

Sven Lütticken
**Toward a
Terrestrial**

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Toward a Terrestrial

The specter of communism was the specter of the International. The International Workingmen's Association (the First International) wasn't created until 1864, but the 1848 *Communist Manifesto* had already noted that the uncontainable, transnational nature of the threat of revolution had forced the European powers "into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies."¹ The *Communist Manifesto* largely reverts to discussing communism in the context of the nation-state, but Europe's empires were concerned precisely because the haunting was not containable – it disregarding national borders, the real-life embodiment of this spectral spread was the media of print and of steam travel, allowing for the dissemination of ideas and of agitators and organizers.

Thus, the International was a figment before it became an official organization, or a series of more or less successful approximations of such an organization. After the end of the International Workingmen's Association following the 1872 Marx/Bakunin split, the Second International was founded in 1889, becoming increasingly reformist and collapsing when the socialist parties rallied behind their national governments and armies at the outbreak of WWI in 1914; the Moscow-led Third International or Comintern tried to organize the world revolution from 1919 on, retreating to a defense of Soviet interests with Stalin's "Socialism in One Country" state policy in 1925–26, and organizing the antifascist Popular Front in the 1930s; while becoming ever more marginal, Trotsky's anti-Stalinist Fourth International was a hothouse of activity in the late 1930s and 1940s, and spawned its own opposition with C. L. R. James and Raya Dunayeskaya's Johnson-Forest Tendency. Whereas the Trotskyists at least aspired to be an international mass movement, the Situationist International of the late 1950s and 1960s took the vanguard model seriously to the point of privileging the exclusion of inclusion. Even so, they frequently presented themselves as a reincarnation of the First International, down to the document of its dissolution, Debord and Sanguinetti's *The Real Split in the International*, which echoed Marx and Engels's *Fictitious Splits in the International*, published exactly one hundred years earlier (1872).²

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain, when Jacques Derrida developed his hauntological inquiry into the "specters of Marx," he also conjured up a New International that would take the post-Cold War field of International Law as its point of departure, transforming it beyond its status as a neoliberal framework for US- and World Bank-led



Andreas Siekmann, *Wir fahren für Bakunin*, 1992–1995.

interventions.³ By now, neoliberalism has spawned its dialectical product in the form of *transnational neofascism* in Europe and beyond.⁴ The international of those who are often still euphemistically called “right-wing populists” is a decentralized network with powerful funders and strong nodes. Steve Bannon’s Brussels-based organization to support Europe’s neofascist parties is an attempt to organize this informal international under American tutelage.

Meanwhile, on the (artistic) left we see a reevaluation of the Popular Front of the 1930s, when the Soviet Union used the Comintern to orchestrate a Popular Front policy aimed at strengthening the left through alliances between communist and other leftist parties in various Western countries even while domestic repression was reaching ever greater heights.⁵

The specter of the International raises its head again – or the specter of the *Transnational*, for whereas the notion of the international might still be said to affirm the primacy of the nation state, that of the transnational accords primacy to the movement across borders. As Jonas Staal has put it:

While the Comintern was brutally weaponized, the lack of a Transnationale today shows its disastrous consequences: authoritarian-capitalist states pursuing aggressive foreign policies dominate transnational trade and military agreements, and subsidize corporate actors that disproportionately influence our political and economic life. This leads to terrifying situations in which the Rojavans, who bravely fought and sacrificed to protect their multiethnic and multireligious region in North-Syria against the Islamic State while establishing their own feminist democracy in the process, are forced to ask support from the Trump regime as the Erdoğan dictatorship threatens with their massacre. As Kurdish Women’s Movement activist and thinker Dilar Dirik argued, that would be the moment to call upon a “Left Air Brigade” – but in the post-Comintern world, there is no such thing.⁶

If we are “lacking a Comintern” in the fight against the Fascist Transnational, and more broadly the version of neoliberal capitalist “globalization” that is neofascism’s *raison d’être*, then what could such an anti-fascist and anti-capitalist International or Transnational (or, as I will argue, *Terrestrial*) look like? Is any speculation on that point bound to be frivolous, a mere pipe dream by armchair Leninists? Thinking through the international to come as an *unrealistic necessity* can help us take stock of

possibilities and impossibilities, necessities to contend with, and chances worth taking. Whereas Derrida sought to appropriate and detourn international law, the equally problematic and compromised framework or medium here is the globalism of the financialized art world – that integral part of the neoliberal world order and its relentless wealth redistribution toward the top.

You and What International?

Even before the *Communist Manifesto*, political radicalism was connected with international organizations and with sinister international conspiracies. The French Revolution and its radicalization, culminating in the execution of Louis XVI in 1793, could not *possibly* have been the result of a complex and overdetermined chain of events. It *had* to have been the work of devious conspirators. In this context, eighteenth-century conspiracy theories about the Jesuits, the Freemasons, and the Bavarian Illuminati came in handy. “Revelations” about secret Illuminati guidance in the Revolution by the conman Gagliostro, the sensational potboiler *Tombeau de Jacques de Molay*, which traced a conspiracy going back to the Knights Templar, and Augustin de Barruel’s *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire du jacobinisme*, created a powerful narrative.⁷

Meanwhile, some small-scale conspiracies were actually underway. In 1796, under the Napoleonic Directoire, Gracchus Babeuf and a group of coconspirators create a *directoire secret du salut public* which aimed to reinstate the 1793 constitution and radical equality. One of the key participants, the Italian Filippo Buonarrotti, sought to realize this program across Europe through his contacts in Italy, Holland, and elsewhere. The conspirators were quickly rounded up by Napoleon’s police. Babeuf was killed, and Buonarrotti embarked on a checkered career as the world’s first professional revolutionary, making the obscure 1796 *Conspiration pour l’égalité* well known through an 1828 book, and serving as a role model for another nineteenth-century conspirator: Blanqui.⁸ It was precisely this model of revolution as a putsch by a small gang of conspirators that Marx rejected in favor of mass organization. But what *kind* of organization?

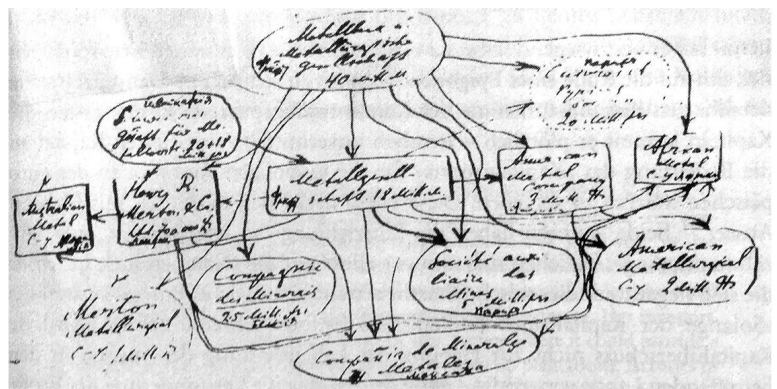
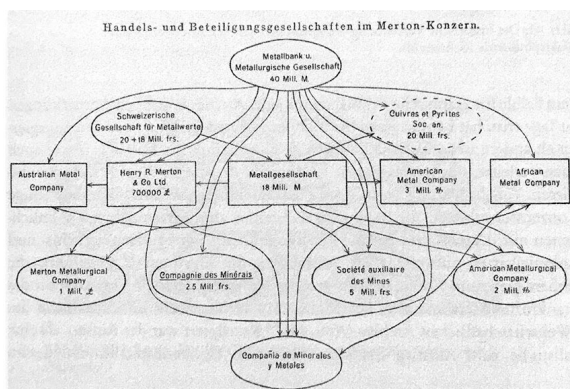
There is a long history of anarchist Marx-bashing that puts him in the corner of authoritarianism, with Bakunin as his libertarian counterpart. This is a self-serving distortion of the historical record. Bakunin was a grotesque and disastrous throwback to the plotting, scheming, conspiratorial kind of revolutionary, appropriating right-wing conspiracist fantasies both for the purposes of self-aggrandizement

(there was always a more secret order or directorate into which Bakunin could initiate you) and discrediting Marx in vituperative anti-Semitic attacks (alleging that the International had been taken over by a cabal of Jews in thrall to “their dictator-Messiah, Marx”).⁹ While Marx may have failed to reflect on the risk of perpetuating conventional organizational forms if the revolution was to initiate not just a takeover of the means of production but a qualitative leap in productive and social relations, Bakunin’s aim “to ensure the Freedom of the sovereign individual Ego” meant that Bakunin’s own ego and power ran unchecked.¹⁰ Whereas Marx, in fact, valued democratic protocol, “Bakuninism in operation meant the imposition of its own authority in autocratic forms: the establishment of a special sort of despotism by a self-appointed elite who refused to call their dictatorship a ‘state.’”¹¹ Furthermore, as *The Fictitious Splits in the International* rightly noted, Bakunin undermined the project of international solidarity by relapsing into an essentialization of races and the rhetoric of race war. Perversely, he projected his own racism onto Marx, whom Bakunin – the Pan-Slavist – presented as a Jewish Pan-Germanist in league with Bismarck.¹² Like many a contemporary race-baiter, Bakunin can certainly be said to have *lived* internationalism. In the mid-1990s, Andreas Siekmann’s project *Wir fahren für Bakunin* proposed subverting the infrastructure of neoliberal globalization for an activist-artistic tour through the almost 260 cities where Bakunin hung his hat at some point.¹³

The divided International Workingmen’s Association, which had come under intensified police scrutiny after the Paris Commune of 1871, was wrecked by Bakunin’s stratagems and quickly folded after the self-destructive 1872 conference in The Hague. Founded in 1889, the

Second International was not a centralized organization but rather a federation of national socialist parties and unions. While this means that it was clearly based in mass movements and could no longer very well be painted as a backroom conspiracy, the focus on national representative democracy in the end served to undermine it, with Bernstein’s reformism being the inauguration of social democracy as we still (just about) know it. Social democracy regarded the nation-state as a “neutral” institutional framework (rather than an instrument of the bourgeoisie) that can be used for progressive purposes. This reorientation notwithstanding, the International maintained a commitment to internationalism, with the Russian and Japanese delegates symbolically shaking hands during the 1904 Amsterdam conference. When the threat of war loomed large in 1912, the internationalist position was reiterated – only for the dominant social-democratic elements within the international to fold in 1914, rallying behind the various war efforts. By 1915, the Second International was dead, with both the social democrats and the radicals around Lenin and Luxemburg departing.

The First World War and the October Revolution were a shot in the arm for far-right conspiracy theories, with anti-Semitism cranked up to the max. The boundaries between popular fiction and political discourse were fluid. Having been forged in Paris during the 1890s, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* had their greatest impact around this time. In John Buchan’s 1915 novel *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (which is effectively the first spy novel, and became one of Hitchcock’s most successful English films) the protagonist is informed that “capital has neither conscience nor a fatherland,” and that the Jews are behind it all.¹⁴ To be exact, the Jews were deemed to be behind *both* international finance capital *and* anarchism/communism; these are



Robert's Liefmann's 1913 diagram of the Merton Metallgesellschaft, and Lenin's hand-drawn sketch based on that diagram. Both images feature in Daniel Damler's book *Konzern und Moderne. Die verbundene juristische Person in der visuellen Kultur, 1880-1980* (2016).

just different sides of the same conspiracy, and depending on their ideological profile, authors attacking the Jewish conspiracy may focus on one side or the other. In 1920, Henry Ford published the *Protocols* in an American edition, while Winston Churchill railed in the *Illustrated Sunday Herald* that one could scarcely “exaggerate the part played in the creation of Bolshevism and in the actual bringing about of the Russian Revolution by these international and for the most part atheistical Jews.”¹⁵ Drawing a genealogical line from Marx via Rosa Luxemburg to Emma Goldman and Trotsky, Churchill traced this sinister global Jewish conspiracy back in time to the Illuminati and the French Revolution. Here Churchill reveals his indebtedness to the older theories about the fall of the Ancien Régime, but of course his real interest lies closer to home, writing that they are the “mainspring of every subversive movement during the Nineteenth Century; and now at last this band of extraordinary personalities from the underworld of the great cities of Europe and America have gripped the Russian people by the hair of their heads.”¹⁶ In a fairly grotesque case of karma, a 1941 Nazi poster included Churchill himself in a diagram of the worldwide Jewish Conspiracy.

Meanwhile, a different, but related, imaginary had been gripping authors on both the left and right: that of the (international) business conglomerate, or trust. The paradigmatic case was Rockefeller’s Standard Oil, comprising many seemingly independent companies. Such trusts were often depicted in the media as octopuses with their tentacles reaching everywhere.¹⁷ More sober-minded scholars drew up flowchart diagrams trying to make sense of the networks of interconnected companies. One such diagram, published in 1913 showing Wilhelm Merton’s Frankfurt-based Metallgesellschaft, fueled British fears of a German-Jewish conspiracy, resulting in alarmist press reports and the protectionist non-ferrous metal bill of 1918.¹⁸ Lenin studied, copied, and modified that same 1913 diagram during his Swiss exile in 1915. As Daniel Damler has noted, he added geographic names to indicate the headquarters of the various companies, turning the corporate chart into a map of imperialism.¹⁹ For him, such an international trust was a crucial symptom of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. Imperialism, as defined by Lenin, equals the effect of finance capital:

A report from the Austro-Hungarian Consul at San-Paulo (Brazil) states: “The Brazilian railways are being built chiefly by French, Belgian, British and German capital. In the financial operations connected with the

construction of these railways the countries involved stipulate for orders for the necessary railway materials.” Thus finance capital, literally, one might say, spreads its net over all countries of the world. An important role in this is played by banks founded in the colonies and by their branches. German imperialists look with envy at the “old” colonial countries which have been particularly “successful” in providing for themselves in this respect. In 1904, Great Britain had 50 colonial banks with 2,279 branches (in 1910 there were 72 banks with 5,449 branches), France had 20 with 136 branches; Holland, 16 with 68 branches; and Germany had “only” 13 with 70 branches. The American capitalists, in their turn, are jealous of the English and German: “In South America,” they complained in 1915, “five German banks have forty branches and five British banks have seventy branches ... Britain and Germany have invested in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay in the last twenty-five years approximately four thousand million dollars, and as a result together enjoy 46 per cent of the total trade of these three countries.” The capital-exporting countries have divided the world among themselves in the figurative sense of the term. But finance capital has led to the actual division of the world.²⁰

When Lenin quotes the economist Heyman’s analysis of trusts in terms of a “mother company” controlling “daughter companies” and “grandchild companies” so that “if holding 50 per cent of the capital is always sufficient to control a company, the head of the concern needs only one million to control eight million in the second subsidiaries,” it is hard not to speculate that Lenin’s Communist International took a leaf out of the book of finance capital as analyzed by that same Lenin a few years prior.²¹ C. L. R. James noted that “each of the three great workers’ internationals [corresponded] in form to a particular stage of capitalism.”²² The Leninist Comintern, then, was a quasi-corporate endeavor befitting the age of monopoly capitalism and imperialism.

The October Revolution gave the Russian party and state a clear head start. With communist movements and parties in other countries still in the process of disentangling themselves from social democracy, and with the perspective of world revolution rapidly dwindling after 1920, the Bolsheviks all too eagerly infantilized the non-Russian parties, turning them into only seemingly independent local branches of what was de facto a political trust



Andreas Siekman, *Wir fahren für Bakunin*, 1992–1995.

ruled from Moscow. Anti-colonial and black liberation struggles were instrumentalized as well, though for some time this instrumentalization seemed the least bad alternative to radicals such as George Padmore or Otto and Hermine Huiswoud. The rise of fascism caused the Comintern to waver in its support of anti-colonial struggle in favor of alliances and coalitions within democratic capitalist nations in the West. The groundwork for the Popular Front era was laid at the 13th Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern in early 1933, and that same year *Negro Worker* editor George Padmore severed his ties with the Comintern precisely for what he saw as a betrayal of the anti-colonial cause.²³

In France, where the Front Populaire was highly successful for a while, a central image was that of *les deux cents familles*. This political myth derived from the fact that the general assembly of the Banque de France used to be constituted by the two hundred largest shareholders. This was generalized into the notion that two hundred families pretty much controlled the entire economy of France.²⁴ Such a myth was obviously susceptible to fascist cooptation, as one local instance of the *jüdische Weltverschwörung*, but the left sought to use it as a motivating myth in the Front Populaire, providing an enemy (high finance) that appealed not only to workers but to a broader segment of society. One Front Populaire poster, with the slogans “Maîtres et valet,” “Contre les 200 familles,” and “Vive l’union du Front Populaire,” shows a network of corporations and wealthy entrepreneurs funneling money towards the right-wing PSF party.²⁵ The image builds on a history of the graphic representation of trusts; the text identifies the two hundred families with “High Finance and Trusts.” At the top is a tower labeled “City” and “Finance Internationale.” From here continue direct connections to German Nazism, Franco, Italian fascism, Krupp and AEG, and to various French conglomerates and their shareholders.

Here, a Comintern-backed venture returns to Lenin’s tracing of trusts during WWI. With its trickle-down of influence and corruption from the “masters” (the financiers and industrialists) to the “valet” (the PSF politician), the diagram shows the failure of bourgeois democratic representation. However, what about the Comintern’s similarly hierarchic structure, with unacknowledged forms of control, with its “front organizations”? The Leninist-Stalinist Comintern mimicked the enemy all too well.

Sovereignty and Disregard

The anti-Semitic racialization of internationalism by reactionaries such as Churchill is no accident,

nor is Bakunin’s tendency to collapse class war back into race war. As Michel Foucault argued, modern historical consciousness emerged though the trope of race war. For the longest time, historical writing was power talking to itself: the history of sovereignty, in the service of sovereignty, glorifying the deeds of kings and the continuity of dynasties and empires.²⁶ In his 1975–76 lectures at the Collège de France, published as *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault presented an ambitious genealogical account of the emergence of what we would now think of as “history proper.” In eighteenth-century France, authors from the milieu of the reactionary aristocracy developed a historical myth about the “Barbarian” Celtic invasion of Gallo-Roman France as a weapon in a struggle against royal absolutism. For thinkers such as Boulainvilliers, the Franks – the Germanic invaders of Roman Gaul – were freedom-loving barbarians who liberated Gaul from Roman imperialism, thus becoming the true founders of France, whereas the modern French state represented a relapse into a foreign, Roman mode of government.²⁷ While Marxist historians have tended to associate the “rise of historical consciousness” with the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century, culminating in the French Revolution, Foucault gleefully presents the reactionary French nobility as the key historical actor.²⁸

Beyond France, Foucault goes back to seventeenth-century England, where during the reign of Charles I and the Civil War, Parliamentarians, Puritans, and Levelers invoked the Norman Conquest and idealized a pre-Norman, Saxon society in which laws were more just and the king’s powers more circumscribed. Here, the invaders (the Normans) had not been the liberators but those who subjugated a more egalitarian and just indigenous society. Nonetheless, the English and the French scenario are both “counter-histories” about warring races that introduce “new characters” as the real historical subjects: the Saxons, Norms, Gauls, and Franks.²⁹ Against the new “historico-political discourse” of mid-seventeenth century England, Thomas Hobbes defended the old conception of sovereignty. Foucault argues that Hobbes wanted to “eliminate the conquest”: “Leviathan’s invisible adversary is the Conquest.”³⁰

In a response to the challenges leveled at royal sovereignty during the reign of Charles I and during the Civil War, Hobbes removes the issue of legitimacy from the equation. He presents two scenarios for the founding of a state: one can have a commonwealth by institution (in which the subjects choose their sovereign) or a commonwealth by acquisition (conquest).³¹



Left: Eugène Delacroix, *Combat de chevaliers dans la campagne*, 1824. Oil on canvas. 81 cm x 105 cm. Photo: Louvre Museum/Wikimedia Commons; Right: Letterist International, "Construct Yourself a Little Situation Without a Future," 1955. Leaflet.

Before the advent of an Enlightenment notion of popular sovereignty and constituent assemblies in the eighteenth century, the idea that European subjects had in any way “chosen” their sovereign was a strategic fiction that in fact gives all the power to the sovereign, not to the people, who are condemned to follow their sovereign “representative.”³² In any case, it doesn’t really matter whether we are dealing with “acquisition” or “institution.” One way or another, the people are now tied to a sovereign (a king or, as a second-best option, some kind of committee) who holds all the cards. Intriguingly, Hobbes’s scenario of “acquisition” provides a close parallel with Hegel’s master-slave dialectic as interpreted by Kojève, and Foucault’s retelling brings these to the surface.³³

While Foucault dismisses Hegel as someone who performed an “authoritarian colonization” of historico-political discourse” by “[codifying] struggle, war, and confrontation into logic, or so-called logic, of contradiction,” one should remember that Foucault’s intellectual coming of age had coincided with the moment when the French reception of Hegel peaked, and he had close ties to a number of thinkers involved in this project.³⁴ As David Macey notes, during Foucault’s formative years at the École Nationale Supérieure, a certain French version of Hegel was dominant there, resulting in a spate of Hegelian theses (including Foucault’s own). Kojève, whose lectures were published by Raymond Queneau in 1947, had a well-known spin on Hegel as “the theorist of the unhappy consciousness, of the master–slave dialectic and of the struggle unto death for recognition, and the anthropologist of desire.”³⁵ Jean Hippolyte was another French Hegelian, with whom Foucault was in direct contact; and then there was Georges Bataille, with whose work Foucault engaged in depth. Bataille followed Kojève in his strong misreading of Hegel, which turned the master-slave dialectic from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* into a metahistorical myth not too dissimilar from the role played by the primeval horde in Freud: history began when, as a result of a primordial fight, the vanquished begged for mercy and accepted the life of a slave. However, whereas Kojève insisted that some kind of “universal and homogeneous state” would sublimate the dialectic of masters and slaves and end history, Bataille folded the Hegelo-Kojévian state sovereignty back into the sovereignty of masters, as opposed to serfs/slaves.

In Hobbes, as read by Foucault, the primordial battle posited by Hegel-Kojève as the *beginning* of history becomes a battle *in* history. Nonetheless, the basic plot is the same: if the victors do not kill the vanquished but let them

live, and the latter do not rebel, they thus renounce the risk of death and show “their preference for life and obedience.”³⁶ Foucault here translates and amplifies part of chapter 20 of *Leviathan* into the sound of Kojève and Bataille:

It is therefore not the defeat that leads to the brutal and illegal establishment of a society based upon domination, slavery, and servitude; it is what happens during the defeat, or even after the battle, even after the defeat, and in a way, independently of it. It is fear, the renunciation of fear, and the renunciation of the risk of death. It is this that introduces us into the order of sovereignty and into a juridical regime: that of absolute power. The will to prefer life to death: that is what founds sovereignty.³⁷

The sovereign, or the master, is born when the opponent chooses to not die, and, following Kojève, becomes a slave; or, following Hobbes as read by Foucault, becomes the sovereign’s subject. But what of those who do not even become full subjects? What of those whose condition is that of a colonized or enslaved subaltern, those who did not even count as proper subjects, as real humans? In modern European thought, the differences between various white (sub-)races paled in comparison when measuring and theorizing races from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, or the Americas.

By the early nineteenth century, after Napoleon, the triumph of cultural nationalism meant that history was now indeed written as the history of nations grounded in races and their intermixing. It is not so much that “the history of sovereignty” was replaced by “history as race war,” as that sovereignty itself was racialized, with a focus on barbarian invasions, *Völkerwanderungen*, and racio-ethnico-cultural continuities across the centuries.³⁸ In one of the most popular novels of the age, *Ivanhoe*, Walter Scott presented a beguiling mix of characters, but arguably the real protagonists were various races. In Scott’s own words, the novel dealt with

the existence of the two races in the same country, the vanquished distinguished by their plain, homely, blunt manners, and the free spirit infused by their ancient institutions and laws; the victors, by the high spirit of military fame, personal adventure, and whatever could distinguish them as the Flower of Chivalry.³⁹

If Enlightenment thought and the American and French Revolutions had redefined sovereignty as

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popular sovereignty (“We, the people”), Romanticism racialized the concept of the people, making “historico-political discourse” hegemonic. Throughout, the concept of race retained what Éric Michaud had called its “extreme porosity,” often ill-defined and mixed with notions such as nation and ethnicity.⁴⁰

Fluid specters such as the Nordic Race, the Germanic Race, and the Latin Race populated the writings of historians and art historians; art was seen as a symptomatic manifestation of essential Germanness, Nordicness, Latinness, etc. But those were the “civilized” races. While ostensibly focusing on the Saxons and Normans, in *Ivanhoe*, Scott keeps returning to Jews and black “Saracen slaves” as figures of the more or less absolute Other. Although Foucault notes that the counter-history of race war fed into nineteenth-century biological racism, he tends to treat the latter as a fairly forgettable phenomenon, and has little to say about colonialism – though he does quote the striking assertion by Adam Blackwood, in 1581, that “the Normans acted in England as people from Europe are now acting in America.”⁴¹ In the words of Sylvia Wynter, in a text that is virtually contemporaneous with Foucault’s *Society Must Be Defended* lectures, one could charge Foucault with an “oversight of the Friday relation” – that is, the centrality of the relation between colonizer and colonized Other (Robinson Crusoe’s Friday) to Western capitalism.⁴² Delving into the history of the terms “ethnos” and “ethnic” and discussing Wallerstein’s account of the emergence of the world economy (the capitalist world-economic system) in the sixteenth century, Wynter suggests that

the X factor of this mutation was the discovery of the New World; that is, the discovery of vast areas of land which in becoming the frontier of what was then still primarily a Christian civilization, transformed that group of people and of states into what we today call the West ... The West became the We, and the people of the Periphery-states became the OTHER. But the point is that neither the We nor the Other now existed as autonomous entities. Both We and Other were now bound in a concrete relation, a hierarchical global relation.⁴³

As Wynter notes, this “We” was defined by the ruling classes in relation to both (internally) ruled *classes* and (externally and internally) ruled *races*. Today, the Fascist Transnational everywhere stages a perverted class-race war: middle as well as working classes who feel that centuries of Western global dominance are

coming to an end are given handy scapegoats. Keyboard warriors and white supremacist terrorists imagine themselves as sovereign subjects whose disregard for others is justified by the fact that they are the master defenders of the white race that is the *real* sovereign, while other races are an undifferentiated mass of (potential) slaves. Embattled subjects reinvent themselves as foot soldiers of an international of (white) masters. Congresswomen of color are told by the American president to “go home.” Migration is seen through the prism of “replacement theory” – basically, barbarian invasions masterminded by “Cultural Marxists.” It’s not just migrants but also women and the specter of LGTB “genderism” that can be used as a convenient enemy, and ultimately some phantom race of queer/black/Jewish “liberals” comes to take on the features of some alien invading race threatening “our way of life.”

If the internationals of the nineteenth and twentieth century proposed a different “cut” in the social continuum than that effected by the right (class struggle as opposed to race war), today the challenge is to again effect a divergent redistribution of the sensible, in social and political terms – a cut across social and racial divides that scrambles neofascist essentialism. This means that one also has to challenge today’s dominant social classifications, as opposed to becoming entrenched in some liberal or progressive sense of being “on the good side” and becoming not so much the fascists’ worst nightmare, but their wet dream. If progressiveness is not just a lifestyle and a form of distinction but an emancipatory project and open offer, then what kinds of coalitions might be posited?

The International and Which You?

Neoliberal self-entrepreneurism creates a sense of life-as-survival: “A society in which everyone is their own entrepreneur is marked by an economy of survival.”⁴⁴ What forms of subjectivation does this generate, and what are the consequences for collaboration and association? According to a certain Frankfurt School analysis, it was the stunted subjectivity of subjects unable to develop into autonomous human beings that made the triumph of fascism possible. More recently, a neoliberal ideologization of the self-sufficient, entrepreneurial self or “sovereign individual” has fed into an online and offline culture of entitled (male, white) trolls and thugs – the yuppie as the larva of the fascist. When a sense of eroding privileges is essentialized, a life reduced to survival can quickly be translated into phantasms such as “white genocide.” However, (seemingly) progressive forces are clearly not



Artist Jonas Staal's photo of a Kurdish demonstration (2015) and its recent use in a call to protest against the US shafting the Kurds.

immune from the social pathologies of the age. The need for coalitions is constantly frustrated by jockeying for position through the construction of hierarchies of grief. In a volatile cultural economy, the accumulation of cultural capital often seems to prevail over the need to build infrastructures of coexistence.

Time and again, entrepreneurs of grief and victimhood assert their sovereign rights of subalterity, weaponizing historical violence as a unique selling point in the present. The growth of Jordan Peterson's zombie army seems to be regarded as only collateral damage, or as a boon for business. What is urgently needed is a socialization of the individuated sense of survival that would allow for the recognition of shared interests and the fostering of solidarity across some of today's highly mediated and carefully maintained divides. It is tempting to side with Jodi Dean when she argues for a shift from the victim to the comrade. She writes: "Survivors experience their vulnerability. Some even come to cherish it, to derive their sense of themselves from their survival against all that is stacked against them."⁴⁵ Years ago, in a different context, Elizabeth Freeman already questioned the turn toward loss and grief in queer theory, and warned that "melancholic queer theory may acquiesce to the idea that pain [is] the proper ticket into historical consciousness."⁴⁶ In contrast to identitarian victimhood, Dean claims that the "term 'comrade' points to a relation, a set of expectations for action. It doesn't name an identity; it highlights the sameness of those who share a politics, a common horizon of political action."⁴⁷

Dean's insistence on working towards the "comrade" is valid and valuable – particularly her insistence that "'comrade' names a relation characterized by sameness, equality, and solidarity. For communists, this sameness, equality, and solidarity is utopian, cutting through the determinations of capitalist society."⁴⁸ However, Dean's Leninizing stance would need as its dialectical counterpoint Bini Adamczak's critical reading of the (masculinist) forms of subjectivity and relationality that were promoted and produced by the Bolsheviks during and after the October Revolution.⁴⁹

Among the more problematic features of Dean's account is her (performative?) confidence in the power of the comrade relation to cut clean through the accumulated and embodied weight of history, as congealed in the present. In 2019, as in 1968, 1917, or 1871, what is required is long and patient work *with* and *on* the human wreckage that is us: the all-too-human mutants and monsters of actually existing capitalism. Becoming-comrade is always a work in progress, and progress is never assured. The relation

between survivor and comrade thus needs to be conceptualized in less dualistic and more dialectical terms.

The fight against the reduction of *life* to mere *survival* was one of the key tropes in the Situationist International's activities. At the height of the Cold War, this entailed not just a critique of consumerist, capitalist alienation in general, but also an attack on the imaginary of the nuclear bunker, on the "new aristocracy of the caves" that thought it could weather the nuclear winter.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the Situationist Asger Jorn also employed "survival" in a different register, not so much as a critique of capitalism but in a direct throwback to the nineteenth century. Pitting Nordic "Vandal" culture against Latin classical culture (and himself against Debord), Jorn searched for traces that would reveal the survival of this Nordic culture throughout the centuries, documenting graffiti and decorations in churches in the northwest of France to show "*survivances de l'influence nordique en Normandie*" long after the Vikings had integrated into French culture (becoming French-speaking Normans in the process, and going on to invade Britain).⁵¹ Admonitions by experts that there is no proof for any of this did not deter him, nor did the fact that this way of reasoning had culminated in Nazi ideology, which reads any form of culture in racial terms: Rembrandt is great because he was so quintessentially Germanic, etc.

While the Situationist critique of the reduction of life to a managed bio-social survival needs to be distinguished from Jorn's romantic and essentialist hypostatization of Nordic cultural survival, today biological, social, and cultural survival become a blur. The popular success of Jimmy Nelson's obscenely titled photo project *Before They Disappear* can be read as a symptom. This is a throwback to a trope from the heyday of imperialism: the trope of the "vanishing races" that are doomed to disappear soon. Many of these cultures have in fact refused to follow this script. Why, then, the success of this generic *National Geographic* version of Edward S. Curtis? Perhaps there is a sense that more and more forms of life are now put in the position of the "vanishing races" and have to fight for survival, as more social, racial, or cultural groups begin to sense that they, too, may be threatened and endangered *ethnics* – endangered economically, but also ecologically, as a consequence of the very economy that tends to turn more and more humans into surplus labor.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels had already asserted their internationalism by stating that

the real intellectual wealth of the individual depends entirely on the wealth of his real connections. Only then will the separate individuals be liberated from the various national and local barriers, be brought into practical connection with the material and intellectual production of the whole world and be put in a position to acquire the capacity to enjoy this all-sided production of the whole earth (the creations of man).⁵²

The slippage between “whole world” and “whole earth” here is suggestive. As Jean-Luc Nancy (who quotes this passage) has noted, capitalist “globalization” has “[circumscribed] the Earth more and more in a horizon without opening or exit,” resulting in “a world where we only find a globe,” or “an earth without sky.”⁵³ The earth is the aboriginal ground that enables the world-historical process, and is transformed and wrecked by its dialectical violence.

While highly aware of this, as his remarks on soil depletion and colonial primitive accumulation show, Marx did not develop a systematic account of the dialectic of earth and world. The Capitalocene forces us to reconsider the question. From Bruno Latour, Déborah Danowski and Eudardo Viveiros de Castro to Kelly Oliver, among others, the earth has come into focus as the non-identical Other of the world – an Other that may resist or act up in ways not foreseen. Latour and Danowski/Viveiros de Castro differentiate between Humans (the gas-guzzling inheritors of the “Moderns” and their state and corporate institutions) and whom they call the Earthbound or the Terrans, who are perhaps most fully incarnated in traditional, indigenous societies.⁵⁴ This is a twenty-first century version of history as race war or class warfare; the *real* political conflict would be that between the Terrans and their Human enemies in (trans)national guises. One way of looking at the Terrestrial is precisely as an organizational form for Terrans. In *Down to Earth*, Latour has also introduced an “attractor” called the Terrestrial, in contradistinction to three other such attractors: the Local, the Global, and the Out-of-this-World. This returns us to the familiar terrain of Sciences Po theoretical radicalism. If the Terrestrial is to be a political actor, as Latour claims, it needs to be understood precisely as the new International – as something to be built, as an artefact.⁵⁵

Building and Branding the Terrestrial

Marx famously noted that what distinguishes the worst of architects from the best of bees is that the architect makes a conscious design, whereas the bee follows its instinct.⁵⁶ In the age of swarm intelligence and hive minds, we are less certain

about this distinction – less certain about not being bees. No doubt the Terrestrial in some way also imposes itself on the humans that build it, and no doubt issues of nonhuman representation, of including “nonhuman comrades,” are pressing.⁵⁷ Yet it is clear that in a constellation that includes other technological and environmental actors, humans have a particular capacity – or a need – to translate what may be conflicting imperatives into design, and to ask: If the Terrestrial must be built, how to go about this project?

The Terrestrial can have presence as a specter, as branding without much in the way of organizational or institutional infrastructure to back it up. We have seen that historically, the international was a myth or a conspiracy theory before it took on a degree of reality – and internationals can always revert to that, or try to exploit their image as one tactic among others. After May ’68, the Situationist International found itself turned into “a collective star” by media and hangers-on with a tendency to regard the upheavals as the result of a “worldwide plot by a handful of individuals,” even as the SI as an organization was struggling to continue meaningful work. Always having opted for an exclusive, reductive membership to ensure they not become a hierarchical mass organization (even though some might argue that on its micro scale it still managed to be plenty hierarchical), the remaining Situationists (essentially Debord and Sanguinetti) decided to let the myth do the work. *The Real Split in the International* boasts that “from now on, Situationists are everywhere,” and “the more famous our theses become, the more shadowy our own presence will be.”

In recent times, the Invisible Committee has embraced mythmaking, leading to excited Fox News hosts waving *The Coming Insurrection* in front of the camera. At the same time, even while catering to conspiracist fantasies, the Invisible Committee is of course part of an ecosystem or network of groupuscules and movements. One way to think about the coming Terrestrial is in terms of a coalition of survivances, of *zones à défendre* in the Global South, the former West, and elsewhere: a loose coalition from which more public manifestations can emerge. A next step would be looking into networked forms for transnational organization, decision-making, and funding. As with previous internationals, the coming Terrestrial can only be an intervention in and modulation of existing (capitalist) infrastructures – not the networks of steam travel and trusts, but of cheap flights and cloud computing, with their destructive ecological consequences.

Crowdfunding the transnational may not be the biggest challenge. What would the

mechanisms of decision-making be like? How much organizational centralization is needed on top of a decentralized technological infrastructure? How to get beyond Marx-vs.-Bakunin reenactments? How to marshal the intelligence of the hive mind and of volatile combinations of distinct individuals? Are there actually existing institutions and organizational structures that can be incubators of the Terrestrial, including in the art world, that playground of global finance capital? If the contemporary condition is a “disjunctive unity of present times,” of different presents, then it come as no surprise that deepening and widening rifts traverse the field (or fields?) of art.⁵⁸ Various types of para-institutional organization-building and movements to decolonize or “liberate” existing institutions are so many attempts to exit a dominant and dismal version of Contemporary Art to create and maintain platforms and forums for futurity beyond and against futurism. This process involves the severing of alliances and the building of new alliances: becoming *Zeitgenossen* – comrades of time – with people, groups and forms of life outside of Contemporary Art.⁵⁹

In an age when accelerationism – that geriatric disease of the European art-affiliated intelligentsia – hawks its retro-futurist fantasies, the transnational must not be another manifestation of accelerationist longing for the jetpacks of yesteryear. *Tomorrowland ist abgebrannt*. The accelerationist future is already here: the unfolding future of surveillance capitalism, of machine learning and predictive analytics, of relentless value extraction from the fabric of human (inter)actions. There is no earthly reason to believe that an acceleration and intensification of this history would result in an Engels-style leap from quantity to quality, would result in a dialectical self-overcoming of capitalism, before the planet has become uninhabitable for those who self-identify as *some kind* of human. The transnational needs a notion of futurity that is multiple and open to contradictions between different versions of the present – contemporaneity as anachronistic montage. As Yuk Hui suggests, it is crucial to ask

what futures are still available for imagination and realization. If we identify Enlightenment thought with modern technology as an irreversible process guided by universality and rationality, then the only question that remains to be asked is: To be or not to be? But if we affirm that multiple cosmotechnics exist, and that these may allow us to transcend the limit of sheer rationality, then we can find a way

out of never-ending modernity and the disasters that have accompanied it.⁶⁰

If existing blockchain-based models such as the Distributed Autonomous Organization are essentially based on property and contracts, amounting to a “reinvention of the company form” in a Peter Thiel-scented ether of libertarianism, the question still remains whether anti-state technolibertarianism can provide some means for creating “a networked, self-sustaining framework for the development of consensus” whose distributed infrastructure offers some much-needed opacity for the preparation of public interventions⁶¹ What Dan McQuillan writes of AI can be applied more broadly: “AI is currently at the service of what Bergson called ready-made problems; problems based on unexamined assumptions and institutional agendas, presupposing solutions constructed from the same conceptual asbestos ... We don't need autonomous machines but a technics that is part of a movement for social autonomy.”⁶²

Can the machinery of networked surveillance capitalism be used to foster forms of decision-making that would actually enable a “Left Air Brigade,” as well as a myriad of less spectacular activities? What would the contemporary distributed version of Lenin’s crypto-corporate Comintern be? That the questions are tentative and gauche (never mind the possible answers) may be the strongest indication that these are the right questions. Asking and discussing them is one way of giving the specter a degree of reality and agency.

x

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Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm>.

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fahren für Bakunin," in *Bakunin – ?Ein Denkmal! Kunst – Anarchismus* (NGbK/Karin Kramer Verlag, 1996), 74–79.

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Winston Churchill, "Zionism versus Bolshevism" (1920), quoted in in Ellen Engelstad and Mimir Kristjánsson, "The Return of 'Judeo-Bolshevism,'" *Jacobin*, February 16, 2019 <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/02/antisemitism-judaism-bolsheviks-socialists-conspiracy-theories>. The full text of Churchill's article can be found on any number of neofascist websites.

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Churchill, "Zionism versus Bolshevism." Churchill contrasts "useful" and patriotic "National Jews" with the scheming and rootless "International Jews." It is the latter who are behind Bolshevism and who need to be combatted (including, and especially, by the National Jews). Churchill embraced Zionism and presents the creation of "a Jewish State under the protection of the British Crown" as a strategy to thwart communism's plans of world domination.

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Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended," 95.

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Dean, "Four Theses on the Comrade."

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