is not possible without collaboration, listening, and collaborative forms of knowledge formation. Collaboration enables the putting-in-relation of worlds and worldviews, opening up possibilities of negotiation and the healing of difficult histories. Rather than producing polarized narratives that fail to find middle ground, collaborative and relational histories seek to co-constitute spaces in which coexistence becomes possible. True collaboration is not always easy, as

3 Suzanne Simard, "How Do Trees Collaborate?," *NPR TED Radio Hour*, January 13, 2017, https://www.npr.org/2017/01/13/509350471/how-do-trees-collaborate?t=1607787738341. Simard's research was first published as Suzanne Simard, David A. Perry, Melanie D. Jones, David D. Myrold, Daniel M. Durall, and Randy Molina, "Net Transfer of Carbon between Ectomycorrhizal Tree Species in the Field," *Nature* 388 (1997): 579–82, https://doi.org/10.1038/41557.

4 Two institutions that I have had the privilege of joining who do this work of reimagining institutions and the relationship between individual and networked research are ICI Berlin, https://www.ici-berlin.org, and the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art, https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk.

power must cede territory to previously marginalized voices, and the margins must cede purity of conviction, calling others in rather than out.[5]

Collaboration links lived worlds, epistemologies, ontologies, expertise, and language proficiencies to construct frameworks of analysis that are complex and nuanced.[6] For too long, academia and the art world have been governed by a Darwinian logic of competition that pits scholars, curators, and artists against each other, rewarding individual achievements grown in soils enriched by many actors. By creating affective communities[7] of shared purpose rather than environments administered by neoliberal assessments, we can create more fertile conditions for untunneling vision, for nurturing the mycorrhizal networks necessary to write the radically entangled, worlded, multivocal, and decolonized histories that are crucial for our planetary survival.

. . .

Just as relational art history cannot be practiced by individuals alone, it should not exist alone; we must create forest schools that embrace publics. We must find ways to nurture the growth of our mycorrhizal networks to sustain and connect more and different types of ecosystems; we must make the heterogeneous and entangled lattices that live in the forest floor visible to larger publics so that toxic myths of monoculture cannot take hold.

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Our universities and museums can and should play a powerful role in changing public culture. Rather than seeking short-term growth and yield, to use another forestry term, our institutions of higher learning and imagination must rise to the global challenges our democracies now face. In this task, art, art history in particular, and the humanities

5 Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Loretta J. Ross, *Calling In the Callout Culture: Detoxing Our Movement* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming 2021).

6 "A Manifesto by the Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective in *Radical History Review* 131," *Medium* (June 22, 2018), https://medium.com/afro-asian-visions/a-manifesto-by-the-afro-asian-networks-research-collective-30857823579f (accessed December 12, 2020). This is an important model for global art history, and it subtends the Intersecting Modernisms sourcebook project that I co-lead with Pamela Corey, Iftikhar Dadi, Salah Hassan, Mari-Carmen Ramirez, and John Tain.

7 Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities, Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

in general can play an important role in grappling with difficult histories, revealing our entangled ecosystems, and building new critical narratives of empathy, care, and collaboration . . . for the survival of the species and of the planet, rather than survival of the fittest.

Ming Tiampo teaches at Carleton University. She is the author of *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (2011) and the co-curator of Gutai: Splendid Playground at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Her current research focuses on the Slade School of Fine Art and the artist Jin-me Yoon. She is co-lead of the Worlding Public Cultures Project (https://www.worldingcultures.org).

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Art history, like any discipline, has its assumptions and orthodoxies; real risks await those prepared to put these constraints aside. I think this is a fair, if approximate, characterization of one of my first discoveries about my chosen field. There it lay before me: a landscape defined by unstated assumptions concerning who and what mattered, and why. At the top of the list came painting, along with genius, abstraction, and men. It didn't take long for me to start looking in other directions—toward sculpture, for example, and the work of women—but these moves seemed less radical than commonsensical, given that the reigning exclusions were so patently indefensible.

My own way of responding required looking elsewhere—at sculpture, at artistic education, as well as at social class, abstraction, gender, maternity, and birth. Do these topics seem surprising? What sort of force do they carry when framed by ambitious questions concerning radicalism, social justice, and emancipatory change?

In my view, the radicalism of these topics (and not theirs alone) lies in the truth that the force of scholarship within the struggle for social justice plays out in how and what it helps us see. Where are the women and children? Where is the power? Where is the harm? These remain radical questions. They begin with "what is missing?" and then ask why. Such questions are certainly proper to our discipline. Art history ought to be part of a radical humanism that is fully conscious of the fact that lives are at stake.

This is one reason that at present I am using my work to explore—if not fully to explain— a closely linked set of questions. Why is it that to realize a sculpture is to exercise a skill possessed by our species alone? Why is it that to produce a sculpture is to make something, a tangible object, that is profoundly human? This is the most radical question I can pose. The answer takes us back to the primal scene of our species: the ancestral belaboring of matter, the first and most radical moment when inert material was transformed through the powers of touch. It is easy to believe, from

within our present dematerialized phantasmagoria, that all this is irrecoverable. Yet the reality of the animate and material worlds we are transforming is still within and around us. To stay focused on that reality, and to respond to it, may well be the most radical act of all.

Anne M. Wagner is professor emerita at the University of California, Berkeley. She now lives in London. Her current book project, *Sculpture and the Making of the Human*, is nearing completion.