## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDITORIAL</th>
<th>CUNY LIFE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Being Late</td>
<td>CUNY-Wide Conference in Defense of Immigrants Held at Grad Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nandini Ramachandran</td>
<td>CUNY Internationalist Marxist Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pg. 3</td>
<td>pg. 52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imperialism and Class Struggle in Chagos and Mauritius</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon Barnes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pg. 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| The Streets Tell What the Press Hides: Disaster Capitalism in Puerto Rico |                                        |
| Maria Heyaca               |                                        |
| pg. 20                     |                                        |

| Moral Depravity, Discontent and Socialism: The Politics of the Urban Revolution |                                        |
| Harry Blain                |                                        |
| pg. 35                     |                                        |

| Neoliberalizing Childhood and Education: WeWork's “Entrepreneurial” Schools |                                        |
| Hillary Donnell            |                                        |
| pg. 46                     |                                        |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REVIEW</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look Back in Anger: Review of Pankaj Mishra’s Age of Anger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asher Wycoff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pg. 91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### On Being Late

Nandini Ramachandran

Umberto Eco begins his final book, *Chronicles of a Liquid Society*, by imagining a world in which being conspicuous is the ultimate value, a world so bereft of stable structures of meaning that the problem of recognition — so long a staple of arcane political theory — becomes so overwhelming that it defines daily life. It is this world he identifies, following Zygmunt Bauman, as “a liquid society,” in which there’s only ever an evanescent present; the past is fiction, and the future is already lost.

*Chronicles* was published posthumously last year, and it is a collection of his columns for an Italian magazine. There are some beautiful and hilarious essays, including one that meditates on the “metaphysical solace” that detective novels provide us and which might remind his fans of his own (almost perfect) murder mystery, *The Name of the Rose*. And yet, as the nature of the enterprise might suggest, this is often a cranky book and sometimes a lazy one, and it is frequently a nostalgic one. This might seem odd, given that people have been diagnosing the crumbling edifices of modernity ever since Marx’s famous pronouncement that “all that is solid melts into...”
“air” in The Communist Manifesto. Walter Benjamin called modernity a hellscape characterized by “eternal recurrence with novelty” around the time that the young Eco was reading the comics he eulogizes so evocatively in his novel, The Mysterious Flame of Queen Flame, which makes his reader wonder, where does this unrequited longing for an untainted and innocent past even come from?

The drift of Eco’s rhetoric makes more sense once you begin reading Bauman’s thoughts about liquid societies in his final book, Retropia. At some point in relatively recent history, Bauman suggests, time turned on itself such that dreams of progress transformed into a longing for a return to the (presumed) certitudes of the past. Bauman doesn’t specify precisely when this happened but he emphasizes its political implications, especially around questions of recognition, and certainly the traces of this turn are easily mapped onto our political landscape. Neither Eco nor Bauman are very convincing in their attempt to present this turn to nostalgia as a distinctively new mode of political or social life, but they are less interested in proving novelty than they are in insisting that its rise is uniquely correlated with a certain crisis of sovereignty: that it is the fading promise of the nation-state that is prompting this longing for a lost community. The appeal of such revanchism is even more obvious in our political landscape: Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump both campaigned on the idea that we inhabit a liminal and unstable present, a moment in history that cannot last. Clinton ran on the idea of an inequitable past, characterized by racism and sexism, and emphasized a vision of gradual but inevitable and successful change. Hence the arrow in her campaign slogan, “I’m with Her!” Trump’s slogan reversed that teleology, replacing anticipation with nostalgia in his rhetoric, and we now live with the consequences of that victory, however narrow and corrupt it was.

It can be hard to escape the feeling these days that we are living in the afterlife of the apocalypse: that we have inherited a reality we can neither alter nor even analyze, and which we can only inhabit as passive subjects constantly confessing our sins to an indifferent audience. We live these days with the sense of being perpetually too late, and confronting this diffuse and enervating emotion with the rigors of what Edward Said once called “late style,” a style at home in its untimeliness, can be the bracing dose of skepticism we all occasionally need to recover from such cynical funks. Said developed this theme in what would be his own final (and incomplete) book, On Late Style, in which he describes his affinity to the “intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction” that haunts such works. Late Style, as he understands it, is the work of a mature artists grappling with their mortality; artists who have, in effect, outgrown themselves. “Late-ness” he writes “is being at the end, fully conscious, full of memory, and also very (even preternaturally) aware of the present.”

What Said finds appealing about late style is the defiance of death— artistic death, physical death, social death— even as it grows impossible to ignore the reality of it. This tension, for him, produces a critique that is brittle yet brilliant, an art that survives the moment that nonetheless...
saturates it. We have great need for such art in our era, and Eco and Bauman don’t entirely arrive at the paradox of exiled belonging that animates it in their final efforts (Eco’s final novel, The Prague Conspiracy, is perhaps a more fitting addition to the canon). But these have been months of great loss, and there are many last books to choose from. The one that comes closest to achieving Said’s exacting standards is Ursula Le Guin’s No Time to Spare.

No Time to Spare is, like Chronicles of Liquid Society, an anthology of incidental writing, and it is, if anything, even more loosely organized. Essays about her cat nestle alongside eulogies to her secretary and reflections on Homer. Yet the spiky spirit of the book is evident throughout, as is her persistent unwillingness to let mortality overwhelm her into nostalgic dreams of return. Occasionally, she confesses, she feels like she’s living in someone else’s country, but “a glimmer of the anthropological outlook keeps me from believing that life was ever simple for anybody, anywhere, at any time. All old people are nostalgic for certain things they know are gone, but I live in the past very little. So why am I feeling like an exile?” There is no complementary urge, however, to evade complicity in the alienated and alienating world: this is the world we made, she insists, “clinging desperately to the metaphor of growth,” and the only question to ask is how to ensure that it becomes, in turn, a past to which we will not—and should not—return.

Le Guin does not answer the question, nor can she. That is the task of our generation. In her most pointed social critique, “The Inner Child and the Nude Politician,” she offers us a hint, suggesting that the valorization of children as sites of authenticity and creativity, and the corresponding denunciation of adulthood as stifling and alienating, is precisely why we persistently elect liars and strongmen. A society in which adulthood is indefinitely deferred is one that confuses ignorance with innocence, and growing up, however challenging and exhausting it might be, is the natural right of all creatures. It is certainly true that capitalism infantilizes us, and that its critics are often told to “grow up” dismissively, as if adulthood were only a complacent acceptance of contemporary social relations. But that is not all there is, Le Guin reminds us, and adulthood is about admitting complicity and taking responsibility; it is the ability to participate fully in the world. It is the art of knowing how (and when) to be invisible in a society that privileges outrage and spectacle as the only possible modes of expressing oneself. It is teaching younger people, as we do daily, about the stakes of thinking and acting in the world, training their attention to truths that the powerful and the smug would rather were kept hidden.

The Advocate’s theme this year has been revolution and sovereignty, and while we have focused heavily on revolution, this is finally a positive definition of individual and collective sovereignty that we can endorse: grow up and own your defiance. We offer stories about activists and artists striving to do precisely that from diverse locations, as well as appraisals of the consequences of failure, hoping thereby to provide tools and definitions and examples that can orient all of us in our quest to challenge the intractable norms that so often seem to foreclose our collective future.
The Chagos Archipelago proves the old maxim that colonialism dies slowly. Also known as the British Indian Ocean Territory, the archipelago was excised from Mauritius in 1965 (then a British colony) and its largest island, Diego Garcia, has been home to a United States military base since 1971, and the entire population of the archipelago was coerced into leaving the islands or forcibly removed by 1973. The archipelago is strategically located in the Indian ocean at the crossroads of Africa and Asia: approximately 2,000 kilometers south of India; 4,000 kilometers east of the Swahili Coast in eastern Africa; 3,500 kilometers west of Malaysia and Indonesia; just over 2,100 kilometers northeast of Mauritius. Looking at a globe, it is clear why the imperialism so covets this tiny atoll that has been largely forgotten by the rest of the world. It is in prime position for the United States’ military forces, allowing them to devote resources and assets to various theatres of operations, and the base is integral to the UK-US war machine, and even more vital in the context of their “Global War on Terror.”

The Central Intelligence Agency and US military used the base, ironically named Camp Justice, as part of its program of extraordinary rendition during the presidential tenure of George W. Bush. The US base on Chagos also housed “black sites,” where rendered individuals from across the globe would be taken indefinitely, without charge and without trial. The British, ostensibly not wanting to appear quiescent as torture was carried out on their territory by non-Britons, asked the US to cease using the Diego Garcia base to this end, a request to which the US military acquiesced by transferring prisoners to other black sites or the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base. They went so far as to obfuscate their own role in the program, insisting that the documents relating to it having been “destroyed accidentally” after having been soaked with water.

Both prior to and in the aftermath of the program of extraordinary rendition, the base at Chagos has been used by US military forces as a hub for long-range bombers, particularly during the jingoistic and bellicose intervention in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in the waning years of that conflict. More recently, under both Republican and Democratic leadership, the base has been utilized as a launch pad for bombing runs and surveillance flights in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Parenthetically, the United States military also operates a drone base in the (relatively) nearby Seychelles.

For revolutionaries, the history of the BIOT in general and Diego Garcia in particular should be quite alarming. On the one hand, there is the question of the 2,500 forcibly displaced inhabitants as well as their progeny, now numbering between five and ten thousand; on the other, the issue of the military base and the sovereignty of Chagos. Put another way, the question of Chagos has all of the trappings of a nascent anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggle, one in which Marxists must take up both the banner of national self-determination (for the displaced Chagossians) in addition to advancing a politics which hold that the defeat of US imperialism and British colonialism offer the only lasting solution to this crisis. However, in order to proffer any solutions to either of these problems wrought by imperialism, one must first know the history of the area and how the situation as it stands came to fruition.

Chagos and Mauritius: A Brief History

The Chagos Archipelago had been part of Mauritius since 1903, then under the auspices of the British Empire. Mauritius had come under British control in 1810, having previously been a French, and before that, Dutch colony. In 1810, the colony of Mauritius included the island of Mauritius, the Seychelles, the Chagos Archipelago, and the islands of Rodrigues, St. Brandon, and Agaléga. The British Foreign Office separated the Seychelles from the rest of the colony in 1903, but the other islands remained a part of Mauritius. In 1965 the British government paid Mauritius three million pounds for control of the archipelago once the former went through constitutional decolonization. Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the first prime minister of independent Mauritius, accepted this deal, likely with the foreknowledge of what would
Mauritius gained its independence in 1968, three years after the creation of the BIOT. Chagos, however, was not to be included, and its inhabitants were still subjects of the Crown in London. At the same time when Britain was negotiating with its epigones in Mauritius, the Foreign Office was also negotiating with the United States. The US wanted a depopulated island in the Indian Ocean from which it could house strategic military assets. This was in part the United States cashing in on the 1963 Polaris Sales Agreement, through which the United States sold the UGM-27 Polaris, a Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile capable of hosting nuclear payloads, to the British. To this end, the British negotiated a fifty-year lease to the tune of around eleven million USD, with the possibility of extension, and both parties settled on Diego Garcia, the largest island in the Chagos Archipelago. The deal was concluded by 1966 and by the time the first US military personnel arrived in Diego Garcia in 1971, the smaller islands had already been depopulated by the British. By 1973, there were no Chagossians in Chagos. This was not a processes wherein people were compensated to leave, or even asked if they wanted to remain. Rather, it was one in which the standard bearers of imperialism and colonialism were deployed to effectuate what those in Washington and London had decided upon. That is to say, it was a process punctuated by deceit, terror, and violence. Some Chagossians, upon travelling to the Seychelles or Mauritius for work or familial reasons were refused return passage, which marooned a portion of the Chagossian population on those islands. Those who weren’t duped by these duplicitous actions of the British and newly independent Mauritius government, were in for something much worse. Once the US military had arrived in 1971 and Diego Garcia still had a sizable population, plans were put into effect almost immediately, in conjunction with the British, to push out the rest of the Chagossians. These plans included a campaign of terror designed to frighten the population into submission. The primary tactic therein was to take every dog on the island, stray or pet alike, and bring them to a gas chamber. In addition to killing off all of the dogs on Diego Garcia, some Chagossians were forced from their homes at gunpoint by US and UK military personnel. Those on Diego Garcia, if not taken directly to Mauritius or the Seychelles, went to either Peros Banhos or Salomon (two smaller atolls in the archipelago), and were then deported a second time to either of the two aforementioned countries. The Anglo-American imperialists attempted to be magnanimous in a manner befitting their social role. They allowed the Chagossians to “choose” which of the two locations they were to be deported to. Indeed, by the end of this process in 1973, as Paul Gore-Booth, a British diplomat had intimated some years earlier, the only indigenous population on Diego Garcia were the seagulls. When met with condemnation, the British government claimed there was no indigenous population to begin with, the Chagossians having only been “contract labour” or “plantation workers.” Prior to Mauritian independence, when a Soviet diplomat criticized a British counterpart for the latter’s subjugation of the indigenous population of the islands, the Briton’s pithy retort was to inquire whether the Soviets were alluding to the dodo birds. Granted, none of the islands of Mauritius were ever “indigenously” inhabited by humans— ancestors of the local population having first arrived because of the dual legacies of chattel slavery and indentured labor— but the British response to the Chagos question has always been inflected by racism, national chauvinism, and an ostentatious contempt for Chagossian workers. As evinced by now declassified documents, one British diplomat ruminated that “unfortunately along with the birds go a few Tarzans and Man Fridays whose origins are obscure, and who are being hopefully whisked on to Mauritius.” Such statements only give one a mere glimpse into the mindset of the functionaries of this imperialist project. The forcible expropriation and deportation of the Chagossians has had a deleterious effect on their socio-cultural lives. The population is now dispersed, the majority being in Mauritius, but many are in the Seychelles and England, and a few have since relocated to France and Switzerland. The diaspora has, since their “eviction” been fighting to return, though the political machinations of bigwigs and elites in Washington, London, and even Port Louis operate as a fetter upon their struggle. One of the more recent examples was the creation of the Chagos Marine Protected Area. A joint project of partners in imperialism, Britain and the United States conspired to designate the entirety of the Chagos Archipelago a “Marine Protected Area.” In effect, this would make it illegal for any potential returnees to fish. Most labor in Chagos is based on one of two things, coconut farming or fishing. In communiques between the United States and Britain, it was established that the creation of an MPA was deemed the most efficient way to impede any attempts at resettlement. This plan was proposed in
2009 and went into effect the following year. By 2015, however, the Permanent Court of Arbitration held that under United Nations rulings regarding the sea the MPA was illegal if Mauritius (not the Chagossians themselves) wasn’t brought into the fold. In effect, if the bourgeoisie in Port Louis can’t be involved in administering the MPA, neither can Washington or London, which is why the Mauritius government is now a party to the agreement.

The subterfuge around the creation of the MPA is simply just the latest in a long line of injustices levied on the Chagossians. Some of the more egregious acts of maleficence involve the remuneration which was to be paid to the dispossessed and displaced Chagossians. In 1972 the British government approved a paltry 650,000 GBP to be paid out to the Chagossians displaced in Mauritius. The British opted to give that sum to the Mauritian government, and some of it disappeared, with the rest being distributed in 1977. In 1982, the British government offered further compensation, this time four million GBP; some of that money again “vanished” and the rest was paid out in piece-meal fashion between 1982 and 1987.

Even if the Chagossians were to be adequately compensated (they haven’t), money would not solve the issue of their right to return, nor would it solve the issue of the base on Diego Garcia, nor would it solve the issue of British colonialism in the Indian Ocean. The Chagossians are effectively refugees wherever they are, not all too different from the plight of Palestinians in Jordan, Lebanon, or Syria. Chagossians have a right to return to their home, whether or not they are “indigenous.” This is even more pressing given their status in Mauritius as a specially oppressed group and the geopolitical concerns around the US base and British colonial control of the archipelago. To combat these forces, no one in Chagos can be relied upon (only military personnel from the United States and Britain, as well as a complement of administrative staff from Britain reside there), and the struggle for Chagos must be waged primarily through the class battles in Mauritius.

Post-Independence Realities: Mauritius, Chagos, and the Class Struggle

Chagossians are a specially oppressed group in Mauritius (as they are in the United Kingdom and the Seychelles), where the majority of them reside. Most Chagossians live in what are colloquially called cités. A cité is a ghetto, and while non-Chagossians are also subject- ed to living in these squalid conditions, the overwhelming majority of Chagossians exist in such destitution. Mauritius is often considered an island paradise for the rich and well-to-do, it is seen as having a working class and petty-bourgeoisie which doesn’t often suffer from the vice grip of global capitalism in general or the particular negative externalities of neoliberalism in particular. This is of course a fallacy promulgated by elites and their lackeys in an attempt to obfuscate the sharp class divisions that persist on the island.

Since the BIOT began duping Chagossians into leaving the archipelago in the 1960s, culminating to the constriction of the military facility in the early 1970s, Chagossians in Mauritius proper have experienced a process of lumpenization. Contemporary Chagossians in Mauritius form the quintessential “reserve army of labor.” This structural underemployment and unemployment of Chagossians results in the proverbial paradigm of being “last hired and first fired.”

The Mauritian economy is subject to the same boom-bust cycles of capitalism as in any other location, and the Mauritian working class in general, and Chagossians in particular, bear the brunt of adverse socio-economic conditions on the island. Furthermore, that the population of Chagos in Mauritius is an ethno-racial minority within a minority group further exacerbates their predicament.

Contemporary Mauritius is highly class-stratified, and this is often routed through race. Chagossians are Creole. Note that in
Mauritius this term does not have the same connotation as it does in the Americas, and it is at its core a racial term. Creoles are those who are the descendants of Black African slaves from Mozambique, Madagascar, and elsewhere, and while a more appropriate term may be “Afro-Mauritian,” one should understand Creole as being synonymous to Black when considering race in Mauritius. Creoles comprise about 27 percent of the island’s population, while people from the Indian subcontinent represent 68 percent of the population. Ethnic Chinese and Malay people are three percent of the population and Whites comprise two percent. Chagossians are therefore seen as both Creole and as distinct from the rest of the Creole population in Mauritius, though both groups are often scapegoated and discriminated against. Though Chagossians are doubly scapegoated, as their version of Creole (the language which all Mauritians speak, regardless of race, not the racial category) is distinct from Mauritian Creole, which makes it easier to differentiate Chagossians from other Creoles.

As social class is indelibly linked to race and racialization under capitalism, the majority of Whites tracing their genealogy to the Franco-Mauritian plantationocracy, which continues to function as the superordinate elite on the island. People of Chinese and Malaysian heritage are more often than not members of the petty-bourgeoisie, many of them owning and operating small shops and businesses, though some are found within the ranks of the working class. People of Indian descent are the most diverse in their standing within the social hierarchy of the island. Most of the working class is of Indian descent, but much of the ruling class is also of Indian origin, and aspects of the caste system in India are manifest in Mauritius. “Tamils” (Indians from Tamil Nadu, and generally phenotypically much darker) are often counter-poised to “Hindus” (Indians who trace their origins to other areas in India). All this is to say that the class struggle in Mauritius is intrinsically attached to the racial categories used on the island.

These ethno-racial categories are used by the ruling elite to segment the working class as is par for the course in any society under racial capitalism. That Mauritius is a bourgeois republic – one of the “better” ones in Africa according to much of the bourgeois press – and its economy serves in the interest of the ruling classes in Washington, London, and Port Louis. Despite all of their posturing about the Chagos Archipelago, successive ruling governments in Mauritius have failed, and will continue to fail, to ameliorate the conditions of the Chagossians in Mauritius, and the issue of Diego Garcia as a beachhead of US imperialism is a non-issue to them. The ruling class of Mauritius takes issues with British colonialism in the BIOT only insofar as it wants the rent paid by the United States for the base. In the unlikely event that the Mauritian bourgeoisie is able to wrest control of the archipelago, the US military facilities will undoubtedly remain, and the United States’ money would flow to Port Louis rather than to London. And if Chagossians in Mauritius were able to return in this scenario, it would remain predicated on ethno-racial animus towards the Creole population.

None of the leading political organizations in Mauritius can carry out a revolutionary programme to defeat US imperialism in the Indian Ocean and effectively remedy the Chagos issue. There exist three chief political parties on the island, the Mouvement Militant Mauricien, the Mouvement Socialiste Militant, and the Parti Travailiste. Despite the nomenclature, these organizations aren’t militant, socialist, or representative of the toiling masses. All of them are a similar brand of center-left social democratic opportunists, their divisions being based more so upon personal allegiances and quasi-ethnic rifts than on political ideology or policy. A prime example of this was the MSM’s abrupt reversal on their central pledge during the last general election in 2014. The PTR, which had been in power since the 2010 elections, had proposed a project to develop a light rail from Curepipe in the center of the country to Port Louis on the west coast. The plan was ostensibly to assuage the horrendous vehicular traffic in the corridor between the two cities where the majority of the island’s population resides. The MSM campaigned against this, citing that it was unnecessary, would potentially displace people, and would adversely affect the job stability of bus drivers. The PTR lost, and the MSM won in 2014, and immediately the MSM launched the Metro Express project, a near-carbon copy of the PTR plan. A firm from India won the bid to build the metro and the MSM promptly began serving people living along the proposed route orders to evacuate their homes. A few were offered a measly indemnity to do so, whereas others received nothing aside from the government directive.

This is simply one of many examples of such form of politics in Mauritius, and all of the primary political parties are culpable of this. Since independence, all of them have at one time or another been allied with one against the other. There exists only one organization on the island that can be said to be fighting for the working class as well as the rights of the Chagossians. Lalit de Klas, literally “class struggle,” began as a quasi-Trotskyist newsletter and can trace its lineage back to a 1971 dock workers’ strike against a government wage freeze. Lalit has proven to be the only political organization genuinely interested in both the liberation of the Mauri-
ritian working class from the socio-economic morass of capitalism (they openly call for a Workers’ Republic of Mauritius) and the expulsion of both the British and American forces from the Chagos Archipelago. Lalit is also the only Mauritian political organization that has actively opposed the military base on Diego Garcia, and called various demonstrations to this end, most notably when United States war ships were docked in Port Louis harbor in 2013.

Lalit openly opposes communalism and the attendant “best loser system.” Communalism in Mauritius is an ideology which fragments the diverse ethnic and racial groups of the island into discrete groupings which are understood to have their own (racial as opposed to class) interests. The best loser system is the political manifestation of communalism in a grotesque form of affirmative action which allocates eight parliamentary seats to the top losing candidates from minority political organizations, namely those of Creole, Sino-Mauritian, or Islamic backgrounds. This practice operates in such a way that it is a fetter to unified class struggle on the island and plays into the hands of both the national and international bourgeoisie. Without overcoming the ethno-racial divide (and the linguistic issues as it relates to Chagossians), a broad based workers’ movement with the power to challenge capitalist rule cannot come to fruition. Lalit, while devoted to the liberation of the working class and the overthrow of capitalism, can be criticized for aspects of their ideology and some of their tactics. This is particularly germane given their illusion that a recent United Nations vote could chart a way forward for the people of Chagos.

On 22 June 2017, the United Nations General Assembly voted in favor of an “Advisory Opinion” from the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands, on the question of the sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago. Lalit joined in the chorus of other Mauritian political groups in hailing this vote as a victory for the struggle of the Chagossians. Unfortunately, it is symbolic at best, and the UN – which has both the United States and Britain on the Permanent Security Council – and the ICJ will offer nothing but suggestive rulings. Part of Lalit’s strategy relies on putting pressure on the extant political apparatus in Mauritius, the UN, and in the United Kingdom. This specific tactic, as revolutionaries well know, does not often result in any material gain for the dispossessed, but rather brings some critics of capitalist institutions into the corridors of power. While this last bit is unlikely for the cadre of Lalit that cut their teeth during the 1979 strike, such a program can only lead to stagnation of the struggle until they call for working class mobilization against the dispossession of the Chagossians and the existence of the military base. The UK-US control of Chagos will end either when the imperialists and colonials no longer require the archipelago or when militant labor with revolutionary fervor is organized to challenge capitalist rule in any
Relics of the abandoned island's past – credit: Diane Selkirk

of the countries in question.

**Present and Future Prospects**

Like the Mauritian bourgeoisie, the ruling classes of the United States and Britain offer no viable solution to the Chagos crisis. Neither Democrats and Republicans have any interest in closing the base on Diego Garcia, while the British authorities only want to maintain the status quo. More recently, both the United States and Britain have put pressure on Narendra Modi’s government in India, a major trading partner of Mauritius which has deep cultural ties to the island, to help in their efforts to quell any Mauritius. Modi’s government in India, a major trading partner of Mauritius which has deep cultural ties to the island, to help in their efforts to quell any Mauritius discontent around Diego Garcia and the archipelago more generally. While consecutive British governments have assured Mauritius it will cede the archipelago to the latter once it is “no longer needed for defense,” it should remain clear that this means that it can exist in perpetuity, so long as Britain or the United States need to “defend” themselves thousands of miles away from the borders of their own states.

Even the most left-leaning members of Labour, represented by Jeremy Corbyn, will not do away with the base. Given Corbyn’s imperative to maintain “security,” as evinced with the election pledge of 10,000 more police during the June 2017 snap election, the base will remain. The only Chagossians going to Diego Garcia would be contract workers for the British administration or the United States military. Currently, most of such contract workers on Diego Garcia are paid around two USD per hour. This is what is in store for any Chagossians lucky enough to return to Diego Garcia under a Corbyn government, if they are able to return at all. The solution to the Chagos crisis will not come through the extant corridors of power, but from unleashing the social power of the working class in Mauritius, and elsewhere.

Due to the precepts of uneven and combined development under capitalism – the Marxian theory which expounds upon social, cultural, and economic developments between advanced capitalist countries and those in a state of colonization and semi-colonization – Mauritius has developed in such a way as benefits the stewards of imperialism. An aspect of uneven and combined development in the context of Mauritius has been the historic creation of an economy focused primarily on sugar cultivation. This has changed little in the decades since independence. Once Mauritius became a “middling” African state, it began diversifying its economy through tourism, textiles, and telecommunications. Even so, uneven economic development persists, and it is the working class who must deal with austerity measures when the market is in a downturn, and Chagossians are the worst hit by this. And it is only the working class who can, through militant labor action and revolutionary zeal, overturn not only the effects of uneven and combined development, but capitalism on the island, and in the BIOT.

The legacy of the 1979 general strike is paramount. It proved that the Mauritian working class had the capacity to seize state power and overcome the ethnic-racial division imposed by the imperialists and the comprador-bourgeoisie. The 1999 “riots” over the murder of Joseph Topize – a Creole musician known as Kaya – while in police custody is also instructive. Masses of Creole, as well as Indo-Mauritians, joined in these protests, most of them from the working class. They revolted against the government and tore down the doors to the central police barracks and freed others who had been arrested with Kaya (for smoking marijuana) to save them from the same fate at the hands of the police. It is legacies like these which offer a hint to the solution in regards to Chagos and the Diego Garcia military base.

The working class in Mauritius is significantly more class-conscious than the working classes in the west, particularly in the United States. This affords them the kernel of the ideological basis from which to deal with the material reality of capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism in Mauritius. The working class of Mauritius, and indeed of the United States and Britain as well, must bring their collective social might to bear if they are to bring a resounding end to the BIOT and the military base there. As the US-UK ruling class is divided with the Mauritian ruling class over ownership of Chagos (again, not the base), it is up to the Mauritian workers to take advantage of this division, and directly insert themselves into the struggle for Chagossian sovereignty. The Anglo-American loss of Diego Garcia, and Chagos more generally, would constitute a massive rupture in the world capitalist system, a direct blow to US-UK imperialism, and would have wide ranging affects from the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden, to the Middle East, and South East Asia. Communism doesn’t have a deep history in Mauritius, but the working class knows it is embattled due to the local and foreign forces of capital. The fervor of 1979 must be reignited, for Chagos and Mauritius.

(This is a truncated version of an article originally published in Revolution, no. 14, newspaper of the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth and the CUNY Internationalist Marxist Clubs.)
On 17 September, the Governor of Puerto Rico declared a State of Emergency in anticipation of Hurricane María, and the storm pummeled the island three days later. The devastation was huge: the water, electricity and communications infrastructure was wrecked; houses blown away; flooded bridges and roads; trees downed and crops destroyed; loss of animals, and a vast death-toll. The aftermath was peculiar: after endless hours of hurricane winds bashing and banging doors and windows, time stood suspended in a profound calm. The initial impulse was to reaffirm life through contact with others. “We are alive,” shouted our neighbors, waving from balconies and rooftops. Almost immediately, communities self-organized to clear heavy debris from driveways and roads. Decades of austerity
measures had greatly reduced the personnel and machinery available for emergency relief to municipalities and public companies like the Electric Energy Authority, and most people never saw the road clearing brigades the government boasted about. The only contact with the world outside the neighborhood was through radio, which reported the scale of the disaster, warned that recovery would take a long time, and allowed people to verify their loved ones’ safety.

I travelled to New York soon after the hurricane, where I was startled by the degree of international attention, but even more so by the narrative: My suspicion about the rhetoric surrounding the catastrophe grew stronger when I saw a flyer for a fundraiser to “help the PR refugees.” A refugee is someone who is forced to cross an international border because of persecution, war, or violence. None of this applies to Puerto Ricans. When the government still spoke of a “humanitarian crisis” two months after the event, all the while masking its negligence, I have to insist on the importance of interrupting this manipulation of humanitarian discourse. It cynically exploits human suffering, and hides the real “crisis,” throwing both locals and the diaspora into a panic and stimulating the emptying of rich rural lands. As I leave New York, a sweet, compassionate woman asks: “Are you going back to PR?” “Yes!” I respond with joy, anticipating my return to beautiful Camuy. Tears in her eyes, she replies: “God bless your heart.” That was the moment this report was born.

Like the Three Wise Men

Survivor testimonies of the disaster and its aftermaths are heart wrenching. The family of one cooperative worker, including children and elders, had to swim and take refuge in the forest for five days after their house was swept away by the river. Nobody came to their rescue. Some had to live with the corpse of a family member for days while searching for an official to certify the death. Hundreds of corpses came to the surface after a cemetery flooded in Lares, potentially contaminating streams that feed into San Juan’s water reservoirs. Veterinarians from Quebradillas were unable to assist Guajataca communities because of the stench of rotten animal corpses.

I recorded some of these testimonies while waiting in unending lines at the gas station, the bank, the supermarket, and the bakery, which became spaces to strengthen community bonds and to share experiences. A week into the hurricane, a clear contrast between the official version and what people were experiencing on the ground began to take shape. Why are thousands of tons of food stuck in San Juan’s ports while supermarkets lay bare in the island? How come there is a gas shortage in such small territory? These long lines also offered the great spectacle of the corruption that lay beneath so much suffering.

Early next morning, asleep in my stranded car, I woke to a knock on the window. “Maria, hurry, you need to document this,” I was told, as I watched some policemen arguing with a policeman while demanding that the station distributed the gas it had stashed away. The owner of the station asked us to go home, yelling “there is no gas until Friday.”

I watched some policemen park their car, take containers out of the trunk, and fill them with what, according to my neighbors, is gas to be delivered to the rich so they could sleep with AC. Turns out there was indeed gas at the station; this is the value of life in post-Maria Puerto Rico: gas for the rich so they can run their ACs, no gas for those on life support in the people’s line. In the days that follow, stories that involve police officers diverting supplies and power plants multiply. Today, it is an open secret.

The incident at the gas station took place under a curfew in effect since 20 September: “our citizens are under grave risks, especially at night,” the executive order states, a sentiment many people endorse. 

All photos credit: Maria Heyaca

Mariposa
In the racist, anti-poor fantasy of some, masses of youth from residential projects would come out under the cover of darkness to rob people’s homes, which also explains why public housing projects were electrified so quickly. Yet never once did I witness “insecurity” in the darkness. What I did see was a brazen pilfering of public goods by the state apparatus at the gas station. Whether by design or not, the curfew created perfect conditions for the trafficking of vital supplies.

It is common in PR for elected officials and their executives to favor their constituencies in providing relief, and this is key to understanding the territorial logics of the “humanitarian crisis.” A few days after the hurricane, for instance, a rumor came down from the central highlands: Utuado is destroyed and militarized. Images of the municipality which was declared a zone of major disaster filled mainstream media and social networks alike. “Utuado forgotten by time,” declares Univisión, with the picture of a young lady bathing with spring water by a road. The image of a military truck or a helicopter delivering supplies to residents smiling back at officers in gratitude went in tandem with these apocalyptic prophesies. It was even the cover of the most hegemonic newspaper. The message: the great US Army will save us.

In the words of a renowned activist: “A month after Maria they were all over: businesses, city hall, main avenues. Helicop-
ters landed on the road holding up traffic to deliver food boxes. Supposedly they were working on opening roads. The strange thing is they work with no equipment: they go around but do not carry supplies, tools, machinery or equipment. Road clearing brigades with no equipment? This rather looks like a display of force.”

According to FEMA, there are over fifteen thousand federal employees in PR. More than eighty percent of them work for the Department of Defense, and four thousand are military personnel. This is in addition to the National Guard, which responds to the Governor. There may be more soldiers per capita in PR today than in Iraq after the US invasion. A substantial number of these military personnel are in Utuado. Some people think it’s a plot to damage the mayor’s reputation: “He is a PPD in a PNP town. His office is controlled by the military. They got rid of him. People are ok with the arrival of the military. Lots of vets live here.” Irizarry Salvá is the first PPD mayor in twenty years, and right before Maria he announced his Facebook account had been hacked.

While the response to the crisis in Utuado was heavy militarization, some communities on the other hand have not received any military help whatsoever. José Felipe Gonzalez and her partner Felisa Collazo are recognized scholars of Antillean birds. He coordinates the arrival of supplies to Barrio Arenas, where they live. The river flooded during the storm and the bridge that connects Arenas to the main road collapsed. The isolated residents organized and survived without external helps and rebuilt the bridge. José smiles while saying: “The military are like the Three Wise Men. They come at night and you don’t see them. The difference is they do not leave gifts.”

A Military Hospital In a Public University?

“They are going to open a military hospital at the university,” a student tells me. A few days later, someone approached three people in medical attire to ask what was going on at the university. The “nurse” didn’t respond and eventually reported the incident to the university authorities, who began trying to identify the person a few hours later. Allowing the military on campus is a massive threat to the Utuado students movement, which was the great surprise of the last UPR strike. The movement consolidated so quickly and so well that three of its leaders were penalized. There were also attempts to link the students to a mysterious burning of some documents, which might have paved the way for an FBI intervention, and inviting the military on campus obviously jeopardized the students’ movement. William
dizes the movement’s capacity to rebuild and reorganize.

The Provost of the university has said that the hospital will be managed by a US medical association, and will offer free services to people in need and strengthen the university’s role in the community. Yet there is little transparency or clarity about the relationship between the medical teams and the US military. Team Rubicon, for instance, which recently visited communities in Utuado, was primarily composed of army veterans. All of them were white men who had no working knowledge of Spanish, and they avoided answering the questions of local volunteers and physicians.

In such murky contexts, it is important to recall that army officials have faced accusations of sexual violence in several countries, and incidents of sexual harassment involving officers deployed in PR only confirms this trend. Militarization also often increases trafficking, an alarming thought in light of the high levels of unemployment amongst young women. Considering that the island has historically been a focal point of unethical medical experiments—such as the mass sterilization of rural women in the 1950s—it is important to continue to be skeptical about the use and abuse of medical authority and army coercion in PR today.

Humanitarian Crisis or Disaster

Colonialism?

Shrewd North Americans see clearly that the hurricane, which ruined the entire country, accelerates the economic penetration of the United States into Puerto Rico.

Pedro Albizu Campos, February 1930

The plan is to empty the country of working class (poor) people and fill it with tourists/investors, clear the way to mining in the mountains, keep filling the coasts with hotels and restaurants that no normal local will be able to pay.

Shaisa Soto Ruiz, young mother, peasant, and Utuado resident, November 2017

While mopping the floor with rainwater, I hear the radio announce: “Hillary Clinton urges Trump to send the Army to PR.” “We are finished,” I thought. On 24 September, Hillary Clinton tweeted: “Pres Trump, Sec Mattis, and DOD should send the Navy, including the USNS Comfort to PR,” echoing a Change.org petition started by Rick Trilsch, a Clinton supporter and Vice President of Finance and Administration for Western Resource Advocates, which is portrayed on its own webpage as “advocating for the West’s transition to clean energy”—in the exact same terms the Democratic Party has been pushing in Latin America. When the Democratic Party—especially Hillary Clinton—militarizes Latin America, the motivation is always to loot our common resources. This time, the excuse is changing the energy matrix: replacing fossil fuels (which the economy is almost exclusively dependent on currently) with renewable energy.

On 27 September, representatives Gutierrez and Crowley sent a letter to the Secretary of Defense requesting a meeting about the military’s role in PR. In the letter, they mention “the heroic support” of the army in Haiti and New Orleans, but entirely ignore the accusations against the Clintons by Haitian activists, who insist that the Clintons enriched themselves with the reconstruction funds. The majority of the $9.04 billion USD international funding went to the UN and private contractors; only 0.6 percent went to local organizations. After Katrina, similarly, black low-income communities were displaced and gentrified, and Brad Pitt today builds profitable eco-friendly housing in the Lower Ninth Ward that the people who originally lived there can no longer afford.

Honduras, however, is perhaps the most illustrative example of what could be coming to PR. After the coup against Zelaya (which was sponsored by Hillary Clinton’s State Department), areas rich in natural resources were militarized and several licenses to exploit rivers were granted. (Water is one Utuado’s most precious...
These licenses were approved in record time, and without carrying out any environmental impact assessments.

A recent administrative order in PR, meanwhile, waives the environmental impact assessment for the “enlargement, rebuilding, and rehabilitation” of coastal areas at risk from floods. To Humfredo Marcano, a biologist working for the US Forest Service, “the idea of “disaster” creates the perfect conditions for loosening permits for the construction industry.” This idea of “enlargement” creates a grey zone and has the environmental movement concerned. “What constitutes an “enlargement”? Who monitors whether some construction work is an “enlargement” or not?” Marcano continues, “A hotel company could expand its facilities alleging “enlargement” and not giving environmental activists or the community enough time to react.”

Recent official statistics suggest a sharp population contraction. The “exodus” started with the catastrophic images which the US press reproduced, as residents brought older or sick relatives to the US. This created the material for the first headlines in the local, hegemonic media stimulating the wave. Thousands then left in “free” flights. Material and employment loss, and the closing of schools have also encouraged the “exodus.” According to the people who took refuge in local schools, FEMA is trying to displace them to the US, claiming there are no spaces left for temporary housing in hotels.

Maria did not cause this massive migration; it accelerated it. The island has been losing population for decades. The roots of the “exodus” go back to decades of colonial looting and local corruption. What is alarming, however, is that the government seems willing to take advantage of the present moment to push for the Board’s agenda, which could include the privatization of the Electric Energy Authority. The case of the schools reveals some of the hidden ways in which this “humanitarian crisis” has played out. Before Maria, Secretary of Education Keleher made it clear that she would please the Fiscal Control Board with the privatization or closing of schools, which became difficult in face of a solid popular resistance. The hurricane is a wonderful excuse to comply with the Board. Many schools are still closed, while others function as refuges. Some families organized to occupy schools and demand their opening. Others migrated so their children don’t lose the school term. “The decline in the number of enrolled students is noticeable,” comments Juan Jiménez, Utuado teacher. Since Maria, more than 6,000 children left PR.

Undoubtedly, the “exodus” promises good deals for the hotel industry and extractive companies, which could benefit from such an emptying of the territory by buying land at bargain prices. In addition to water, Utuado is rich in minerals and has been one of the most important municipalities in the fight against open-pit mining. Recently, the Rebuild Puerto Rico economic summit took place in the luxurious Condado Vanderbilt. Roughly 200 people attended, including businessmen, the FEMA Director, and the PR Governor, whose speech was particularly intriguing: “We know you have good connections in Washington. Help us get the appropriate funding.” Time will tell if those resources will be channeled towards people or towards the companies that seek to get rid of them.

Going back to Honduras, hundreds of women with children from the Black-Indigenous Garífunas communities migrated to the US in 2013. Like Puerto Ricans today, these women were labeled “refugees,” and the US media called it a “humanitarian crisis.” Since this “exodus” began, it has grown increasingly evident that this Garífuna land is being targeted for “development” by...
Canadian companies, who want to turn their ancestral territory into hotels and other profitable tourism enterprises—plans which don’t, as Shaisa’s wise words anticipate, include the locals.

I was about to send this article to my editor when my cell phone buzzes with a text message: The Clinton Foundation is coming to Puerto Rico.

La Granja Is Still Here, The Fight Continues

La Granja community in Utuado owes its name to a farm once owned by the UPR, which conceded the land to the government. That’s how the community was born. Today roughly 270 people live in La Granja, scattered between 40 families. According to Yajaira Pagán, granddaughter of Juan Cruz Rivera, the first Utuado shoemaker: “families used to be larger. Fathers, sons, grandfathers, uncles, all lived together. Back then, farm labor was the primary source of income. Farm workers cultivated coffee, oranges, grapefruit, lemon plantains, and bananas in local farms, in addition to cultivating their own crops. This changed around 1995, with the epidemic of people migrating because they could not get work, but as our guide Juan remarked, agriculture in Utuado held on strong because of the people of La Granja.

These days many people supplement their income with construction and domestic work, but work is hard to find and many young people are migrating. Residents are mostly adult, and often depend on help from the government. “We changed agriculture for food stamps and we came out losing?” I ask Yajaira. “Yes that’s exactly it.”

When she was young, Yajaira escaped to play in a small creek, now buried under a cement road built 25 years ago. That image that so horrified the press, of Utuadans washing in the river, is affectionately remembered by families of La Granja. Water is one of La Granja’s defining characteristics. “We got all we need,” states Juan. It belongs to the community “because it comes from nature. We would not agree to its privatization.” In addition to water, the mountain is rich in bronze, limestone, and calcic rock.

Maria hit hard. Nilda Torres River’s testimony is harrowing. The creek came in through the back and out the front door. Her house is now covered with mold and has been declared inhabitable. But Nilda and her husband, who sleeps in a mattress propped on top of chairs, have no place to go. There is no electricity nor any water, and she was forced to send her grandson to the US. “My grandson, my life, was taken from me, this is not living!” she screams in desperation. Nilda and her husband take sedatives in order to sleep at night, “in case a landslide buries us, we’ll die without feeling
a thing.” Nilda applied for disaster relief from FEMA. Her application was rejected because she has insurance. But the insurance people are nowhere to be found. Some years ago, some of La Granja houses were placed in “red zone,” meaning they were susceptible to landslides. The municipality bought most of these houses and moved residents to the town of Quitín. Nilda tried to sell her house but the municipality refused.

My journey through La Granja was made possible thanks to the Mutual Help Centre of Utuado (CAM-U), which is part of a network of self-organized community-based initiatives, with no political affiliation. They are doing incredible work in community support and reconstruction in various municipalities across the country. Some of their activities have included community soup kitchens, solidarity brigades in different farms, community health clinics, theatre shows for children, and the distribution of vital items such as solar lamps, mosquito nets, and tarps.

Jurrián Alabrrán Rodriguez, an enthusiastic and civic-minded young woman, resident of La Granja, and employee at the UPR, served as the liaison between La Granja community center and the CAM-U. They co-organized two workshops in the center. The first distributed water filters and 3000 water purifying tablets. The second offered legal assistance by the director of an Inter-American University free clinic, in which the seamy underbelly of FEMA’s record came to light. Mayra, the director of the center, is full of dreams. This center is one of the hundreds of collective spaces that Maria helped to strengthen. “When I lower my arms, I find angels,” she shares, thinking about the dedicated work the CAM-U is doing. “The hurricane came to help us grow spiritually. While we have everything, we are ungrateful. It has taught us to share and it has brought unity, which is the most important thing,” says resident Vivian, who lost everything, with a smile. Her husband William, is an artisan and a farmer: “agriculture’s his life. He dreams of his machete.”

How to help

1. Avoid the expressions “refugee” and “humanitarian crisis.” Speak instead of a possible plan to displace the population
2. Do not focus your attention on the city: the highlands are threatened by green capitalism
3. Spread word about the reconstruction work carried out by community-based organizations that are not affiliated to political parties, NGOs, or foundations.
4. Donate water filters, solar lamps, mosquito nets, tarp, organic seeds, and farm tools. You can contact us in the AELLA office at the Graduate Center or send us an email at popolvuhitinerante@gmail.com
5. Help us stop the Clinton foundation from disembarking in Puerto Rico. They have their offices in Harlem
6. Organize a research group and survey Puerto Ricans migrating to the US. Try to determine which town they came from and whether they left voluntarily or were somehow persuaded. Contact us with the results to share vital information with grassroots activists: every testimony makes a difference
7. Demand the de-militarization of the highlands by organizing a protest or contacting your local representative
8. Speak out against Trump’s racism, but do not believe in the Democrats’ green energy discourse. It is a mask to sack our common goods

When political leaders use the language of doctors, you know they are planning something barbarous. ‘Cancers’ must be eradicated, not tamed; ‘viruses’ can only be met with ‘harsh cures’; and ‘epidemics’ must be contained before they can spread. Read any newspaper after October 1917 and you will see the proliferation of ailments threatening the ‘body politic.’ ‘Bolshevism,’ of course, but also seemingly incurable nuisances like hot-tempered suffragists, unruly union leaders, and – perhaps worst of all – those people who refused to accept the science of racial hierarchy.

The menaces were all linked, as Tom Buchanan conveys in The Great Gatsby. “Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions and next they’ll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white.” However, there was one looming source of fear that hung over the otherwise comfortable lives of the Tom Buchanans and their friends in Albany or Washington: the chaotic and explosive growth of cities. How could order be imposed on such a swelling morass of filth, toil and misery? What would stop the “vicious, semi-criminal” classes (to use Charles Booth’s term) from invading the walled gardens?

Moral Depravity, Discontent and Socialism
The Politics of the Urban Revolution

Harry Blain

A boy in a glass factory, ca. 1890. (Jacob A. Riis, Museum of the City of New York)
and respectable streets? For how long could Men of Good Breeding live alongside disease, ragged immigrants and knife-fights in seedy alleys? All of this represented “an evil which is gnawing at the vitals of the country”, in the words of Henry Morgenthau at the first National Conference on City Planning (1909). “An evil that breeds physical disease, moral depravity, discontent, and socialism” – which “must be cured and eradicated or else our great body politic will be weakened.”

Those who took up Morgenthau’s challenge permanently transformed the United States. Some left a legacy of methodical and deliberate brutality far beyond anything even the most devious gang of criminals could hope to accomplish. Others turned cities into laboratories for the great social programs of the 20th Century. Amid these revolutions, most people ate, talked, fought, got drunk, danced, sang and worked. Their music, poetry and literature has long outlasted buildings, roads and housing developments.

We inherit these urban revolutions. Can we make new ones?

A Certain History

Well before the events of October 1917, great cities were scary. Jacob Riis’ descriptions of New York in 1890 offered a warning:

Where Mulberry Street crooks like an elbow within hail of the old depravity of the Five Points, is “the Bend,” foul core of New York’s slums... Around “the Bend” cluster the bulk of the tenements that are stamped as altogether bad, even by the optimists of the Health Department. Incessant raids cannot keep down the crowds that make them their home. In the scores of back alleys, of stable lanes and hidden byways, of which the rent collector alone can keep track, they share such shelter as the ramshackle structures afford with every kind of abomination rifled from the dumps and ash-barrels of the city. Here, too, shunning the light, skulks the unclean beast of dishonest idleness. “The Bend” is the home of the tramp as well as the rag-picker.

Max Weber described Chicago in equally vivid detail fourteen years later, likening what was then the world’s fifth-largest city to “a human being with its skin peeled off and whose intestines are seen at work.” Dickens had already looked deep into 19th Century London’s “intestines,” and shown them to be overflowing with lawless hordes of street-children, hopeless paupers, and scheming merchants. The idea of this in the vast country of Thomas Jefferson – who saw nothing but disaster in “the mobs of great cities” – was terrifying.
Everyone knew that poverty existed. In a way, they knew it better than we do, avoiding our sanitizing language of “relative deprivation” or “socioeconomic disadvantage” and instead going for squalor, penury, filth, and misery. You couldn’t hide from this in cities. And, if you couldn’t see it, you would probably smell it, as Londoners learned during the Great Stink of 1858 – which was so bad that Parliament nearly had to be moved to Oxford and “curtains were soaked in chloride of lime to suppress the ‘noxious stench.’” And thus was Progress made: London built decent sewers, Chicago conquered typhoid, New York built a subway.

And then, in 1917, one of the great cities of “civilization” – home to the worldly socialites and princes of War and Peace – exploded. St. Petersburg (stupidly renamed ‘Petrograd’ so it didn’t sound too German) was full of raucous workers: striking, threatening and organizing. Trotsky listed them: “Laundry workers, dyers, coopers, trade and industrial clerks, structural workers, bronze workers, unskilled workers, shoemakers, paper-box makers, sausage makers, furniture workers.” Once they seized power in Russia, would others follow? The great reformers of the 20th Century – high-minded, sober, intelligent, and elitist – felt they could. British Prime Minister David Lloyd George even feared “there would be a soviet in Lon-
don” if a foolish “military enterprise” was ever launched against the Bolsheviks.

The cities had to be tamed. There was, of course, the option of brute force: beat up striking workers, ban picketing, sweep up suspected ‘reds.’ This was certainly the preferred choice of the more panicked and less intelligent decision-makers, such as President Wilson’s notorious Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer. His belief, as he told Congress in June 1919 – that radicals could “rise up and destroy the government at one fell swoop” – led to some of the most reckless and violent political repression in the modern United States (the ‘Palmer Raids’), all under a supposedly ‘progressive’ administration. Others were smarter. In New York, especially, a strange alliance of machine politicians, labor activists, and urban visionaries revolutionized the city, the state and, eventually, the country.

It all started with flames. Frances Perkins, who was then the Executive Secretary of the New York City Consumers League, remembered it well. On March 25, 1911, she – along with hundreds of other New Yorkers – watched in horror as dozens of young women, many still teenagers, were asphyxiated. 146 died in total. The Triangle Shirtwaist disaster embodied everything wrong with urban life and work: crowded and poorly managed factories, miserable labor conditions, and no semblance of health or safety protections. This was the reality of modern New York, and the Factory Investigating Commission, established three months after the fire, was damning. It was unprecedented in its scope, holding 59 public hearings and taking testimony from 472 witnesses, including Perkins. 3,385 workplaces were investigated in all key industries. The Commission found “insidious,” “numerous” and “deadly” hazards – particularly in the chemical industry, where workers were regularly exposed to “lead, arsenic, phosphorus, mercury, injurious gasses, irritating dusts, high temperatures, hot and corrosive liquids, and dangerous explosives.” “Health is the principal asset of the working man and working woman,” the Commission wrote in its final report, recommending that the government “is bound to do everything in its power to preserve the health of the workers.” The Commission’s report led to several crucial pieces of state and local legislation, and helped inspire the creation of the federal Department of Labor in 1913. Perkins, however, was not fin-
ished. In 1918 – the first year that women could vote in New York State elections – she mobilized this new electoral force behind Al Smith, a Tammany Hall city politician who spent his teens working in the Fulton Fish Market to support his widowed mother. Smith, who had co-chaired the Factory Commission, went on to become one of the state's greatest governors. Perkins, for her part, became FDR's Labor Secretary, and the first woman to hold a cabinet position in the United States federal government. She traced Roosevelt's social programs to an earlier date: the day she saw the black smoke of the Shirtwaist Factory rise above Washington Square – March 25, 1911, "the day the New Deal was born."

Neither Perkins nor Smith were die-hard socialists. Smith, in fact, went on to lead an odd and speculative project you may have heard of called the Empire State Building, and became mixed up with virulently anti-New Deal financiers. But the initial goal of the two New Yorkers, one from the slums under the Brooklyn Bridge, the other a graduate of Columbia, was simple: make urban life more tolerable. With this, they eventually inspired the holder of the most powerful office in the country, who used their ideas to change it permanently.

"You can’t make an omelet without breaking some eggs"

While this was happening, another force was rising in cities that few politicians could grasp: the automobile. In the 1920s, following the release of the new, relatively affordable Ford Model T, the number of registered drivers trebled across the United States, reaching around 23 million people. This did not just affect Detroit, where these new symbols of middle-class triumph were made. It transformed every single city. This is one of the few revolutions that we can always see: the plodding chains of cars permanently lining the Hudson River, the dual-carriageways slicing through the middle of the Bronx, the snaking parkways on Long Island, or the endless suburbs sprawling out (most obviously) from Atlanta, Las Vegas or Houston. How did all of this happen?

Again, New York was a model, thanks almost exclusively to the work of Robert Moses, who controlled various public offices in the city and the state for over forty years. His mix of arrogance, imagination and ruthless is conveyed beautifully in Robert A. Caro’s gigantic book, The Power Broker (1974), which invites the reader to gauge some of Moses’s influence simply by looking at a map:

Standing out from the map’s delicate tracery of gridirons representing streets are heavy lines girdling the city or slashing across its expanses. These lines denote the major roads on which automobiles and trucks move, roads whose very location, moreover, does as much as any single factor to determined where and how a city’s people live and work. With a single exception, the East River Drive, Robert Moses built every one of those roads. He built the Major Deegan Expressway, the Van Wyck Expressway, the Sheridan Expressway and the Bruckner Expressway. He built the Gowanus Expressway, the Prospect Expressway, the Whitney Expressway, the Clearview Expressway and the Throgs Neck Expressway. He built the Cross-Bronx Expressway, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, the Nassau Expressway, the Staten Island Expressway, and the Long Island Expressway. He built the Harlem River Drive and the West Side Expressway.

When Robert Moses was laying down parkways on Long Island, his only immediate barriers were the estates of billionaires and small fishing communities. However, when he turned to the streets of the city – some of the densest in the world – the task was radically different.

But Moses was confident. He was, after all, an Oxford and Yale man of the highest pedigree, "the best bill drafter in Albany," a tall, imposing, eloquent political communicator. His intellect and work ethic describes impact of the construction on the Bronx Expressway in All That is Solid Melts Into Air (1982):

For ten years, through the late 1950s and early 1960s, the center of the Bronx was pounded and blasted and smashed. My friends and I would stand on the parapet of the Grand Concourse, where 174th...
Street had been, and survey the work’s progress – the immense steam shovels and bulldozers and timber and steel beams, the hundreds of workers in their variously colored hard hats, the giant cranes reaching far above the Bronx’s tallest roofs, the dynamite blasts and tremors, the wild, jagged crags of rock newly torn, the vistas of devastation stretching for miles to the east and west as far as the eye could see – and marvel to see our ordinary nice neighborhood transformed into sublime, spectacular ruins.

It’s hard to know exactly how many people were displaced by this single project in one New York borough, or how many neighborhoods were permanently erased. Moses and many others argued that the cost was worth it, for here was our great chance to build the teeming and flowing motor metropolis of the 20th Century, and why should a few thousand people be allowed to stop it? These people certainly couldn’t make their case in the rational, cost-benefit language that dominated the thinking of figures like Moses. It’s impossible to quantify the ‘value’ of an urban neighborhood, despite the repeated attempts of economists and planners to improve their models and metrics. For Berman’s Bronx neighborhood, and countless others in New York and across the United States, this would prove fatal. And their executioners were, so often, “progressives.”

The tools were not always roads. ‘Slum clearance’ programs became just as critical in grand city-taming visions. Ostensibly benign and public-spirited, they helped to establish the racial and economic segregation that still defines so much of the urban landscape in North America. “San Francisco and most northern cities now are engaging in something called urban renewal”, James Baldwin said in 1963. He was blunt about the subtext: “Moving Negroes out. It means Negro removal – that is what it means. And the federal government is an accomplice to this fact.”

I have no idea what conditions were really like in the supposedly ‘blighted’ neighborhoods that were razed or cut up by highways. I have no idea what would have happened if they survived. Maybe it was all worth it. Moses was probably right to say that nothing would ever get built if we let every community action group wield veto power. “If the ends don’t justify the means, what does?” Moses famously asked. “You can’t make an omelet without breaking some eggs.”

But then we have to ask: how many houses, street corners, shops and stoops are we willing to see disappear forever? A few thousand? A million? And for how many roads? Moses wanted to build three expressways across lower- and mid-Manhattan and Harlem. Such a scheme is utterly unthinkable today, which shows some shift in our moral and political compass, one that thinks a bit more about the “eggs” and less romantically about the “omelet.” As we look back today, the hero in New York’s story is Moses’s adversary, Jane Jacobs. Her view was clear and simple: “The urban planners are ravaging our cities.” All the nuisances that planners loathed were the veins of the city. Rip them out, and the city would die.

The death is very visible, and
related deaths nationwide, which make terrorism look like a joke. It can be seen in decaying buses and subways and on abandoned railroad tracks. In the 20th Century, the car won and the city lost. Can we salvage anything from these ruins?

In New York, at least, some attempt can be made. Visit Moses’s Orchard Beach – complete with high-decibel Puerto Rican music blaring through Long Island Sound – on an August afternoon. Or one of the 225 playgrounds he built in just one decade, or one of his public pools that swell with overexcited children in the summer. They are hardly the genteel ‘leisure’ spots he envisaged – invariably crowded and loud, maybe not to the taste of a hard-headed Oxford man. They could only be created through massive physical transformations, but they lay something down and left it to people – all people – to figure out how to use it. This is the great promise that planning offered – and perhaps still can.

**Inner City Blues**

By the 1960s, Moses’s outlook had been replicated in almost every city across the United States. Roads, cars, highways, housing projects, parks, all of them could bring the promise and the brutality of New York’s Great Leap Forward. How did people respond?

Some wrote the soundtracks of the era, imbuing their music with its dominant themes. Motown— the voice and spirit of Detroit—led the way. When Marvin Gaye released What's Going On in 1971, the Motown era already included the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, the Watts riots, white supremacist terrorism in Birmingham, rent strikes in Harlem, the March on the Pentagon in Washington. Gaye’s album has a special way of capturing these moments.

“Bills pile up sky high, send that boy off to die.”

“Crime is increasing, trigger-happy policing.”

“Panic is spreading, God knows where we’re heading.”

“What about this overcrowded land? How much more abuse from man can she stand?”

“Are things really getting better like the newspapers say?”

“Mother, mother there’s far too many of you crying. Brother, brother there’s far too many of you dying.”

That a man who was mainly known for singing about sex could produce this poetry says something about both the man and his time.

Across the country, it was true that there was no such thing as ‘keeping out of politics’ (to paraphrase Orwell). It was even truer in its great cities, where uncertainty and turmoil were inescapable. Of course, the art and the picture were never the same. Take the differing portraits of Harlem alone: the films and songs Hell Up in Harlem (1974) and Across 110th Street (1972) were filled with references to “pimps”, “pushers” and “junkies.” “You don’t know what you’ll do until you’re put under pressure, across 110th Street is a hell of a tester,” Bobby Womack sang. “The family on the other side of town would catch hell without a ghetto around.” “In every city you find the same thing going down – Harlem is the capital of every ghetto town.” “I’m not saying what I did was alright, trying to break out of the ghetto was a day to day fight.”

Then there was Bill Withers’ Harlem (1971), which struck a lighter tone:

“Summer night in Harlem, man it’s really hot!”

“Well it’s too hot to sleep and too hot to eat, I don’t care if I die or not!”

“Winter night in Harlem, radiator won’t get hot – and that mean ole landlord, he don’t care if I freeze to death or not!”

“Saturday night in Harlem, Ahh every thing’s alright. You can really swing and shake your pretty thing, the parties are out of sight.”

Here was the variety of the modern city: at once exploitative, fun, fast, slow, dangerous, curious. The “inner city blues”, as Marvin Gaye titled one of his greatest songs, encompassed all of it.

“Do things gradually, bring more tragedy”

“My people are rising”, Nina Simone wrote in the song Why? after King’s murder in 1968. “What’s gon-na happen in all of our cities?” That question is still open. Simone’s observation – “do things gradually, bring more tragedy” – has, in some ways, been borne out. The old Jim Crow was dismantled, but our cities are still segregated, and the north is no better than the south. In fact, according to our most recent census, eight of the top ten most segregated cities in the United States are above the Mason-Dixon Line. In this sense, the reflections of Elizabeth, from James Baldwin’s Go Tell It on the Mountain weren’t far from the truth: “There was not, after all, a great difference between the world of the North and that of the South which she had fled; there was only this difference: the North promised more. And this similarity: what it promised did not give, and what it gave, at length and grudgingly on one hand, it took back with the other.”

“The difference is in the way they castrate you,” was how the great Harlem writer put it himself. “But the castration itself is the American fact.” There is still “trigger-happy policing” and bills are still piling up sky-high. Our cities are still scarred by Robert Moses monstrosities. Neighborhoods killed by highways are never coming back. We are, however, left with some scraps of hope. The public spaces carved out by planners can be enjoyed and expanded; the great songs can keep enriching our culture and understanding. By surveying the wreckage of earlier urban revolutions we might, with some luck, fumble our way towards new, more human ones.
Neoliberalizing Childhood and Education
WeWork’s “Entrepreneurial” Schools

Hillary Donnell

The co-working startup WeWork announced that it is opening a school called WeGrow in November 2017. WeWork’s cofounder Rebekah Neumann describes the project as “a new conscious entrepreneurial school committed to unleashing every child’s superpowers.” The pilot WeGrow academy, which will be housed at the startup’s headquarters in Chelsea, is slated to open its doors in the fall of 2018. The private elementary school will initially offer preschool through third grade, but the company plans to add grade levels over time and eventually open schools at each of its stateside and overseas locations.

Considering WeWork’s recent history of rapid expansion, and the current education innovation fad amongst budding billionaires, this announcement comes as no surprise. Rebekah and Adam Neumann, WeWork’s co-founders, have been frenetically growing the brand, which was recently (over)valued at $20 billion, to include much more than just a place to rent a desk and hold meetings. Recently they snapped up the Flatiron School, a New York based coding boot-camp, and opened WeRise, a gym cum wellness facility. In October, Neumann partnered with Airbnb to allow itinerant freelancers to rent desk space in WeWork facilities through the Airbnb app. This kind of growth is emblematic of burgeoning start-ups that are trying to follow in the footsteps of Facebook and Google, and the corporate compulsion to absorb and assimilate activity unrelated to work seems insatiable. Phenomena like the Google campus, and Facebook’s forthcoming “village” in Menlo Park supposedly increase productivity by combining convenience, futuristic design (the WeGrow space will be designed by superstar Danish architect Bjarke Ingels) and stock-option padded salaries. With a beer tap, laundry services and a full-fledged school within striking distance of the copy machine, workers presumably have fewer and fewer reasons to leave the office, all while enjoying the added benefit of feeling “in community.”

This then is where hyper-capitalism meets an odd historical bedfellow. In 1820, Charles Fourier was envisioning the phalanstère: a combined work and living space where a myriad of community needs would be met in one building. It would be, as Marcuse put it, a sort of Eden where “work would be transformed into pleasure.” Fourier decried industrializing labor practices and educational systems as profoundly alienating, and saw the standardiza-
tation resulting from industrialization as deadening to the spirit of children and adults alike. Fourier believed that allowing people to pursue personal interests (even those deemed taboo by capitalist society, such as homosexuality) would be liberating and encourage free self-development, closing the gap between leisure and work. Before the start of the Civil War, more than 30 of these communities functioned in the United States.

In the vein of Fourier, Adam Neumann is quick to blame the standardized education system for “squashing the entrepreneurial and creative spirit that’s intrinsic to all children.” An obvious difference between them, of course, is that Fourier saw capitalism as an immiserating force rather than one that fueled creativity. At the core of his model, Fourier required residents of the phalanstère to embody the socialist ethos, rather than the “entrepreneurial spirit” extolled by WeWork.

Adam Neumann, who is Israeli, has said he would like to see WeWork evolve into a “capitalist kibbutz” where ostensibly the profit motive and communitarian ethic can coexist, which raises the perennial question about whether self-interest is compatible with social cohesion. We might also ask whether such amenities as the infamous WeWork “kegerators,” refrigerators filled with free booze, actually promote pro-social behavior on the job or just help employees forget that they’ve been working on the same proposal for 12 hours. We should also be asking ourselves what the WeWork community/schooling model represents for those of us interested in encouraging revolutionary educational practice in public schools and universities. Is this project rel-
Like any proposal with billions of dollars of presumed value, this project likely appears far more innovative than it actually is, and the sheer unoriginality of the WeWork educational initiative is worth highlighting. The Neumanns’ plan to focus learning around “meaningful local cultures and environments so [learning] can be hands-on and experiential” evokes a core tenet of progressive educational practice. As long ago as 1938, John Dewey insisted on experiential learning, arguing that the role of the educator is to ground a learner’s encounter with the unfamiliar in a context that mimics everyday experiences so the learning will “stick” beyond that singular experience, thereby carrying over as usable knowledge. In the most extreme variant of exploratory education, the free school, children are allowed to guide their own learning.

WeGrow is a not free school, and its model is heavily dependent on adult intervention, both to set up learning experiences and to then frame such learning as being marketable. As a Bloomberg article from November states, “The kids have already gotten lessons from the Neumanns’ employees in creating a brand and using effective sales techniques, and from Adam Neumann on supply and demand.” On the one hand, this educational model will certainly make students themselves more attractive candidates on the job market, thereby attracting parents seeking alternatives to public schools. On the other hand, it is apparent that pedagogical buzzwords like freedom, exploration and experiential learning are merely an attractive veneer for the unsavory premise that that children’s passions should be pursued only insofar as they are marketable. Rebekah Neumann recently said, “there’s no reason why children in elementary schools can’t be launching their own businesses.” I suspect progressive educators and discerning skeptics could come up with quite a few.

The Neumanns are hurrying to make their mark on what has proven to be an irresistible venture for people who have more money than they know what to do with. Consider The Primary School, Mark Zuckerberg’s East Palo Alto initiative, which promotes physical health for low-income students, or the AltSchool, ex-Google exec Mark Ventilla’s personalized learning tech-driven network. Even Donald Trump has some dim awareness that education reform is buzzworthy right now. Joining a chorus that includes the last three Commanders in Chief, as well as countless executives and investors who justify their support for neoliberal education reform policy (i.e. charters, vouchers or outright privatization) on the premise that these reforms allow for innovation, Trump addressed a joint session of Congress with the oft recycled adage: “education is the civil rights issue of our time.” He’s not wrong. But it is taken for granted both that any innovation coming from incubators like WeWork is good when it is applied to any sector, and that this innovation will trickle its way into public schools. Neither of these premises is solid, and both require hearty challenges.

As we dedicate ourselves to the campaign for a fair wage and benefits that reflect the immense labor and emotional demands of teaching at the graduate level, we should also pay close attention to the ways in which education sits squarely in the crosshairs of insidious neoliberalization at the primary and secondary levels as well. Initiatives like WeGrow and other boutique schools may seem like a distraction from the battle to keep public schools open and thriving, but if we allow the media to continue touting the glitzy and illusory achievements of entrepreneurial educational ventures, we are losing the ideological battle as much as the material one.

If you have children yourself, this embattled terrain is all the more familiar and personal. Even those of us without kids can attest to knowing someone who is grappling with the question of where their children will attend school. Does our commitment to public education extend to entrusting our children and their future to them? Sources say WeGrow is already overenrolled for next fall, and the admissions applications continue to pour in. WeWork’s project and similar school experiments are increasingly siphoning off money, resources and the students themselves from our public schools. The best we can do as educators is to encourage everyone to put faith, time, energy, and most importantly, our kids, into the public school system.
On 3 March, eighty CUNY students, faculty and staff members, came together with immigrant rights activists and labor organizers for a conference in defense of immigrants. Attendees participated in intensive discussion and organizing, and the conference included a panel aimed at creating the framework for a university-wide rapid response network against the threat of deportations.

The conference opened with reports on two recent cases of repression against immigrants. The first exemplifies the urgency of the conference: the detention of Aboubacar Dembele, a prospective Bronx Community College student who was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents on 8 February. Dembele’s attorney, Monica Dula of the Legal Aid Society, told the conference that plainclothes ICE police told Dembele, who has been in the U.S. since the age of three, they were detaining him because his DACA renewal was rejected after the program was rescinded by Trump. Conference participants made plans to attend Dembele’s bond hearing as well as his court appearance on 15 April. The second case was that of Juan Esteban Barreto, who was recently detained by the ICE in collusion with the NYPD.

Greetings from activists at Latin America’s largest public university were read to the conference in Spanish and in English translation. The message, from the Internationalist Committee at the National University of Mexico (UNAM), connected the defense of immigrants on both sides of the border to the fight against capitalist repression, as in the case of the 43 “disappeared” students from the Ayotzinapa rural teachers’ college. (Editor’s note: the full message has been reprinted in this issue of the Advocate)

The first conference panel was entitled “DACA and TPS: Where Do We Go From Here?” Among the speakers were Janet Calvo and Matías González, respectively a professor and student at CUNY Law. Their presentations provided detailed information on the present legal situation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) as well as legal cases in a number of states related to DACA. Kaitlan Russell of the Hunter College Committee to Defend Immigrants and Muslims spoke on DACA as well as the revocation of Temporary Protected Status for Haitians and Salvadorans. She warned against any kind of reliance on the Democrats, who, under Obama, deported a record number of immigrants and under de Blasio have permitted collusion between the NYPD and ICE.

The next panel was “Opposing Islamophobia and the ‘Muslim Ban.’” It featured Naz Ahmad, staff attorney from CUNY CLEAR, Debbie Almontaser of the College of Staten Island and Muslim Community Network, and Chaumtoli Huq of Borough of Manhattan Community College and Law@theMargins. Speakers traced the three versions of the Trump “Muslim bans,” noting that these built on a history of anti-Muslim measures long predating the current administration. Panelists also spoke on the revelations of NYPD’s spying on Muslim students at several CUNY campuses, as well as other topics. Speakers from the floor noted that when CUNY student Saira Raifee was stranded by the ban in February 2017,
protests by students and unionists highlighted her case, helping facilitate her return; and also underlined the significant presence of workers from a number of majority-Muslim countries in several sectors of the NYC working class.

The third panel was “Immigrant Workers’ Struggles: Lessons For And At CUNY.” It featured Mahoma López of the Laundry Workers Center, and well as three activists from Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas (Class Struggle International Workers). The panelists spoke powerfully about their experiences in the restaurant, garment, taxi and domestic-worker sectors, and their activity in organizing campaigns at the Hot and Crusty bakery, B&H Photo, Liberato Restaurant, and in Ayotzinapa solidarity. Particular emphasis was given to connecting immigrant rights struggles to a working-class strategy for uprooting women’s oppression, which, as one of the TIC speakers stressed, “falls with triple force on immigrant working women.”

During the discussion, conference participants emphasized the need for CUNY activists to “break with ivory-tower approaches” and connect up with the living struggles of the multinational, largely immigrant working class that makes NYC run.

The final panel was called “Building a CUNY-Wide Network.” Marjorie Stamberg, public school teacher, United Federation of Teachers delegate and member of Class Struggle Education Workers, talked about the determination of NYC teachers to stand up against any threats by the immigration police against their students or the students’ family members. Maeve Campbell, a CUNY Internationalist Club activists who chairs the Committee to Defend Immigrants and Muslims at Hunter College, made the case for building a rapid response network throughout CUNY, and cited recent examples of direct action against deportations from several parts of the U.S., as well as the “Transport Workers Against Deportations” in Los Angeles.

Campbell stated that the tasks of such a network include alerting students, faculty and staff of any ICE presence on or near CUNY campuses, and systematically laying the basis to “mobilize students, faculty and workers” to actually block attempted deportations, and “shut down CUNY schools in response to a deportation or detainment.” She emphasized that this is counterposed to illusions of collaboration with the administration, and some headway was made in building this network.

The conference was called by the CUNY Sanctuary Committee, which has been meeting since early 2017 at the Professional Staff Congress union hall. Bringing together student and union activists from across the City University, these meetings have worked towards building a university-wide rapid response network. At the March 3 Grad Center conference, it was noted that a letter sent by the CUNY Sanctuary Committee resulted in Kingsborough Community College officially eliminating restrictions it had applied to undocumented students receiving grants from the College Foundation. This was cited as a small but relevant example of organizing at CUNY to fight all kinds of anti-immigrant measures.

Organizers of the March 3 conference expressed the hope that participants will return to their campuses with redoubled dedication to the ongoing work of organizing in defense of immigrants and the rights of us all. To get involved in these efforts, please write to Committeeodefendimmigrants@gmail.com.
Greetings of Solidarity from Mexico

The following greetings were read, both in Spanish and in English translation, to the CUNY-Wide Conference in Defense of Immigrants at Tlatelolco, and the 10-month strike and occupation of UNAM in 1999-2000 that – despite the arrest of 1,000 students – successfully defended free tuition, with electrical and university unionists forming “workers defense guards” at UNAM supporting the student strikers. In the recent period, UNAM has been a site of sustained protests against the “disappearance” of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa teachers college in 2014 by state forces, and the massacre of teachers’ strike activists in Nochixtlán, Oaxaca in 2016.

3 March, 2018
Compañeros and compañeras:

From the largest public university in Latin America, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, we send greetings of solidarity to the conference of City University of New York activists in defense of immigrants.

Of all international news topics, struggles in defense of immigrants in the United States may be the one that receives the most attention here in Mexico. Radio and TV news programs, as well as the daily papers, provide detailed coverage about the anti-immigrant attacks: the horrific raids by the ICE police, the constant provocations and threats issued by President Donald Trump, by his government officials and by anti-immigrant racists who have been emboldened by the new administration. But it is with particular urgency that working-class families follow the struggles to resist these attacks. The connection between working-class families on one side of the border and on the other is very real. The future of those on one side closely depends on the future of those on the other side.

Many of those who migrate from Mexico to the United States come from peasant and indigenous families, who, within NAFTA’s framework of imperialist pillage against Mexico, have lost their land or find that it is now impossible for their land to be productive. This vast sector is impoverished by the policies of the Mexican bosses, who offer up the poverty of the Mexican workers on the altar of so-called free trade. That is the sector that our compañeros and compañeras of the Ayotzinapa rural teachers college come from. These are the Ayotzinapa students who were brutally attacked by the police in the state of Guerrero in September 2014, and who to this day remain “disappeared.”

The things that you will be discussing today are very important for the workers and poor people of Mexico. It is of vital importance to discuss not only how to resist, but how to defeat the anti-immigrant onslaught that is the product of the North American bourgeois politicians of every kind. As revolutionary Marxists, we know that there is a social power that is able to defeat the attack by the employing class: that is the power of the working class, which makes everything in the capitalist system run, and which can, for that reason, bring it all to a halt. The United States working class is a multiracial and multiethnic giant whose mobilization is the key to defending immigrants and their families. All immigrants must have full citizenship rights!

Mexico is not only an enormous “expeller” of migrants; it is also a country of transit for migrants from different parts of the world seeking to reach the United States. At the same time that the Mexican government says it will defend besieged Mexican immigrants in the North, it carries out raids against immigrants of other nationalities here. Over the past weeks, the number of Central American, Caribbean and even African immigrants detained and deported by the Mexican “Migra” (immigration police) has multiplied. For many of those who leave their countries and set out on the dangerous voyage on what is known as “La Bestia” (the Beast), going long distances by foot and always facing the risk of capture by the Migra or criminal bands, it is of vital importance to have full citizenship rights here in this country as well. The defense of immigrants demands the international – and internationalist – mobilization of the workers of Mexico and the United States.

It is with this conviction that we send you revolutionary greetings, hoping to hear from you in return.

UNAM Internationalist Committee

Mahoma López, leader of several recent immigrant workers’ organizing campaigns

UNAM Internationalist Committee
A New Era

Whenever we get students and workers together to brainstorm a way out of the mess that CUNY is in, soon enough we face the facts that something more than patient negotiating at the bargaining table is needed, that lobbying Democrats is a glaringly obvious dead end, and that only disruption and direct action can move the needle on forty years of austerity destroying the school we love. In other words, CUNY needs to go on strike. At this moment, on cue, a loyal PSC comrade invariably rejoins: “But that’s against the law.” With that, the Taylor Law, the eternal alibi of business unionism in the CUNY system, has served its purpose once more.

The Taylor Law was enacted in 1967 as the final act of the legal recognition of New York City unions, begun a decade prior. Under the Taylor Law, City unions gained an unambiguous right to claim representation of city workers and collect their dues, and these representatives of the city’s unions got an incontestable seat at the bargaining table. The tradeoff was that these legally recognized unions cannot legally go on strike. Strikes by public sector workers have been either de jure or de facto prohibited throughout New York City’s history, so this wasn’t anything particularly novel. What changed was suddenly there was an institutionalized labor bureaucracy, guaranteed a steady stream of employee dues, a staff of paid functionaries, access to the halls of power, and the conceit of imagining themselves as labor dignitaries, giving grandiose speeches, working the conference circuit touting their achievements, and issuing self-aggrandizing newsletters celebrating themselves and their small clique of friends, as they became evermore cemented as the left wing of management. And this class of union bureaucrat suddenly had a lot to lose if workers struck. Accordingly, the legally codified power of New York City’s unions, gained through the bold and daring strikes of workers in sanitation, transit, and the city’s public schools, is now contingent on the ability of its leadership to prevent strikes. So when somebody tells you we can’t go on strike because it’s against the law, what they mean is it would challenge the union’s financial infrastructure and the cozy arrangement our leadership has with the city. A strike would place us in an actual confrontation with the forces of austerity, not the performance of confrontation we currently have, with its empty rhetorical grandstanding and symbolic, stage-managed arrests. This means the PSC would have to take some of its social justice magnetic poetry like “fighting against the logic of the neoliberal regime” and actually live by it. But that would require a profound break from business as usual.

As it happens, this past week, two profoundly unusual things occurred.

First, an actual flesh and blood PSC staffer contacted many adjuncts directly to discuss their stake in the union. Had President Bowen been visited by three spirits who’d shown her the error of autocratically administered business unionism? Alas, this was not the case. The US Supreme Court is currently hearing arguments over Janus v. AFSCME, sure to be decided in favor of the plaintiff, which will result in public employee unions losing their right to claim dues automatically from public employees who do not wish to sign a union card. Effectively, unions like the PSC can no longer force people to give up their dues money when they don’t think the union deserves it. Therefore staffers were contacting members under the auspices of a discussion, but simply to deliver carefully crafted talking points, the entire purpose of which was for members to sign a special card diminishing the time they can quit paying dues to a ten-day window each year. In an organization that actually commanded the respect of its membership, engaged in robust democratic participation, and empowered the rank-and-file to take control of their workplace with the union at their back, Janus would not be much of a threat, and the very idea of a such a
bizarre and binding loyalty oath would be ridiculous. Maybe a few reactionaries would leave for ideologi-cal reasons, or those with a more pressing need for their dues money, but unless we think our colleagues are a bunch of selfish dolts (and if so, why organize at all?), we can assume a critical mass would remain in a union if they thought it worth their money. (And this is to say nothing of what exactly a ‘union’ needs money for when it has given up the right to collect a strike fund!) But to a union like the PSC that relies on top-down leadership of a demobilized rank-and-file, and instead begs politicians for table scraps in vain, Janus is an unmitigated disaster, akin to a giant asteroid approaching Earth.

Second, teachers in West Virginia, a ‘right to work’ state where collective bargaining is not recognized and striking is illegal, conducted what even the bourgeois press called a ‘crowd-sourced strike.’ Outside of the formal structure of the AFT, the parent union of the PSC, and against its explicit wishes to stop, they organized a statewide walkout unprecedented in recent decades. Spurning an insulting 1% wage increase, which similar to the last PSC contract didn’t keep pace with inflation, these brave teachers didn’t waste their time lobbying politicians from a position of powerlessness. They built a campaign of direct action that relied on a broad base of community support and collective risk-taking in defiance of the law and their own union leadership, which was soon chasing after the independent initiative of its rank-and-file. The WV teachers didn’t just demand raises for themselves, either. In contrast to unions like the PSC refusing to even consider bargaining demands outside its own narrowly defined contract (including the pressing need to unify with students demanding free tuition), the WV teachers stood in solidarity with other public sector workers, demanding wage increases in other sectors, too. And they didn’t let the illegality of their strike stop them; instead they donned red to invoke the Battle of Blair Mountain,

West Virginia’s most militant labor confrontation, an armed confrontation in which 10,000 miners exchanged fire with the police for five days, with a million rounds of ammunition spent! Surely the New Caucus would have referred the agitators who initiated this strike to the PSC’s pantheon of labor scholars and socialist public intellectuals, who would have didactically explained the futility of taking any action beyond lobbying the Democratic Party, because in real life the rank-and-file just isn’t ready for the kind of militant direct action that labor intellectuals write their books about. Thankfully the vanguard of New York City labor intellectualism, sticking to its natural habitat of swanky DUMBO loft parties, was absent in provincial West Virginia, and as of writing, their example is resounding across the country, with similar actions planned in Arizona and Oklahoma.

Janus v. AFSCME is the latest phase of a decades-long ruling class offensive against any vestiges of worker power or dignity, waged by the bitter enemies of working people, who must be defeated by any means necessary. But this despicable campaign has been abetted by union bureaucracies, which seek only to preserve their own power and prestige while managing the inevitable decline of legalistic US unionism into oblivion. In unions like the PSC leadership spends more time monitoring and containing challenges from the left than it does going on the offensive against the right, even while their disastrous pact with the Democratic Party and its affiliates continues to prove fruitless and a failure beyond redemption. The result has been a class struggle in which only one side is fighting. And now our enemies are poised to strike a death blow, but this will not be the end. When people struggle in concert they produce organizational forms, which soon ossify and become fetters to the struggle’s unfolding, as we see when our comrades cower before the Taylor Law. It’s time to cross the threshold and leave the dead weight of the past behind. We do not rejoice in the further weaken-

ing of a union apparatus so degraded and powerless that it must delude itself with self-aggrandizing bombast while begging politicians for scraps from a position of utter powerlessness. But their disaster need not be ours. If Janus is a giant asteroid, we are not afraid, for we are not dinosaurs. It’s a new era. Join us. 7k or strike!

CUNY Struggle

Source: https://academeblog.org/2017/12/05/psc-cuny-kicks-off-contract-campaign/
Accessing Digital Literacy

Sarah Hildebrand

Born in the late 1980s, I am unmistakably a millennial. I grew up on the cusp of dumb-to-smart phones and a world increasingly tethered by the digital ether. I feel comfortable navigating online platforms, and a little anxious when I’m out-of-range of a cell tower.

Yet, my formative years were comparatively low-tech. I still remember floppy disks, MS-DOS, and dial-up. My first laptop was too heavy to be transportable and generated enough heat to burn skin. I had a Computer Applications course in high school that was really just a typing class.

It wasn’t until college that my classrooms became “smart” or at least technology-compatible. And even with each room outfitted with its own computer and projection system, very few professors utilized them with confidence. PowerPoint became a standard part of student presentations, and a couple intrepid teachers let us experiment with video and sound recording equipment, but all written assignments had to be printed and stapled, and my classmates and I built most of our digital literacy independently, surfing the web after (or eventually during) class.

Flash forward a decade later and institutional initiatives to digitize learning and install classrooms with the most up-to-date technologies have only increased. While some faculty have happily jumped on the bandwagon, utilizing computers to enhance their pedagogy and craft innovative assignments—anything from podcasts to website design to collaborative writing—others have been less sold by the break from pen-and-paper-based learning. These scholars invoke research about the benefits of handwritten notes as evidence for why laptops should be universally banned from the classroom, argue that computers are a gateway to distraction, and hypothesize that smartphones have perhaps just made us dumber.

Rebuttals to many of these arguments have already been made. They rightly expose how the uniform banning of technology is an ableist pedagogical move, discriminating against students who may not be able to take handwritten notes or otherwise out them by making them an exception to the rule. They acknowledge that computers are far from the only distraction within our classrooms, asking us to rethink teaching practices that fall short of engaging our audience.

However, while the myth that technology might somehow universally detract from learning has been largely debunked, the underserved flipside of this is that requiring students to have and utilize technology can also create educational barriers.

Nowadays, we teachers often expect students to enter our classrooms with a baseline set of computer skills. We generally assume students will know how to log on to the school’s Wi-Fi and into our course websites—that they will have email addresses and be able to type. In fact, for those of us who didn’t grow up with the internet, or even a computer, we often trust (or fear) that our students know way more about technology than we do.

However, while at times this may be true, hidden behind this generalization is another set of assumptions around access and accessibility. We assume that our students have internet connections at home, laptops readily at-hand, and are generally computer-literate before entering our classrooms. We stereotype millennials, and especially those who’ve come after, as permanently plugged-in and probably hoarding some enviable skills in computer coding that we ourselves missed the boat on.

Yet, many students at CUNY are far from at-home in the digital world. Rarely do more than a handful of my students own laptops. Some can only access the web on-campus. And even students who are active on the internet are often less digitally literate than one might expect.

Whenever I have library sessions with my students geared towards conducting academic research, the most common complaint I receive is that the instructor is moving too fast as they navigate the scholarly databases. My students can’t remember where to

The first IBM PC, the 5150, that went to the market on August 11 1981. With a price of 3,280 dollars. It was a machine of 11 kg, 15 cm of height with a small black and green screen of 11.5 inches, and ran Microsoft’s MS-DOS software – source: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2591182/Dumb-users-Bill-Shakespeare-The-jokes-Microsofts-programmers-hid-firms-MS-DOS-software-revealed.html
click or how to get the results they want from educational technology even if they do spend hours browsing Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. They can conduct a cursory Google search, but would be hard-pressed to explain Boolean logic.

And while that may prove a difficult test for many of us, more recently I’ve come to realize that even uploading an assignment through our course website or posting to an online forum is no small task for many students. While an age-based bias often haunts our perceptions of who will or won’t be computer-literate in our classrooms, even those who fit the millennial demographic aren’t necessarily well-versed in how to effectively delve into educational technology. While Blackboard in particular is an admittedly poor platform—often awkwardly laid-out and far from intuitive—guiding some of my students through the Discussion Board feature has made me realize that many are unfamiliar with even basic website navigation.

Similar issues of access extend to contingent faculty. Adjuncts often can’t afford to purchase educational technology correlated with more “innovative” forms of pedagogy, and I’ve yet to teach a course at Lehman College in a room with ready-access to a computer. Instead, obtaining technology is a multistep process of reserving equipment online, hoping it’s available, picking it up from the media center, hoping it’s functional, and lugging it back and forth from my classroom.

Accessing technology is a hassle. For adjuncts whose time is
stretched thin by commutes to different campuses, it’s difficult to determine how to acquire technology in the first place, let alone find the time to shuttle equipment between buildings. As a Graduate Teaching Fellow, it took me a semester and a half just to get my official college email address set up. And when I finally figured out how to borrow media equipment, I was often thwarted by broken cables and cracked screens—one computer was literally held together with tape. I grew accustomed to knowing that, any time I wanted to integrate technology into my lesson, there was a 50/50 chance it would be successful. During a course observation, I once resorted to drawing pictures on the chalkboard while I waited for IT to bring me a new VGA cable. Luckily, both my students and the observer shared laughs over my lack of artis- tic ability, but the experience still left me reticent to use technology in any high-stakes way. And although, yes, there is always at least one student who knows way more about technology than I do and will readily volunteer to set up the projector while I start the lesson, often the majority of the class is just as out-of-the-loop as I sometimes am. I baffled many students the other day when I used an Ethernet cord to quick-fix a problem in the school’s Wi-Fi con- nexion. They had no idea internet could come from a wall rather than thin air.

While it’s no longer an anxiety-inducing experience to check-out equipment—Lehman has definitely updated their gear over the past few years, and I feel more adept at switching to a back-up plan—these ex- periences have raised a whole new set of questions. Not “Will the technology work?” but “Will my stu- dents be able to work the technology?”

Technology turns over so quickly that there is no universal platform. When I do manage to score access to computers for my class, my lessons sometimes become hijacked by crash courses in digital literacy. Now, before I design a computer-based project, I ask: Will my students be able to complete the assignment unaided? How much class-time will I need to devote to explanation? Is digital literacy a core component of my course? And, perhaps more importantly, should it be?

Nowhere in any of the courses I’ve taught has the ability to use technology been mentioned in the standardized “course objectives” section of my syllabus, yet it’s a skill we expect all students to have magically acquired upon graduation or often to have entered into the academy with as freshmen. When are stu- dents supposed to learn this skill? From whom? I have never banned computers from my class- room. (Confession: I initially held a grudge against cellphones, but soon realized this was a discrimina- tory, classist move, too.) But I also have no great an-ecdote of how I revolutionized the learning process with educational technology. Instead, the ways my students and I employ computers is extremely prag- matic, perhaps even mundane. I use open educa- tional resources to cut costs—all course readings are posted to our website. I frequently ask my students to Google vocabulary words, by which I hope more to help them develop certain habits of mind than be- come digitally literate — though that is a welcome byproduct. Sometimes, I find I am using less technology in my classroom than I’d like or I feel I should. But it’s not because I am lazy, a luddite, or in any way angsty about our increasingly digital world. I am simply torn. I wonder how I can ensure the success of twenty-five students with varying access to technology. Do I re- quire a digital project that might put some of them at a disadvantage? Do I sacrifice other course content to make room for technology, which I was not told to teach but also told not to teach without? The internet is not as ubiquitous as it may appear. As academics, most of us can hardly imagine life without email—as much as we might want to. But it’s worth remembering that this makes us part of a privi- leged class. And while my students are brilliant and up to the task, any language takes time to learn.

The Struggle for Housing

Christopher M. Morrow

A recent talk by writer and activ- ist Julian Brave Noisecat on dis- placed indigenous peoples in California was midway interrupt- ed by a CUNY security guard. The guard politely acknowledged the disruption, and asked for a break in the proceedings while arrange- ments could be made to accommodate the steady stream of audience members who continued to pour in well after the event had started. Sean Kennedy, the organizer and facilitator of the CUNY Adjunct Project event, negotiated with Graduate Center facility staff in the hall about opening the room up to accom- modate the swelling crowd. Security instructed audi- ence members to step into the corridor while the staff rearranged the room to accommodate the larger audience.

The irony of the request to move was not lost on the group of activists, lawyers and academics. Some- one from the audience made a joke about the audi- ence being displaced. Marina Ortiz, an East Harlem organizer who had already finished her segment of the talk a little earlier, took over the mic as mainte- nance staff folded the collapsible walls, insisting on
Where the government is geared towards the needs of real estate,” said Sam Stein, a CUNY Grad Center Urban Studies scholar. Stein had kicked off the evening by emphasizing the real estate industry’s power to shape urban development, and politicians’ eagerness to allow the unchecked appropriation of neighborhoods that had been homes to working-class New Yorkers and immigrants. Stein, who was researcher at two of the major buildings trade unions, including SCIU 32BJ, is well-versed in current New York labor trends, specifically as they pertain to housing. 32 BJ is the union for the entire east coast property management staff, including doormen, janitorial staff, and security. Stein underlined the ways in which all these professions are directly affected by the housing crisis and have been active in the rezoning hearings around the city.

Panelist Chaumtoli Huq, a Bangladesh-American labor and human rights attorney, turned the audience’s attention to the criminalization of urban space. Huq herself had been unlawfully arrested during a peaceful rally in Times Square. As founder and editor-in-chief of Law at the Margins, she has written extensively on human rights issues. Huq discussed her organizing and participation in movements with immigrant communities over housing and labor issues in New York.

The final speaker, Susanna Blankley, offered a more historical perspective on housing and urban development in New York. She emphasized that since the arrival of the Dutch in New York, the economy has been rooted in land speculation. As a coalition coordinator of Right to Counsel NYC, she has had extensive experience organizing and her discussion focused on successful precedents for organizing in New York City, including pre-war era Lower East Side immigrant neighborhood-wide rent strike that lasted for years. The success of these rent strikes is a model for mass protest against the increasing commodification of space and the gross displacement of working class and immigrant communities.

New York is currently in the midst of multiple rezoning projects which will impact hundreds of thousands of residents in Washington Heights, the South Bronx and Harlem. Event attendees and local activists on the panel echoed the growing concern over the rezoning of East Harlem and the Bronx, many who are personally affected as residents. Attendees of the event included graduate students, activists, organizers, interested community members and faculty. “The goal is for the people to become owners. To cut out most of the middle men. Brokers, developers, all of them are taking their cuts.” said Fillip Popovich, an architect originally from Serbia who attended the talk. Popovich cites collective housing movements like the Berlin based Baugruppen for inspiring his interest in architectural activism. He found out about the Struggle for Housing event through social media and saw the event as an opportunity to gain insight into community-based housing solutions.

Around 8p.m approached, facilitator Kennedy informed the audience that we still had the room for another hour. With the room expansion disruption and the audience introductions, the event had exceeded its scheduled time. Regardless, attendees were still engaged and eager to participate in the Q&A. Participants offered insightful questions and comments, focusing on a range of issues from union organizing to the issue of CUNY student displacement. It was the beginning of a network that would use the insights it had gained to question and organize across communities, attempting to break down the silos between not only communities but the realm of work and home. The event had generated strategies, critical questions and debates that continued through to the reception downstairs, where some of the panelists and attendees remained over the next two hours continuing to discuss issues of rising rents in New York and the toll it has taken on families and those seeking to start families in an increasingly prohibitive city.
Dear Fellow Students and Colleagues.

The Doctoral and Graduate Students’ Council (DSC) welcomes you to another semester and year! With the term already underway, we wanted to be sure to remind all GC students of the following information.

2017-18 DSC Participatory Budget Initiative

Thank you to everyone who voted and thereby took part in this initiative. Three projects received the highest rankings according to the votes cast by the student body, and therefore will receive funds for implementation. These projects include the following:

1. Water Bottle Fountain
2. The Student Column
3. English Lounge Renewal

If you are interested in the Participatory Budget initiative or are considering submitting a proposal for a 2018-19 cycle and have questions, please email dsc@cunydsc.org. Pending budget approval, the deadline for proposals will most likely occur in the fall 2018 semester.

Reminders

DSC Nominations and Elections

The nomination period for 2018-19 DSC Representation was open until March 1st. Elections for DSC Representation for will be open April 1st, 11:59 PM and can be submitted online here: https://eballot4.votenet.com/dsc. Only those who are nominated will be appear on the ballot. If you did not nominate someone in time, you can always include them as a write-in candidate on the elections ballot.

Grants

The next grants deadlines is March 16th, 2018. The maximum award amount for the 2017-18 academic year is $700. Please see the website (http://cunydsc.org/grants/) or email funding@cunydsc.org for more information.

Program Governance

The DSC Governance Task Force will be administering a survey in the near future on program governance. The survey is accessible through the website here: http://cunydsc.org/2018/02/dsc-governance-survey/

Library and Technology Services

The DSC Ad-hoc Library Committee is administering a survey in the near future on students’ library and technology needs. The survey is accessible through the website here: http://cunydsc.org/2018/02/library-tech-survey/.

Chartered Organizations

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

Election ballots are online and will be open from April 1 until May 1, 11:59 PM

For more information, see http://cunydsc.org/elections/ or email ccsa@cunydsc.org.
The Artist as “Terrorist”
Violence and Caste in the Persecution of Kabir Kala Manch

Bhargav Rani

On the morning of 2 April 2013, two prominent members of the Pune-based cultural group Kabir Kala Manch, Sheetal Sathe and her husband Sachin Mali, gathered outside the premises of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly in Mumbai. This was their first public appearance in two years, having been compelled to go underground after an arrest warrant was issued in their names by the Maharashtra state government. Sathe and Mali assembled in front of a modest crowd of supporters, sang a few songs, and issued a statement unequivocally asserting that this was not a surrender but a satyagraha, a staunch insistence on truth, a demand for justice. Their decision to come out of hiding, they said, was motivated simultaneously by their faith in the due process of the law as well as their desire to put the very democratic character of the state and its dictum of freedom of expression to test. Within moments, officers from the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorist Squad arrived on the scene, and took Sathe and Mali into custody. Over the years, the Indian state has repeatedly failed to stand up to their test.

That article is about the questionable construction of the terrorist figure by the state. Sathe and Mali are not terrorists in any common understanding of the word. Kabir Kala Manch is a political-cultural group that employs performance as a means of protest against the state. Through their repertoire of songs, plays and poetry, they confront the entrenched structures of oppression that proliferate within Indian society. More specifically, they are a predominantly Dalit group, performing at various bastis, or slums, in working-class neighborhoods in Pune, where they stage street plays and sing songs of resistance advocating caste emancipation, women empowerment, and minority rights. Their performances also frequently criticize land acquisition policies, the failures of democracy, and the systemic discrimination of a capitalist state. Sathe and Mali are essentially artists – singers and poets – and who use the medium of performance to reach out to the marginalized and to puncture the complacent apathy of the Brahminical ruling classes.

Such persecution of artists as “terrorists” by the state through the invocation of a draconian law underscores the dubious nature of the state’s discursive manipulations. At the most elementary level, it begs some questions. Who is a “terrorist”? What parameters determine the qualification of an individual.
as a “terrorist”? Who are the ter-
rorized? What are the means em-
ployed by the so-called “terrorist”
in order to terrorize; to perpetrate
“terrorism”? The answers that the
case of Kabir Kala Manch offers
to these basic questions are each
incrementally more outlandish
than the other. Moreover, the per -
secution of artists by the Indian
state, the largest democracy in
the world, strikes at the very foun-
dational principles of democracy,
provoking a critical appraisal of
the nature of democracy itself.

Kabir Kala Manch was first
started in 2002 in the wake of the
Gujarat Riots. After a train carry-
ing Hindu pilgrims from the dis-
puted Babri Masjid site at Ayod-
hya was mysteriously burnt down
on 27 February 2002, at a railway
station in Godhra, killing fifty-nine
passengers, Muslims in Gujarat as
a whole were painted as respon-
sible by right-wing factions and
Hindu mobs, and it lead to one of
the most gruesome pogroms of
torture, rape, and murder against
them. By 4 March, when the riots
were finally brought under con-
trol, over 2,000 Muslims had been
killed and over a hundred thou-
sand displaced from their homes,
many of them still awaiting jus-
tice in ghettoized transit camps
in Ahmedabad. While the political
climate that prevailed in the coun-
try over the next decade governed
the tenor of discourses that now
constitute the “official” history of
the Gujarat riots, there also runs
a substantial counter-discourse
that implicates the highest offices
of the state, including the then-
Chief Minister of Gujarat and the
current Prime Minister Narendra
Modi, as complicit in the orches-
tration of these riots for electoral
advantage.

In the aftermath of the riots,
the state’s pretensions to impart-
ing justice to the victims was a
mockery. More than half the peo-
ple arrested were taken in from
predominantly Dalit areas, and
a third more from Dalit-Muslim
areas. Less than a hundred (of
the nearly 3000 people arrested)
were taken from areas in which
the most Muslims were murdered.
While the number of Hindus ar-
rested exceeded, if only margin-
ally, the number of Muslims, only
32 of those arrests were of upper-
caste Hindus. Thus, in a meticu-
lously orchestrated decimation of
an entire community of Muslims
through a collusion of political
leaders and Hindu right-wing fac-
tions, caste was as much a factor
as religion and Dalits were round-
ed up as the sacrificial lambs in a
travesty of justice.

It was in response to this som-
ber state of affairs that Kabir Kala
Manch was started by Amarnath
Chandaliya, along with other
Pune-based activists, as a means
of cultural expression of resis-
tance and a performance of pro-
test. The two central concerns
underpinning the activism of the
group is that of caste and class, a
politics seeped equally in Ambed-
karism and Marxism. Even as the
group foregrounds the politics of
caste oppression through its cul-
tural activism, it never loses sight
of their class struggles and explic-
itly attacks the complicity of the
capitalist state in the perpetua-
tion of caste hierarchies. For Kabir
Kala Manch, caste emancipation
is not a possibility within the
capitalist structures of oppres-
sion that stand antithetical to any
idea of affirmative action, and the
two are entwined in a figuration
of mutuality must be confronted
and dismantled in the same vein.

In 2005, Sheetal Sathe, a tal-
ented singer, poet and musician,
attorney graduate of Fergusson College,
Pune, and a Dalit activist, joined
Kabir Kala Manch along with her
husband Sachin Mali, her cousin
Sagar Gorkhe, and Deepak Dengle
and Siddharth Bhosle. Sathe, Mali
and the others came in contact
with a number of radical left activ-
ists in the group, including some
members of the banned Commu-
nist Party of India (Maoist), who
were influential on their activist
agenda. Then, in 2006, the Khair-
lanji massacre happened. In a
small village in Maharashtra, four
members of the Bhotmange fami-
lly, belonging to a Dalit caste, were

**FREE THE SINGERS**

**Sheetal Sathe and Sachin Mali are arrested in Maharashtra**

Police is silencing the songs

brutally lynched over a land dispute, and the women paraded naked in public and gang-raped before being murdered in cold blood. The national media and the political leaders alike ignored this massacre until the Dalit outrage spilled onto the streets of Mumbai in the form of vehement demonstrations against the state. It was during these mass protests that Kabir Kala Manch activists, and their poetry.

In 2011, the Government of India, under the provisions of the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967, a law inscribed in a legal language that is dubious at best, declared Kabir Kala Manch a threat to national security and incriminated a number of its activists as Naxalites or Maoists actively engaged in logistical support to insurgent movements. While the Dalit outrage spilled onto the streets of Mumbai, the political leaders alike ignored this massacre until the state invoked this law against Kabir Kala Manch, it authorized a crackdown on musicians and activists by the Anti-Terrorist Squad, and Dengle and Bhosle were put to jail. Dengle, in an interview, recalled his time in jail, where Sachin and Sheetal were. I didn’t know, so they continued to hit me. They stripped me, tied my hands and legs with a rope and hung me from the ceiling. Then they took this oil called Suryaprabhak oil, and put it all over my body, including my groin. It caused burning all over and makes it hard to breathe. I was in so much pain that I asked them to shoot me and get it over with. They only untied me once I lost consciousness.”

Sathe and Mali, along with two others, Sagar Gorkhe and Ramesh Gaichor, were forced to go into hiding for two years. In 2013, they finally remerged and gave themselves up to the state, after Dengle and Bhosle were released on bail with the judge declaring that being sympathetic to the Maoist cause was not a crime, although pleading innocent on all charges. Sathe, who was pregnant at that time, Mali, Gorkhe and Gaichor were immediately imprisoned and were rejected bail twice by the judicial system. Sathe was granted bail in late 2013 on humanitarian grounds, when she was almost eight-and-a-half months into her pregnancy, while the other three languished in jail for four more years, till they were finally released in 2017. While Sathe and Mali have split from the group due to ideological differences to start a new cultural front, Navyan, Kabir Kala Manch has over a dozen committed artists who rehearse at least thrice a week and continue to perform regularly in Pune slums.

The law that facilitates such persecution of artists by the state demands some scrutiny. Rustom Bharucha, in his book Terror and Performance, highlights the slippery terrain that the language of terrorism inhabits, and in what he calls the “doublespeak of ‘terrorism,’” asserts that, “Even as there is no consensus on the official definitions of terrorism, we have no other option but to engage with them not least because they could be the most powerful legitimizing devices for the perpetration of terror in our times. The absence or the lack of consensus around adequate official definitions does not stop them from being used in insidious ways.” As a closer inspection of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967 reveals, the ambiguity of the language in the law is not incidental to its articulation. It is rather a conscious, calculated ruse that the state employs to preserve the status quo.

The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, first instituted in 1967, is a law that pertains to the powers bestowed on the Indian state in dealing with activities that threaten its integrity and sovereignty. While essentially arcane, as the date on the Act indicates, it has undergone few minor amendments over the years, the most recent of which was in 2008, impelled by the terrorist attacks in Mumbai. Rein incorporates certain provisions from the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 2002, which was discredited and repealed in 2004 due to its rampant misuse by the police, the
amended act invested the state with unbridled powers to not only curb insurgency threats on the basis of mere suspicion but to even suppress any form of dissent. Much like Bush’s “war on terror” in the wake of “September 11,” the Indian government capitalized on the palpable sense of terror that pervaded the public consciousness after the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November 2008, and passed the amendment granting itself almost autocratic powers with little debate in the parliament. The 2008 amendment stipulates a terrorist act as one involving the use of “bombs, dynamite...other explosive substances or inflammable substances or firearms or other lethal weapons or poisonous or noxious gases or other chemicals or by any other substances...of a hazardous nature or by any other means of whatever nature.”

While the law was ostensibly passed as an anti-terrorism law, stipulating a range of actions that could justifiably be argued to constitute terrorism, the seemingly careless and yet calculated inclusion of the final clause — “by any other means of whatever nature” — underscores the state’s crafty manipulation of the legal language. Who, according to the state, is a terrorist? Practically anybody! In addition, the law also stipulates that any act “likely to threaten the unity, integrity, security or sovereignty of India” can be construed as a terrorist act, thus introducing a very problematic subjectivity into its implementation even as it jeopardizes the core democratic mandate of the presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

It is imperative to remember Bharucha’s crucial emphasis on the “language of war,” for this language, as he argues, is imbued with a “performative energy, whereby words are not just descriptions but the embodiments of actions.” It can be argued that the law does not merely function with performative force, but rather performativity is its axiomatic premise. That is, its performativity is an a priori condition for the law, and the stakes involved in the articulation of a law are so high precisely because the words necessarily shape the socio-political realities that define the lives of its citizens in palpable ways. A phrase misplaced can transform an “artist” into a “militant” into an “insurgent” into a “terrorist,” and completely overhaul the material realities of his or her daily life. The manipulation of legal language by the state must thus be understood as a conscious, concerted effort towards inflecting the performativity of the law. In Bharucha’s words, “Language is not just ‘speaking’; it is ‘doing’, ‘torturing’, ‘killing’.”

Kabir Kala Manch’s incrimination as terrorists is an
application of that sly appendage of infinite significations, that phrase “by any other means of whatever nature,” in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The specific signification to which it is tethered in this context here is the group’s mode of protest, their songs and their theatre, which are identified by the state as their “weapons.” The obvious dichotomy that emerges is violence as opposed to non-violence, and one can argue that it is the essentially non-violent character of Kabir Kala Manch’s modes of resistance must absolve them of all charges. However, while this is undeniably true, we must be cautious to not let our activist zeal to exculpate this group of artists prevent us from an attention of the nuances of the argument. At the outset, it must be conceded that any cultural or political group that chooses to employ performance as a means of protest does indeed strategically espouse it as a weapon against the oppressive structures of the state. We must heed Bharucha’s insistence that we stop thinking of theatre as inherently “non-violent” and consider the “violence of non-violence.” To recall the Brazilian activist Herbert de Souza’s fiery retort to Bharucha’s provocative question of whether we no longer need to fight, “Of course we have to fight...Think of Gandhi. What could be more violent than non-violence?” But where exactly does the violence of non-violence lie? Bharucha sums this up when he says, “the ‘violence’ of non-violence cannot involve killing or even abusing the other; rather, it necessitates the courage of standing up to the other, receiving the blow, and being prepared to die not for some ideal of heroism or transcendent ideal but for the affirmation of Truth.” He then goes on to engage with the visceral, corporeal register of this proposition to analyze the visceral presence of blood in all its visceral presence, in order to definitively implicate violence that permeates our daily life in all its banality. Violence manifests in the seeming non-violence of everyday experiences of caste discrimination, in the politics of touch and purity, just as it persists in the non-violence of performed dissent. The former must be understood as non-violent violence, while the latter as violent non-violence. The members of Kabir Kala Manch, in and by virtue of their “courage” to stand up, to “receive blows,” and in their preparedness “to die” for the cause of Dalit rights, for the “affirmation of Truth,” have already put their corporeality in peril’s way. Their acts of dissent have already “marked” them in the invisible cross-hairs of the state. And violence does not begin with the pulling of the trigger, it is always already present in the “marking” itself.

While Bharucha provides much of the critical vocabulary for an investigation of the violence of non-violence embodied by the artists of Kabir Kala Manch, his propositions on the violence of non-violence stem from a lineage that has its roots in Gandhi, and it would be erroneous to implicate the violent non-violence of Kabir Kala Manch in this lineage. What I want to emphasize here is that Gandhi exerts an almost hegemonic influence over both the discourse and praxis of non-violence in today’s world. This is not so much to question the validity of this persistent influence of Gandhian thought in thinking through non-violence, but to recognize other agents and players in the deployment of non-violence as a strategy of resistance against the state. The violent non-violence of Kabir Kala Manch traces its genealogy not to ahimsa, Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence, but to the figure of Ambedkar, himself an embodiment of the paradox of the violence of non-violence. I would like to end this article by offering two examples of the revolutionary violence that lies underlies Ambedkar’s philosophy, one at the level of discourse and the other at the level of praxis.

At a discursive level, Ambedkar’s 1936 published speech, Annihilation of Caste, is arguably one of the most violent pieces of writing that has emerged from India. It is, as Arundhati Roy puts it, a “breach of peace.” A scathing indictment of the caste system, it was originally written for a speech that Ambedkar was invited to deliver at the annual conference of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal in Lahore, a radical faction of the Hindu reformist organization, the Arya Samaj. But the profound radicalism of his propositions, which the organizers found “unbearable,” led to the cancellation of the conference. Ambedkar then decided to publish his speech as well as his correspondence with the organizers to provide his readers with the context for the cancellation of the conference. In his speech Ambedkar unpacks the manifold discourses and practices that inform the perpetuation of caste in Indian society, analyzes the arguments and counter-arguments for caste emancipation, and
eventually calls for a radical re-nunciation of Hinduism itself, at-tacking its very foundations, its sacred scriptures and religious texts. To quote just one brilliant passage: “It is no use seeking refuge in quibbles. It is no use telling peo-ple that the shastras do not say what they are believed to say, if they are grammatically read or logically interpreted. What mat-
ers is how the shastras have been understood by the people. You must take the stand that Buddha took. You must take the stand that Guru Nanak took. You must not only discard the shastras, you must deny their authority, as did Buddha and Nanak. You must have courage to tell the Hindus that what is wrong with them is their religion - the religion which has produced in them this notion of the sacredness of caste. Will you show that courage?” Unlike the reformist agendas of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal and many other Hindu caste emancipation organizations of that time, Ambedkar called for a complete revolution. He staunchly believed that the root of the evil of caste oppression lay in the essence of Hinduism itself, and rejected all claims of the possibility of an emancipatory project within its auspices. Ambedkar recognized that any ideology of oppression and its concomitant structures must be premised on a tacit com-pliance, albeit forced, of the op-
pressed, who in turn legitimate these structures and thus partici-pate in its perpetuation. Acutely conscious of the Brahminical gun pointed to his head in its demand that he perform his assigned part and make the prescribed moves, Ambedkar indignantly flings the board away, violently scatters all the pieces, and adamantly refuses to play by their rules. Against the overarching violence of the Hin-
du state that threatens any chal-
lenge to its status quo with death, Ambedkar’s “courage” stands out in his affirmation of truth, and that is where the violence of his non-violence lies. This violent non-violence of Ambedkar that evinced in his discourses also translated into his praxis for resistance. He had famously declared in 1935 that though he was born a Hindu, he would ensure that he didn’t die a Hindu, and he stuck to his word. Days before his death, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism—having studied it all his life—in a public ceremony in Nagpur, Maharas-
thra. The inherent violence of his non-violent act of radical renun-
ciation notwithstanding, the sheer scale of the violence must be understood in light of the fact that half a million of his support-
ers also converted to Buddhism on that day. These ceremonial mass conversions persisted after his death on 6 December, 1956; such that by 1959, between fifteen and twenty million Dalits had renounced the religion that had persistently treated them as less than humans. The threat of these conversions to the integrity of the Hindu state should not be understated, and the question of conversion still holds valence in the current political climate, with the issue of gharwapsi, or “home-
coming,” the Hinduva’s response of re-conversion back to Hindu-
ism, being a case in point. Thus, the violence of non-violence that we identify in Kabir Kala Manch’s cultural performances is a legacy of this radical figure of Ambed-
kar, whose very invocation in a caste-ridden, Hindu dominated society is charged with the spec-
ter of violence. The appropriation of Ambedkar by right-wing, Hindu factions in their pandering to low-
er-caste electorates in contempo-
rary politics must be understood as their attempt to tame Ambed-
kar, to sanitize him, to render his explosive ghost benign. As a final note, it must be noted that the persecution of Kabir Kala Manch artists as “terrorists” by the state is a violation of the “right to perform.” This question had come to the foreground in 1989, in light of the brutal murder of Saf-
dar Hashmi, the theatre director of another political-cultural group, Jana Natya Manch. Without being too rhapsodic about theatre’s lim-
liminality, it must be conceded that the manifestation of the tensions fraught in the question of the right to perform in contemporary political discourses underscores the persistence of theatre’s rele-
vance as a modality of resistance. Bharucha locates the political va-
lence of theatre in its affirmation of freedom; as he asserts, “There can be no compromise on the de-

mand for this freedom - it is not a freedom-in-waiting, but a free-
dom which is embodied and lived every single time in the here and now of practice.” Against the realities of caste op-
pression that essentially serve to limit the freedoms that Dalits can enjoy, the radical affirmation of the right to perform, the freedom to perform, resonates with the call for Dalit freedom and justice. The fight for Kabir Kala Manch ac-
tivists who have been malicious-
ly incriminated by the state is a fight for artists, it is fight for caste emancipation, for the right to per-
form, and in the final instance, it is a fight for freedom.
The Revolution Should Not be Televised
The Oeuvre of Peter Watkins, Part II

Peter Watkins was concerned about the possibility of nuclear war from the beginning of his career, but then again, who wasn’t? Though nuclear brinkmanship once again bubbled to the surface of public life, it has yet to reach the Cold War fever pitch that produced Ingmar Bergman’s Winter Light, Stanley Kubrick’s Dr. Strangelove, and Watkins’ second film for the BBC, The War Game. A pseudo-documentary in the mode of the previous year’s Culloden, The War Game, released in 1965, looks to a plausible near-future in which Britain’s central government has dissolved and a network of regional commissioners and emergency committees have been set up around England in response to nuclear tensions between the Russians, the Chinese, and the Americans.

Watkins’ fictional film crew follows a group of London women evacuated to Kent in the south east and includes man-on-the-street interviews and footage of day-to-day life. “What am I going to feed them on? Are they colored?” one woman asks when told to expect ten evacuees in her home. “No, there won’t be a war. I’m quite convinced of that,” says another local. Shopkeepers gouge the prices of sandbags and wood needed to build shelters. Throughout the film, BBC presenter Michael Aspel stentoriously intones warnings like: “Should Britain ever thus attempt the evacuation of nearly twenty percent of her entire population, such scenes as these would be almost inevitable.” “Did you know this?” he asks people on the street about NATO’s increasing reliance on nuclear deterrents. This question will appear again and again in 1987’s The Journey.

“This could be the way the last two minutes of peace in Britain look” Aspel says gravely as alarms blare and a family scrambles for cover. When the heatwave from the first blast strikes the town, the image inverts to negative: eyeballs melt, skin and fur-niture burns, a boy screams. The extreme heat creates a firestorm, sucking in winds up to 100 miles per hour. “This happened after the bombing of Hamburg, at Dresden, at Tokyo, and at Hiroshima” we learn. The camera shakes violently, and scenes of people on fire are intercut ironically with quotes from religious texts created a subjunctive mood that gave the issue a powerful filmic immediacy, despite being made for television.

This testing of the limits of the possible seriously troubles the line between education and fearmongering. Watkins’ ardor for his subject matter is understandable in the face of near-total media silence on nuclear armament, yet his belief in the power of the filmed image to drive social change (an article of faith that has animated his entire career) borders here on the reckless. His evocation of the nuclear horrors of Germany and Japan reeks of opportunism, no matter how viable. But responsible art is never very interesting. It’s easy to snicker at the film’s dire final warning: “It is entirely possible that what you have seen happened. It’s easy to see why such an alarmist film was banned by the BBC, and also why it was so heartily embraced by the Academy, who gave it the Best Documentary Feature Oscar. The tension between carefully-researched fact and genuinely unsettling images created a subjunctive mood that gave the issue a powerful filmic immediacy, despite being made for television.

Regarding Others Regarding the Pain of Others

Peter Watkins, La Commune (Paris, 1871) – source: https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/2002/05/the-revolution-has-been-televised/
branch, under the watchful eye of a shadowy figure. The day of reckoning is at hand. The world stands on the brink of catastrophe. The fate of humanity hangs in the balance.

As therobotic legions march across the battlefield, the price of victory becomes clear. The cost of progress is too high. The cost of progress is the destruction of all that is sacred.

And yet, amidst the chaos and destruction, there are moments of quiet reflection. Moments when the human spirit shines through. Moments when hope and courage overcome the darkness.

But for how long? The cycle of violence continues. The cycle of violence is unbreakable. The cycle of violence is absolute.

And so the tale ends. The tale of the world's descent into darkness. The tale of humanity's struggle for survival. The tale of the artist in revolution. The tale of the art of revolution.

But the story isn't over. The story is only just beginning. The story of a new world order. The story of a world reborn. The story of the artist in revolution.
about the subject of this film. The film’s translators then introduce themselves and their nationalities as well. The first images we see are still photographs, taken and explained by Bob del Tredici, a Canadian artist and teacher who extensively documented the bomb making process, as well as the effects of nuclear disasters like Three Mile Island. People looking at and talking about photographs is Watkins’ preferred trope throughout the film, though it’s usually families seated around dining room tables, taking in pictures of the devastation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These families serve as audience surrogates, demonstrating again and again how the viewer will meet in this film. And, further, in case it wasn’t clear: “This film is about systems, the systems under which we all live, and the mechanisms they use to deprive us of information and participation.” “Did you know this?” he often asks both the film’s participants and the audience through his narration. “I didn’t,” he just as often admits. It’s classic muckraking, bringing to light the secrets on which oppressive structures thrive.

Watkins is, however, far more interested in the people doing the work of exposure themselves. He interviews a peace worker in Bangor, Washington who intentionally moved next to the train tracks so she could monitor the movements of the mysterious white trains, straight out of The X-Files, which bring nuclear weapons into the Trident submarine base that employs 95% of people in Kitsap County, across the sound from Seattle. In a later episode, the woman tells of nearly 250 communities along the train’s route from the Pantex plant in Texas to Bangor and then to the East Coast who keep vigil on the train’s movement and raise awareness in their towns of what’s passing through them, occasionally even sitting on the tracks, treating the trains as though they were carrying Jews to the concentration camps.

Forty-five minutes into the first episode, Watkins is still exposing filmmaking and teaching viewers how to watch. His explanation of the auditory scheme he will employ is worth reprinting in full, to illustrate both its absurdity and the lengths Watkins went in his quest to strip televisual media of its inherent manipulation:

Throughout this film, we will be showing you examples from around the world of current televisual affairs coverage, particularly the evening news. And in order to show you the increasing rapidity of television cutting, a phenomenon which is as marked in the contemporary cinema, we will indicate each direct cut or edit from one image to another with a noise such as (beep) or (blip) or occasionally (higher blip). You will hear (harmonic beep) when additional information such as a map or a caption is jumped onto the screen on top of the original image. We will also indicate in this way the internal cuts we have made to our own scenes of dialogue in the film. Please remember that each of these cuts or changes in image means that a specific editorial decision has been made by the television producer or by the editor or by the film director to change the primary visual information we are receiving.

Thankfully, he employs this system only sporadically, or the already challengingly film might have become torturous. He follows this explanation with a short tutorial on editing. Though it’s difficult to believe the general public was this unaware of how news media function, it clearly illustrates Watkins’ deep conviction, shared with Schoolhouse Rock and NBC’s “The More You Know” public service announcements, that knowledge is power.

Like all agitprop, The Journey is most effective when it’s least obvious. Watkins creates constant disjunctions between sound and image, employing non-sequitur shots the meaning of which only become apparent later. He often chops and remixes time, such as when he introduces a survivor in Hiroshima and then says that tomorrow she will lose thirteen of her family members. This recursive structure creates the sense of an eternal now in which the threat of nuclear extinction is ever-present.

Watkins also builds a complex sonic tapestry that subverts underlines the interconnectedness of all life on Earth, as in episode two when he overlays the sound of footsteps on train track gravel with a Polynesian chant and the voice of U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. This is no bellicistic flourish, but an aesthetic expression of Watkins’ core philosophical project. As Naomi Klein did with climate change in her 2014 exposé This Changes Everything, Watkins presents nuclear proliferation as the problem that circumscribes all others, both the root of and the clearest manifestation of global political and economic inequity. Watkins is a self-styled Poirot, rooting through the visual noise to understand the bigger picture.

For all the film’s lawyerly argumentation, however, I often wanted to yell, “Speculation!” or “Leading the witness!” while watching it. Watkins leaves his barrage of facts with constant appeals to emotion, yet his method

---

Peter Watkins, La Commune (Paris, 1871) — Source: https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/2002/05/the-revolution-has-been-televised/
replies so heavily on conjecture that his rhetorical structures nearly collapse. He asks a man protesting the so-called Shamrock Summit between Ronald Reagan and Canadian prime minister Brian Mulroney how he thinks the CBC triages what ends up on the news, and pesters child after child looking at the Hiroshima pictures around the various kitchen tables why they think they were never shown those images in school. It’s a bid for inclusion in form only, as the answers are always clearly prescribed by Watkins’ aggressive tone.

Watkins cites the work of Jerry Mander, whose *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* clearly had a profound impact on him. Mander positions television as the means of a silent coup that “takes place directly inside the minds, perceptions and living patterns of individual people. (The) technology makes it possible, and perhaps inevitable, while dulling all awareness that it is happening.” Watkins completely subscribes to Mander’s fatalistic view of the medium and agrees that it might be unredeemable. It’s undoubtedly a large part of why he’s made only two films since *The Journey*, 1994’s August Strindberg biopic *The Freethinker* (*Fritänkaren*), and *La Commune*.

If Watkins’ revolutionary zeal hasn’t dimmed, his confidence in cinema or television’s part in the revolution certainly has. The Internet has largely discredited his belief in the transformative, didactic power of photographs; if anything, the superfluity of images has made empathy even more elusive. We have access to infinitely more images online, yet human society is now one tweet away from ruin. Even if his roadmap is perhaps faulty, Peter Watkins is an unique and optimistic filmmaker, single-mindedly dedicated to an utopian ideal despite the galaxies of evidence to the contrary. If that’s not worth televising, what is?

Peter Watkins, *La Commune* (Paris, 1871) – source: https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/2002/05/the-revolution-has-been-televised/

---

**Look Back in Anger**

Review of Pankaj Mishra’s *Age of Anger*

Asher Wycoff

**We’re nearing 170 years since Karl Marx drafted the unofficial slogan of modernity: “All that is solid melts into air.” The modern experience has long been understood as one of painful ambiguity, in which rapid progress entails equally rapid dislocation and the extension of freedom dissolves traditional structures of meaning. The growth of mass production sinks thousands of artisans into a toiling proletariat. The extension of religious toleration accompanies a rapid proliferation of schisms and doctrinal conflict. Technological development entails the stultifying rationalization of the social world. These are familiar narratives, and they have similar implications for individual subjectivity. Modern individuals find themselves grasping for ways to make sense of a world in constant flux, a world in which they feel isolated and directionless, a world they feel has robbed them. The “structure of feeling” that emerges as tradi-**
tional structures of meaning collapse is Pankaj Mishra’s object of study in *Age of Anger*. The persistent disorder of the modern world has frustrated liberal expectations of indefinite progress, Marxist expectations of working class liberation, and Romantic expectations of a retreat into prelapsarian harmony. What has prevailed instead is an omnipresent frustration from which social conflicts bubble up in a non-correlative scatterplot formation. Skittering across time and space, Mishra sketches the outlines of this modern disposition with striking clarity and an impressive scope of reference.

While *Age of Anger* nods to nearly every major social thinker of the past three centuries, two great internal critics of modernity are especially central. Rousseau and Nietzsche assume the role of a Janus-faced Virgil to Mishra’s Dante, each guiding him through separate patterns of social reaction. The former exemplifies the utopian response, committed to “restoring the moral and spiritual unity” attributed to previous eras. The latter adeptly diagnoses the grimy underside of Romantic critiques. In Mishra’s adapted Nietzschean analysis, the commitment to restoring social unity stems from *ressentiment*, the simmering discontentment of the weak and isolated. It finds its motive in envy and its form in sabotage. While the modern era calls for Rousseauian reflection on the nature of true freedom, equality, and community, Mishra suggests, its rhythm has instead been dictated by the violent paroxysms of *ressentiment*. Examples are in no short supply. Anarchist assassins appear alongside Fascist paramilitaries, ISIS conscripts, the September 11 hijackers, and Timothy McVeigh. Despite the evident differences in their ideological and material positions, these figures of terror share a kind of collective psychology, characterized by a general frustration inculcated by modern life which drives them to disruptive, symbolic acts of violence.

Mishra stakes much of his argument on the presupposition that “the unfolding of time” has “no deep logic,” and this premise is readily reflected in *Age of Anger*’s structure. The chapters are organized thematically rather than chronologically, and it is not uncommon for a single paragraph to span three continents. Expressly eschewing materialist analysis and system-building, the book instead offers a collage, bringing together disparate but complementary elements into a cohesive image. The congruence between normative commitment and research method is striking.

Some readers may bristle at associations of, say, the Jacobins with Pol Pot, but Mishra’s more eclectic comparisons are excused somewhat by his central premise. As guiding principles go, the assumption that history lacks a coherent logic is a common and eminently reasonable one. Mishra occasionally allows the unstructured character he attributes to history to bleed into social organization generally, declining to comment more than superficially on the myriad forms of institutional domination that shape the *ressentiment* he so painstakingly catalogues. For instance, Mishra periodically notes that the subjects of this structure of feeling are almost invariably “angry young men,” aching for a “moral victory over the unmanly self.” Yet he offers no real account of the patriarchal domination that would pattern this kind of mass psychology, despite it being structurally common to every setting he visits. He notices, for instance, the erotic charge of early Italian Fascist rallies, as well as the weaponization of male sexuality more broadly, yet these reflections remain sporadic and impressionistic. The reader is afforded little opportunity to reflect on or interrogate the clearly gendered character of modern *ressentiment*.

This curious silence highlights a tension that persists throughout *Age of Anger*, a text torn between its own skepticism toward structural analysis and the historical inescapability of structural phenomena. Colonialism, patriarchy, and racial capitalism have had an undeniable role in shaping various expressions of *ressentiment*. While the omission of systematic institutional and material considerations makes possible a study of tremendous scope in a relatively short book, this happens at the expense of a more thorough interrogation of these phenomena.

Credit: Patrik Nygren CC BY SA 2.0
the expense of rendering the central argument unfocused and impressionistic. Mishra sublimates concrete relations of power into the chaotic totality of modernity, which necessarily obfuscates the dynamics particular to any given episode of political violence. The history that results is undeniably captivating, but it never quite coalesces into more than an array of carefully selected anecdotes.

There are also times when Mishra doesn’t entirely commit to his vision of formless history. The book’s centerpiece essays – “Losing My Religion” and “Regaining My Religion” – trace strong parallels between eighteenth-century Europe and the present-day Middle East and South Asia. Iran circa 1979 evokes France circa 1789, Modi’s India evokes interwar Germany, and so on. This constellation does entail an interesting subversion of Orientalist tropes, such that violent conflict prevails in these countries not because of their residual barbarism, but because of their thoroughly modernity. Still, the parallels drawn with earlier European history cannot help but leave the impression that, for instance, Iran is two centuries behind France according to Mishra’s rubric. The implicit vision is that the modern era inaugurates a pattern of eternal recurrence, slowly expanding to sweep more and more nations into the cycle of angry ages. That is to say, if one dives below the whirlpool of names and dates on Age of Anger’s surface, a coherent chronology does come into focus – a chronology that reasserts the West as an historical ground zero from which modernity eddies out into the surrounding world. Just as social scientific “objectivity” is often a Trojan horse for normative commitments, Mishra’s disavowal of theories of history seems to disguise his own.
On April 26 the PSC-CUNY Graduate Center chapter will vote on a resolution for **$7K or Strike!**

This vote is open to all members of the PSC Graduate Center chapter

**Thursday, April 26**

12:30–2:00pm

Room 5414

**Teachers in West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Arizona are leading by example. Disruption works!**

---

**The Resolution**

**WHEREAS** adjuncts make up 57% of the faculty at CUNY and teach 53% of classes, at an average rate of $3,500 per three-credit class with no compensation for research or advising, amounting to an annual salary of $28,000 for the same course load as full-time professors, who make $76,000 at the lowest step;

**WHEREAS** adjunct poverty is detrimental to student success since adjuncts, who teach the majority of lower-level courses, are forced to work additional jobs and consequently do not have the time they need and want to dedicate their students;

**WHEREAS** devaluing adjunct labor is the principal means of devaluing the labor of CUNY education workers across all titles;

**WHEREAS** the PSC has rightly put adjuncts at the center of the current contract campaign by demanding an adjunct minimum wage of $7,000 per three-credit course in the next contract;

**WHEREAS** $7k per course amounts to a living wage in New York City and is parity with what a full-time lecturer makes at CUNY for the same work;

**WHEREAS** $7k per course is a bigger demand than what the PSC has won in past contracts, which rarely keep pace with inflation, and thus requires more than collective bargaining supplemented by occasional demonstrations to win;

**WHEREAS** the PSC leadership has admitted in the 26 March 2018 bulletin This Week in the PSC that “the campaign to more than double adjuncts’ pay will be waged not at the bargaining table”;

**WHEREAS** the inefficacy of lobbying is exemplified by the PSC’s persistent lobbying year after year for the $200m Maintenance of Effort bill, which failed to stop Cuomo from vetoing it and failed to convince state lawmakers from overriding the veto despite having enough votes;

**WHEREAS** educators across the country, especially in West Virginia where striking teachers won 5% raises for all state workers, have shown the power and necessity of striking as an alternative means to achieving significant victories for workers;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the [Graduate Center Chapter of the PSC]/[members of the Graduate Center of the PSC assembled at the 26 April 2018 chapter meeting] supports going on strike if CUNY management does not offer $7k per course at the bargaining table.