

Posthuman Prehistory

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Gulf Labor's *52 Weeks* campaign (2013–2014) sought to draw attention to the working conditions on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi, where a new Guggenheim Museum (among other franchises) is being constructed. Migrant construction workers here are often tied to a single employer who acts as their 'sponsor'; they have their passports confiscated and are shackled by debt to recruiters. Charles Gaines and Ashley Hunt's contribution, the poster *Cultural (En)richment*, shows a pale black-and-white rendition of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi's Frank Gehry architecture mingled with multiple (partial) copies of the famous abolitionist 1788 diagram of a slave ship. The anonymous, identical, proto-Neurathian slave figures encircle and traverse the ghostly Gehry architecture; if the latter's virtuoso CGI forms seem intent on exacerbating spatial complexity, in Gaines and Hunt's version the space becomes all the more warped; it reveals the dimensions that stay otherwise folded into the architecture's high-tech facades.

On the upper two-thirds of the poster, the rows of abstracted slaves become an increasingly pale white background for a text. As the background figures become lighter towards the top, the text becomes darker (which of course means that as one reads the text from top to bottom, it starts to pale). Addressing 'a world whose imagination of wealth is rooted in the free labor of others' in the blood of migrant workers and slaves, the text ends with Gertrude Stein-like proclamations:

A WORK CAMP IS A WORK CAMP,
AND A SLAVE IS A PERSON, A PERSON MADE A SLAVE,
A WAGE SLAVE IS A WAGE SLAVE,
IS A SLAVE IS A SLAVE BY WHATEVER NAME YOU CALL IT,
A PERSON REDUCED TO THE ENRICHMENT OF ANOTHER.¹

In his 1930s lectures on Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), Alexandre Kojève famously claimed that 'History stops at the moment when the difference, the Opposition, between Master and Slave Disappears'.² So long as there are still masters and slaves, we have history. In Kojève's version of Hegel's philosophy, the philosophical attainment of absolute knowledge can only take place at or after the end of history,

1 See the downloadable poster at <http://gulflabor.org/2014/week-17-charles-gaines-and-ashley-hunt-cultural-enrichment/>.

2 Alexandre Kojève, in Allan Bloom, ed, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, James H Nichols Jr, trans, assembled by Raymond Queneau, Cornell University Press, New York, 1980, p 43

IN A WORLD WHOSE IMAGINATION OF WEALTH IS ROOTED IN THE FREE LABOR OF OTHERS, WHERE CULTURE AND THE GOOD LIFE ARE ENABLED BY COUNTLESS SERVANTS AND WORKERS WITH NO CHOICE BUT TO ACCEPT THAT JOB AT THAT PAY, IN A SOCIETY WHOSE WEALTH IS THE BLOOD OF MIGRANT WORKERS AND PEOPLE DISPLACED FROM THEIR LAND, IT WILL SEEM LIKE NOTHING TO ENSLAVE A PEOPLE, TO ROB A PEOPLE OF THEIR NARRATIVE AND SUPPLY THEM A NEW ONE AS BUILDERS OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S TEMPLES.

IT'S JUST ANOTHER DAY'S WORK,
BUILDING CULTURE ON THE BACKS OF THE VULNERABLE,
BUILDING THE HIGHER THINGS UPON THE SUBORDINATED.

WHOSE HANDS ARE THESE?
WHOSE BODIES ARE THESE?
WHOSE LABOR IS THIS?

FOR
A WORK CAMP IS A WORK CAMP,
AND A SLAVE IS A PERSON, A PERSON MADE A SLAVE,
A SLAVE WAGE IS A WAGE SLAVE,
IS A SLAVE IS A SLAVE BY WHATEVER NAME YOU CALL IT,
A PERSON REDUCED TO THE ENRICHMENT OF ANOTHER.



Cultural (En)richment, poster, 2014

which in turn would mean the creation of a ‘universal and homogeneous state’ – with homogeneous here meaning ‘free from internal contradictions; from class strife, and so on’.³ In other words: the master/slave dialectic has been abrogated. In the ‘Master and Slave’ section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel had argued that self-consciousness, in order to be *an und für sich*, needs another consciousness that recognises it: a dependent, slavish consciousness that makes possible the *für sich seiende* consciousness of the Master.⁴ Kojève turned Hegel’s account of the formation of human consciousness into a historical scenario that has played out from the dawn of man to the dawn of a classless society.⁵

In the German original of the *Phenomenology* Hegel uses the ambiguous terms *Herr* and *Knecht*, which could be translated as lord and serf or master and servant. That this becomes master and *slave* in many English translations could be seen as a serious distortion, as Hegel clearly did not opt for the German word *sklave*. However, Susan Buck-Morss compellingly argues that Hegel’s work was informed by his knowledge about the slave revolt and revolution in French Saint-Domingue (1791–1804), which became independent as Haiti in 1804.⁶ Therefore we might say that the English and French translations (Kojève writes about the *maître* and *esclave*) desublimize Hegel. For Kojève, human history started with two people fighting over *recognition*. However, in the end, the winner was only recognised by the defeated, who was allowed to live as a slave or serf, and whose recognition of the master is not exactly the free recognition that had been the prize of the fight.

[The vanquished] must give up his desire and satisfy the desire of the other: he must ‘recognise’ the other without being ‘recognised’ by him. Now, ‘to recognise’ him thus is ‘to recognise’ him as his Master and to recognise himself and to be recognised as the Master’s Slave.⁷

Kojève resocialises and repoliticises the servant/serf figure from the *Phenomenology*, albeit in the form of a rather oneiric scenario. In his later *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel himself had explained actual slavery by noting that spirit, in its ‘earlier untrue manifestation’, had to posit the other as objectified; the other was reduced to a thing (*Sache*), to property.⁸ Here slavery is presented as flowing in an all but necessary manner from spirit’s early immaturity. Hegel thus frames ‘objective’ slavery in terms of the ‘subjective’ master/servant dialectic as discussed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – but what for him is a historical phase that has already been overcome is turned into the very principle of history as such by Kojève. This generalization has problematic implications. Fights that end with enslavement of one party usually begin with one party having a historically accumulated advantage over the other (better weaponry, laws on their side, etc). Kojève’s archetypal protohistoric fight fantasy hardly does justice to any of this, either in relation to the ancient world or to colonialism or industrial capitalism.⁹ In the 1930s it was CLR James (1901–1989), not Kojève, who analysed the Haitian Revolution under Toussaint Louverture (1743–1803) as an exemplary moment of self-emancipation by colonial slaves.¹⁰

If all forms of servitude or disenfranchisement are slavery, then nothing is; you may as well paint ‘SLAVE’ on your face over a conflict with your record company. However, provided one does not allow it to gloss over essential differences, the *generalisation of slavery* in Kojève’s master/slave dialectic has a polemical and analytical sting. Generalisation

3 Bloom’s English translation of the Introduction is incomplete; the full text is in Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, *ibid*, p 90.

4 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [1807], Hans-Friedrich Wessels and H Clairmont, eds, Felix Meiner, Hamburg, 1988, pp 12–137

5 As Perry Anderson puts it, ‘the *Phenomenology*, bearing at once on the formation of the self and the development of the world, in language of opaque passion and elusive intensity, invites the largest interpretive constructions while withholding most of the empirical specifications needed for them’. Perry Anderson, ‘The Ends of History’, in *A Zone of Engagement*, Verso, London, New York, 1992, p 316.

6 Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 2009

7 From Hegel’s section on the master/slave dialectic, quoted in Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, *op cit*, p 8.

8 GWF Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* [1821], *Werke* 7, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1986, pp 123–125

9 Things become rather obscene in Kojève’s 1943 *Esquisse d’une phénoménologie du droit* (published posthumously; Gallimard, Paris, 1981), in which the author stresses repeatedly that from the slaves’ point of view, it is ‘just’ that the master is master, for he has taken a risk (in the fight for life and death) that the slave refused to take.

10 CLR James’s *The Black Jacobins* was published in 1938, when Kojève was still working his way through the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* in Paris.

here should not mean equivalence, but attentiveness to the Other of Mastery in all its historical iterations and gradients – let us call ‘it’ by that name.

In recent years, both Kojève’s and Francis Fukuyama’s version of the End of History thesis have undergone a certain revival; Fukuyama, of course, had notoriously riffed off Kojève’s Hegel interpretation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, declaring a democrático-capitalist ‘End of History’ under American auspices after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In 2014 Fukuyama was invited to lecture at Amsterdam’s Stedelijk Museum at a conference on metamodernism that also involved derailed actor Shia LaBeouf running circles around the museum building.¹¹ This renewed interest even in Fukuyama’s cartoon version of Kojève’s cartoon of Hegel is indicative of a widely felt crisis of historicity and futurity, in which the notion of the *posthistoire* enters into a complicated conceptual dance with that of the posthumanity. The posthistorical meets, or just misses, the posthuman.

Ultimately, the relevance of the ‘end of history’ lies not so much in the doubtful diagnostic accuracy of the overall thesis as in the defamiliarising effects – the *ostranenie* – that it can engender. In this context, the notion of the *posthistoire* enters into a complicated conceptual dance with that of posthumanity. The relevance of the ‘end of history’ thesis lies not so much in its doubtful diagnostic accuracy as in the defamiliarizing effect – the *ostranenie* – that it can engender. To bring this out, it is Kojève’s essential syllogism that must be engaged with: if slavery, then history.

THE LONG PREHISTORY, OR: HISTORY AS SLAVERY

The end of history has had its fair share of surprising twists and turns. In 1989, Lutz Niethammer published his study of the origins of the notion of the *posthistoire* – a seemingly French term used only in German discourse, due to Hendrik de Man (1885–1953) and Arnold Gehlen (1904–1976).¹² Niethammer discusses Kojève’s 1933–1939 lectures, which were published in 1948 by Raymond Queneau, but emphasises a Germanic genealogy of disappointed ex-Nazis or former ‘Conservative Revolutionaries’, who established the *posthistoire* discourse after World War II. Tracing the notion of the *posthistoire* back to Antoine Cournot’s (1801–1877) nineteenth-century account of modern social life as tending towards a final beehive-like state, these post-war prophets of posthistory diagnosed a society out of joint and beyond human intervention.¹³ If, for Niethammer, the End of History was a somewhat quaint notion associated with defeat, with being on the wrong side of history, the months following the release of his book were marked by the publication of Fukuyama’s 1989 article ‘The End of History?’ (which would become the basis for his book *The End of History and the Last Man* in 1992) and the fall of the Berlin Wall.¹⁴ The ‘end of history’ now became associated with capitalist-liberal triumphalism.

At the same time, Arthur C Danto (1924–2013) had considerable success with his loosely-based-on-Hegel account of the end of art. Danto argued that with Duchamp and with Warhol, art had become *its own philosophy*, and fully cognisant of its essence – which is rather

11 <http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/calendar/symposia/metamodernism-the-return-of-history>

12 Lutz Niethammer in collaboration with Dirk van Laak, *Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?*, Patrick Camiller, trans, Verso, London, New York, 1992 [German edition 1989]

13 See Hendrik de Man, *Vermassung und Kulturverfall: Eine Diagnose unserer Zeit*, A Francke, Bern, 1952, p 125. This is the origin of the mistaken attribution of the term ‘*posthistoire*’ to Cournot, which Gehlen took from de Man. De Man here argues that since history is produced by man, and since it appears to be impossible to assert human influence on contemporary events, the world has become posthistorical. For Gehlen, see *Studien zur Anthropologie und Soziologie*, Luchterhand, Neuwied am Rhein, Berlin, 1963, p 344. Niethammer discusses this genealogy on pp 82–85.

14 Perry Anderson in Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Penguin, London, 1992, p 279

different from Hegel's actual point that in the modern era philosophy had made art obsolete as a vehicle for the self-development of spirit. For Hegel, art was ultimately insufficiently spiritualised, and hence was left behind; for Danto, it became fully philosophised.¹⁵ The fact that art had come to full philosophical self-awareness meant that '[anything] ever done could be done today and be an example of post-historical art', and that '[no] art is any longer historically mandated as against any other art'.¹⁶ In the *posthistoire d'art*, anything goes! What was left out of Danto's bizarro-Hegelian plot is any sense of art as practice – of artistic praxis and its contradictions in a field that is profoundly implicated in the retooling of capitalism, of labour and subjectivity, and in exploding inequality. The historicity of contemporary art is to be located not in neo-, zombie- or meta-modernist parlour games, but in its engagement with the antagonisms that underpin and undermine it.

Modern Western discourse has often equated the writing of history with *having* a history. Tribal, oral cultures were hence deemed prehistorical, and the decline of writing and rise of visual media in the late twentieth century has been taken as evidence of a waning of *historical consciousness*, which in turn amounts to a waning of history itself. By contrast, Marx polemically extended the notion of prehistory into the heart of the historical world of industrial capitalism: the century of Hegel may have *felt* and *thought* historically, but socially and economically it was stuck in primeval mire:

The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production ... but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.¹⁷

This passage, of course, can be seen as an example of Marx at his most teleological and accelerationist, imposing a linear plot on the mesh and mess of history. Who is he to say that this is 'the last' antagonistic mode of production? But for all the problems enwrapped in Marx's condensed statement, there is a countervailing element. If we have so far been in prehistory, then history proper must involve a qualitative and quantitative leap, a *potentialisation* beyond what is imaginable from a 'prehistorical' framework. Marx here is not too far removed from Deleuze, who was planning a book on Marx at the time when he wrote in *What is Philosophy*:

History today still designates only the set of conditions, however recent they may be, from which one turns away in order to become, that is to say, in order to create something new.¹⁸

What we have here is an implicit acknowledgement that the problem may precisely be what passes for history *today* – an extended prehistory. Is another history possible?

In one of the most thorough responses to Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*, Perry Anderson (1938) has cautioned against adducing anecdotal proof against the 'end of history' thesis, noting that '[the] end of history is not the arrival of a perfect system, but the elimination of any better alternative to one'.¹⁹ However, this raises the question 'what counts for a better alternative, and why?' Was the Soviet Union an

15 See Arthur C Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986; Hegel's account of the end of art is in GWF Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*; 1 Werke 13, Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, eds, Suhrkamp Taschenbauch Wissenschaft, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1986, pp 141–142.

16 Arthur C Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Lydia Goehr, Foreword, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1998, A W Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, Bollingen series, pp 35–44, p 12, p 27

17 Karl Marx, 'Preface', in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie, 1859], S W Ryazanskaya, trans, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>

18 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, trans, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p 96

19 Anderson, *The End of History and the Last Man*, op cit, p 336

actual alternative? Even before Stalinism reached its apogee, council communists such as Anton Pannekoek (1873–1960) strongly denied this, and in the 1940s renegade Trotskyists such as CLR James followed suit.²⁰ Was Maoist China – and the form of state hypercapitalism it gave birth to – an alternative? Of course, the 1960s and 1970s saw a proliferation of alternatives to these ‘alternatives’ in the form of radical movements in the West and in the Third World. It is to such movements, then as now, that we should look. And we should make sure to include those movements that attack the nation-state, which for Kojève and Fukuyama were the sole paths to post-history – from Mexican Zapatistas to confederalist Kurds.

Kojève read the master/slave dialectic through Hegel’s alleged conviction that Napoleon had completed history; more specifically, Kojève insisted that for Hegel the 1806 battle of Jena had been the completion of history and the moment when the principle of the universal and homogeneous state had been established.²¹ As is now well known, Hegel never wrote any such thing.²² Some passages in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* appear to come close to an ‘end of history thesis’, but if Hegel states that Europe is ‘the end of world history’, elsewhere he opens up history once more by calling America ‘the land of the future’. For Kojève there could be no ‘real’ future, either in America or in Europe, since all countries were now just gradually catching up with the end of history, progressively implementing the universal and homogeneous state and for the first time creating integral, ‘whole’ human beings as *citoyens*; neither master nor slave, or, to be precise: working for ‘himself taken as a legal entity’, for capital, the bourgeois was *his own slave*.²³ The bourgeois intellectual went one step further in *not working* in any recognised sense, thus being ‘as stripped of the essential character of the Slave as he is of that of the Master’.²⁴

Meanwhile, in 1789, the auto-slave that was the bourgeois-turned-revolutionary – and having created ‘the situation that introduces into him the element of death’ – inaugurated the universal and homogeneous state: it is in the Terror that the State is born in which this ‘satisfaction’ (a synthesis of master and slave, ie ‘man’) is attained. This State, for the author of the *Phenomenology*, is Napoleon’s Empire. ‘And Napoleon himself is the wholly satisfied Man, who, in and by his definitive Satisfaction, completes the course of the historical evolution of humanity.’²⁵

In comparison with some of Alexander Kluge’s (b 1932) television shorts and short texts on Napoleon, the difference could hardly be greater. For Kojève, Napoleon is relevant only in so far as he completes history and thereby is the ‘wholly satisfied Man’, whereas Kluge focuses on a concrete man who is a brilliant military strategist but who also blunders, grows old and slow and cannot live up to his own myth. In one clip, Kluge interviews comedian Helge Schneider as Napoleon, sporting an outrageous French accent (or rather a *Corse* accent) and musing on the sartorial blunders of his Russian campaign: how could he, hailing from the south, have known about the Russian winters? Granted, he had given his soldiers warm bearskin hats, but in retrospect warm boots might have been necessary.

20 For Anton Pannekoek, see for instance ‘The New Blanquism’ [1920], <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1920/blanquism.htm>; ‘Party and Working Class’ (1936), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1936/party-working-class.htm>; ‘Lenin as Philosopher’ (1938), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1938/lenin/index.html> In opposition to mainstream Trotskyism, CLR James and Raya Dunayevskaya’s ‘Johnson–Forest Tendency’ argued that the Soviet Union represented a form of state capitalism. For their definitive statement, see CLR James with Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee (Boggs), *State Capitalism and World Revolution* [1950], Charles H Kerr, Chicago, 1986.

21 For Kojève on Jena, see *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, op cit, p 44.

22 As Eric Michael Dale has argued, one can see why even before Kojève, Engels and Nietzsche felt that Hegel *ought* to have declared history over, had he been consistent. If, according to Hegel’s anti-Schellingian conception, the absolute is ‘ganz wesentlich Resultat’ – if spirit is indeed an absolute subject realising itself ever more fully, this suggests that the process could come to an end. Eric Michael Dale, *Hegel, The End of History, and the Future*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014, pp 13–109.

23 Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, op cit, p 65, p 68

24 Ibid, p 68

25 Ibid, p 69

26 Ibid

27 On Kojève and Stalin see Hager Weslati, 'Kojève's Letter to Stalin', *Radical Philosophy* 184, March/April 2014, pp 7–18. At the end of the 1936–1937 lectures, left out of Allan Bloom's English edition (for which he is criticised by Weslati, p 9), Kojève notes that for Hegel it would still have been a problem that *Bewusstsein* (Napoleon) and *Selbstbewusstsein* (Hegel) were separated. To overcome this duality, Napoleon would have to invite Hegel to Paris to become the philosopher of the universal and homogeneous state. 'Ceci pourrait se faire (et encore!) si Napoléon "reconnaissait" Hegel, comme Hegel a "reconnu" Napoléon.' The 'et encore' can only refer to Stalin and Kojève, but in the end it does not seem to matter if we are talking about 1806 or 1937: 'Quoi qu'il en soit – l'histoire est terminée'. See Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel: leçons sur la Phénoménologie de l'Esprit professées de 1933 à 1939 à l'École des Hautes Études*, Gallimard, Paris, 2014, p 181. By contrast, in a late (1968) interview, Kojève looks back at his Hegel lectures and paraphrases his stance at the time rather less ambiguously as amounting to: Hegel was wrong by about 150 years, Stalin and not Napoleon is the *Vollender* of history, and I'm his prophet. Kojève, interview from *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, 1–15 July 1968, in Kojève, *Überlebensformen*, Andreas Hiepko, ed, Merve, Berlin, 2007, p 61.

28 Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, op cit, p 160

29 Kojève mentions the 'self-determination of the Papuans' along with the 'two world wars' in the 1962 footnote, ibid.

30 Ibid, p 161

31 Christoph Kletzer, 'Alexandre Kojève's Hegelianism and the

This can be read as Kluge's desublimation of Kojève's half-hearted politicisation and socialisation of Hegel, which has no truck with the actual effects of Napoleon's actions on the mass of people, or with his stance on actual slavery. No matter if Napoleon's military campaigns cost the lives of more than one million Frenchmen, and if he in fact revoked the National Convention's Decree of 16 Pluviôse (1794), which had abolished slavery in the French Colonies, thus actually re-legalising slavery with the Law of 20 May 1802. For Kojève, such details are just one of many eggs that go into the Hegelian omelette. In any case, the rebellious French colony falls outside the scope of Kojève's 'universal' history, whose sites are European, and whose crucial stages are the French Revolution and the Empire.

In his 1937–1938 lectures, Kojève notes that since 'we have seen that in the Bourgeois world there were no Masters', the French Revolution could not have been 'a class fight properly so-called, a war between the Masters and the Slaves'.²⁶ But then why, during this period, did Kojève bank on Stalin, as the supposed heir to a revolutionary tradition of class struggle? Had Napoleon and the battle of Jena *really* been the end, or just the beginning of the end? If the bourgeois worked for capital, ie for themselves, then what about the industrial working class and their wage-slavery? Was Stalin the real *Vollender* of history, the new and improved Napoleon to complement Kojève's new and improved Hegel?²⁷ Would they finally bring about the end of history in their own lifetime?

The second edition of Kojève's lectures from 1962 contains a lengthy footnote to a footnote from the original 1947 edition, which Raymond Queneau had put together on the basis of transcripts. In the 1962 note, Kojève claims that by the year 1948 he had finally come to the conclusion that the end of history was no longer a future event, and that Hegel had indeed been right to date it to the battle of Jena.²⁸ Everything that had happened later, including two world wars and the anti-colonial struggles (whose intellectual figureheads were of course often exponents of Hegelian–Marxian dialectics, from CLR James to Aimé Césaire (1913–2008)), amounted to nothing more than the continuing birth pangs of the posthistorical world that had been irrevocably founded under Napoleon.²⁹ In the end, the Soviet Union, the United States and Europe offered just so many slightly different versions of the universal state. And was the United States not more truly Communist than the Soviet Union? Everything was moving in the direction of the universal and homogeneous state, whatever its superficial ideological colours.³⁰

In the process, the nation-state was in fact becoming the instrument of its own *Aufhebung*: working for the French ministry of economic affairs after World War II, Kojève was actively involved in the creation of the European Economic Community (the EU's predecessor).³¹ Kojève had become the proto-Fukuyama, a technocrat or clerk for the seemingly post-political state – a move whose significance Boris Groys has repeatedly stressed. In 2012, Groys curated an exhibition of the photos Kojève took during his travels as a civil servant in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the picture postcards he collected during

Formation of Europe', in *The Cambridge Yearbook of European Legal Studies*, vol 8, 2005–2006, John Bell and Claire Kilpatrick, eds, Hart Publishing, Oxford, UK and Portland, Oregon, 2006, pp 133–152

32 <http://www.formerwest.org/ResearchExhibitions/AfterHistory>, accessed 24 July 2016

33 Georges Bataille, letter to Alexandre Kojève, 6 December 1937, in G Bataille, *Choix de lettres 1917–1962*, Michel Surya, ed, Les Cahiers de la NRF, Gallimard, Paris, 1997, pp 131–132

34 *Le Dimanche de la vie* (Gallimard, 1966) is the title of one of Raymond Queneau's 'Kojévian' novels, which Kojève reviewed for G Bataille's journal *Critique*: 'Les Romans de la sagesse', in *Critique* 60, May 1952, pp 387–397.

35 Bataille, *Choix de lettres*, op cit, p 133

36 Boris Groys, 'WikiLeaks: The Revolts of the Clerks, or Universality as Conspiracy', *Open!* 22, 18 November 2011, pp 36–45

37 The term 'hacker class' is McKenzie Wark's; see *A Hacker Manifesto*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 2004.

38 On Metahaven see for instance <http://www.theverge.com/2013/12/19/5223620/hi-res-censorship-metahaven-on-edward-snowden-and-rebranding-wikileaks>. Trevor Paglen's photos were published on Glenn Greenwald's *The Intercept*, <https://firstlook.org/theintercept/2014/02/10/new-photos-of-nsa-and-others/>.

those trips.³² It would seem that what is left after history is cultural tourism in the service of the universal and homogenous state.

While Georges Bataille (1897–1962) largely followed Kojève in his interpretation of Hegel, he argued that one fundamental problem remained unresolved. If this society had indeed ushered in the posthistoire, the problem for Bataille was that of 'negativity without employment', as he put it in a letter to Kojève in 1937.³³ How would humans and societies use their potential for negation and transgression during the posthistorical 'Sunday of life'?³⁴ Bataille averred that 'unemployed negativity' could take a number of forms, from art to crime. In art, however, the negation of the world of utility and labour in the form of pure *dépense* (as in a potlatch) is in turn objectified and assimilated to the realm of production.³⁵ Today this process has progressed dramatically beyond Bataille's historical horizon. Visual art in particular has been integrated into the financialised potlatch of the neoliberal economy; yachts moored in Venice during the preview and opening of the Venice Biennial are floating symptoms of escalating income and wealth inequality.

In this potlatch of financial capitalism seemingly anything goes, and the 'historical' value of the most dubious tchotchkes can always be compellingly argued by hired art historians. Have we entered a *posthistoire d'art*? We appear to live in more Dantesque times than ever, in which the art market monetises almost anything and art has become one branch of what neoliberal Stalinists insist on calling 'the creative industries'. The overhaul of institutions and subjectivities is presented as a necessity, and historical change becomes something tantamount to climate change: manmade, perhaps, but beyond social or political intervention. This would appear to be a *posthistorical revolution*; the contradiction in terms has become flesh. But of course, new versions of the master/slave dialectic proliferate in the expanding cultural sphere.

Not everybody is happy with the amount of eggs that need to be broken to uphold Kojève's state, which seems to revert to its Stalinist incarnation and create new forms of exploitation and oppression. If, for Boris Groys, Kojève's later career is an example of the intellectual becoming a seemingly posthistorical 'clerk', Groys has also drawn attention to new forms of dissent and dissidence that have arisen among those working in 'universal service'.³⁶ The 'revolt of the clerks' à la WikiLeaks and Snowden is one symptom among many; here the 'hacker class' refuses to be bought off by dubious privileges and acknowledges the sliding of service into serfdom.³⁷ Artistic projects ranging from Metahaven's unsolicited 'rebranding' of WikiLeaks to Trevor Paglen's photos of NSA sites and Simon Denny and David Bennewith's 2015 Venice Biennale 'Secret Power' project installations articulate the aesthetic politics at play here: the dialectic of social, legal, ideological and technological forms of (in)visibility.³⁸

With capitalist accumulation and wealth redistribution crucially depending on information and the 'creative industries', intellectual and artistic labour are profoundly implicated in the proliferation of old and new forms of slavery. This is true both for conditions that constitute or approximate literal slavery *and* in the more generalised sense of *Knechtschaft* as serfdom or servitude, to use the Hegelian term – from

entire ethnic groups being repressed to migrant and domestic workers devoid of rights and legions of first-world denizens shackled by debt. In a number of initiatives, artists and academics acknowledge and act upon their implication in far more severe inequality and exploitation. Gulf Labor's collective Guggenheim boycott, its protests at the New York Guggenheim or the aforementioned *52 Weeks* poster campaign are a case in point here.³⁹ Meanwhile, activities for and with legal and illegal immigrants and migrant workers – from Tania Bruquera's 'Immigrant Movement International' in New York (Tate Modern, 7–15 August 2012) to the 'We Are Here' support group in Holland, to name just two – start from an acknowledgement of the 'creative' sectors' manifold dependency on migrant workers.

The litmus test for the end of history is not the 'absence of systemic alternatives', conceived as different types of states, but the overcoming of slavery, oppression and inequality. Even then, are we not actually talking about the end of history-as-prehistory? Would this not in fact be the opening up of another kind of history – of history properly speaking? In the context of his New World Summit and New World Academy projects, artist Jonas Staal works with a variety of international groups that have been put onto terrorism watch lists for their contestation of particular nation-states, and at least in some cases also of the nation-state as such. This is true in particular of (parts of) the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its affiliated organisations. In prison, the PKK's Abdullah Öcalan discovered the work of Murray Bookchin (1921–2006) and started to critique the nation-state, attacking it both as a stronghold of capitalism and – in support of the Kurdish Women's Movement – as irredeemably patriarchal. In Rojava (also known as Syrian Kurdistan), where the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) is the PKK's counterpart or affiliate, the Kurdish liberation movement has consequently started to organise in the form of 'autonomous cantons' rather than in the form of a nation-state – strongly suggesting that there is still a potential for historical plasticity.⁴⁰

Staal discusses this case in the context of his New World Academy's collaboration with the Kurdish Women's Movement.⁴¹ In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Friedrich Engels discussed the origins of slavery and the reduction of women to property in monogamous patriarchal households as interdependent processes; today, the Kurdish Women's Movement puts it more starkly in that 'the very experience of PKK led the movement to conclude that women's enslavement constituted the very basis of all subsequent enslavements as well as all social problems'.⁴² We need not accept this statement as incontrovertible historical fact any more than Kojève's primeval fight scene. Neither Engels's complex and nuanced narrative nor the Kurds' stark statement presents such early forms of enslavement as being coeval with the emergence of the human and of history; hence *another* history – beyond our ongoing long prehistory – should be possible.

Class war, anti-colonial struggles and feminism were the forms taken by the master–slave dialectic during industrial modernity. In the contemporary world, class composition is far more messy and sprawling than in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

39 On Gulf Labor see also Andrew Ross, *The Gulf: High Culture/Hard Labor*, OR Books, New York, 2015.

40 Jonas Staal, 'To Make a World, Part III: Stateless Democracy', *e-flux* 63, March 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/to-make-a-world-part-iii-stateless-democracy/>

41 <http://newworldsummit.eu/>; <http://newworldsummit.eu/news/new-world-academy/>

42 Havin Güneşer, 'Feminicide', *New World Academy Reader 5*, special issue, Renée In der Maur and Jonas Staal, eds, *Stateless Democracy*, BAK, Utrecht, 2015, p 63. Güneşer here echoes Öcalan, who has written in similar terms about women's enslavement. Also see Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* [1884], Penguin, London, 2010.

Various rights movements sought to inscribe sexual or gender minorities more fully into neoliberal capitalism, with some success. However, the pressure of unequal global wealth distribution keeps mounting on the EU and the USA's borders. Kojève's decision to present the 'universal and homogeneous state' – or what has to pass for it, from Napoleon's Empire to Stalin's Soviet Union and a unified Europe – as the true sublation of the master/slave dialectic is a reduction of his own historical dialectic to a teleological caricature. No modern state has created a condition in which Kojève's bourgeois subjects have truly overcome the master/slave division in themselves. Forms of allo-slavery and auto-slavery abound – but certainly on drastically differing levels of comfort.

Again, this is not about obscuring fundamental differences, but about forming alliances across real divides. Kojève's primal scene is still with us – the scene that inaugurated our extended prehistory. Rather than proving the end of history, Kojève has shown that it never truly began; nor has art become mere posthistorical play. Could the future, then, still have a future?

ONTO-HISTORY

We have been living in Fukuyama's neoliberal post-cold war version of Kojève's plot for decades. There is no alternative, or so the mantra goes. 'Liberal democracy' is the culmination of history – and has to be defended against the Al-Qaedas and Isises of this world by revoking ever more features of democracy and liberalism. The finality of modern grand narratives has been domesticated in the form of a perpetual present; this ongoing catastrophe is plotted out with the same managerial skill as the salvation histories and metanarratives of old, with no other finality than its own perpetuation. The seeming triumph of neoliberal capitalism, which made End of History theses so attractive around 1990, has generated effects which amount to a real-time disaster movie.⁴³ The crisis of the concept of the *human* comes to the fore with ever greater clarity and urgency. Prehistory gives way not to history but to a posthistoire that is marked by humankind becoming a *posthumanité*.

Fukuyama's 1992 *The End of History and the Last Man* was characterised by faith in technological solutions; Fukuyama lambasted eco 'extremists', reassuring the reader that alternative technologies will help to create and maintain the posthistorical state.⁴⁴ Ten years later, in *Our Posthuman Future*, the author argued that his earlier diagnosis had been mistaken because techno-scientific progress made sure that truly historical developments were not a thing of the past.⁴⁵ Fukuyama now averred that history would actually go on (even after the fall of the Soviet bloc) as long as techno-science, and especially biotechnology, continued. History did *not* end; humankind was about to. Fukuyama now argued that the next historical leap was that from the human to the posthuman through genetic improvement – a process that the author acknowledges has many risks, musing that 'young people begin to suspect that classmates who do much less well than they do are in fact genetically not fully human. Because, in fact, they aren't'.⁴⁶ With this somewhat oneiric return of class antagonism within Fukuyama's

43 Oxana Timofeeva, 'The End of the World, From Apocalypse to the End of History and Back', *e-flux* 56, June 2015

44 Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, op cit, p 86

45 Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002, p 15, pp 216–218

46 Ibid, p 9

‘post-ideological’ discourse, the beginning of a posthuman history is proclaimed.

The Enlightenment concept of humanity is well and truly disintegrating, not into classes or even ‘races’, but potentially into different (sub)species. It is still as crucial as ever to make sure that large groups of people – such as ‘illegal aliens’ – do not drop out of the category of the human. Recently, the YAMS artist collective used Sylvia Wynter’s 1994 polemic ‘No Humans Involved’ as the basis for an exhibition.⁴⁷ Wynter’s title refers to a code used by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) that was revealed in the wake of the Rodney King riots: NHI or No Humans Involved meant that only jobless young black men had been involved in a crime. The officers in question would likely not have denied that the young black men in question were human from a strictly biological point of view – Wynter argued that genetic racism with its claims about biological inferiority was increasingly being replaced by a social racism that focused not on ‘blacks as such’ but on specific *kinds* of blacks. The disenfranchised inner-city youngsters may have been part of humankind biologically speaking, but not part of humanity. What if increasing wealth gaps and the relegation of the majority of the global population to subsistence outside of the neoliberal world order leads to a disintegration rather than a generalisation of the concept of humanity? And does the genetic not enter through the back door as ‘social racism’ creates a health gap, as well as a wealth gap?

Hegel’s work effected a decisive shift from ontology to history, or a historicisation of ontology itself, with nature being the ‘refuse’ of the idea, an externalisation produced by spirit in its process of self-actualisation. Part of this process was art, but art in its historical sense ended when spirit moved on the rarefied heights of philosophy. In art, the idea was manifested in the material form of an external reality, but philosophy left behind such externalities. However, we remain entangled in contradictory and unstable forms of life, in living forms; furthermore, conceptual thinking is shaping material reality to an unprecedented degree and in unexpected ways. Art may not have ended, but the aesthetical-cum-political issues of the present require forms of aesthetic practice that are not necessarily limited to institutionally sanctioned art. Being is liquefied and transmogrified into new forms of becoming; being itself is revealing its temporal nature. If for Speculative Realists the original sin of modern philosophy is the replacement of ontology by epistemology and history, today the fabric of being is itself subject to historical change.⁴⁸ Human intervention comes to produce quantitative and qualitative change in the world, and as a consequence the historical turn of the nineteenth century is mirrored by an ontologisation of history under the impact of the life sciences and ecology.

Data show that, after a slow start, the Anthropocene truly kicks into gear with the ‘great acceleration’ since the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁹ As much as by carbon-induced climate change and nuclear power, the Anthropocene is marked by a crisis of the *anthropos* itself. This manifests itself in dire warnings about the proliferation of hybrids and ‘chimeras’ in the service of global corporations. For the former Situationist, shepherd and eco-activist René Riesel, we are in the process of becoming both post-historical and post-human: ‘There once was history, but now there

47 HOWDOSAYYAMIN-AFRICAN?, ‘No Humans Involved’, exhibition at Witte de With: Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, 2015. The exhibition’s title is a reference to the 1994 essay ‘No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues’ by feminist philosopher and writer Sylvia Wynter, NHI, Knowledge for the 21st Century, vol 1, no 1, autumn 1994, Knowledge on Trial. See exhibition guide, <https://issuu.com/wittedewith/docs/no-humans-involved-english-wdw-rich>

48 See for instance Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, Zero Books, London, 2011.

49 Will Steffen et al, ‘The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration’, *The Anthropocene Review*, 16 January 2015, pp 1–18. See also Ian Angus, ‘When Did the Anthropocene Begin ... and Why Does It Matter?’, *Monthly Review*, vol 67, issue 4, September 2015, <http://monthlyreview.org/2015/09/01/when-did-the-anthropocene-begin-and-why-does-it-matter/>

50 René Riesel and Jaime Semprun, *Catastrophism, Disaster Management and Sustainable Submission*, Roofdrukk, Amsterdam, 2014, p. 12. The French original was published by the Éditions de l'Encyclopédie des Nuisances in 2008.

51 Alain Leauthier and René Riesel, 'The Progress of Submission Moves at a Frightening Speed: An Interview With René Riesel', *Liberation*, 3–4 February 2001, translated from the French by *Not Bored!*, August 2007, http://www.notbored.org/riesele-interview.html#_ednref16. For a critical comment on Riesel's habit of quoting Theodore Kaczynski, see note 11.

52 Kerstin Stakemeier, 'Desiring Catastrophe: Fictitious Sciences of a Less Probable Life', unpublished manuscript.

53 Karl Marx, 'On the Jewish Question' [written in 1843 and first published under the title *Zur Judenfrage* in Paris in the journal *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, 1844], quoted in John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2000, p. 74.

54 Donna J Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Routledge, New York, 1990, p. 150. For Riesel's single-vision response to Haraway, see *Remarques*, p. 88.

55 Nick Land, 'Circuitries', in Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian, eds, *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, Urbanomic, Falmouth, 2014, pp. 251–274.

56 Beatriz Preciado [now Paul B Preciado], *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, Bruce Benderson, trans, Feminist Press,

is only integrated "resource" management.⁵⁰ As a Unabomber-quoting pastoralist, Riesel advocated traditional techniques of co-evolution, which have created the humanity that is now under threat: 'Our fate is in our hands: it is a matter of renewing the historical process of humanisation.'⁵¹ Between such apocalyptic screeds and visions of a post-human golden age, today's theory is the theorisation of an ongoing real-time catastrophe that is no longer a matter of solid things melting into thin air; rather, the material basis of life is subject to various forms and degrees of liquefaction and recomposition.

For much of modern philosophy the locus of the human was the *subject*; to be human was to negate and externalise (and ideally to own) the other as *object*. However, for Hegel the subject is not necessarily or ultimately a person: *Absolute Spirit* (Geist) is the ultimate subject – unfolding through the (relative) agency of individuals, but ultimately irreducible to them. Napoleon on Saint Helena is the refuse of spirit. If the subject can negate or instrumentalise the human, can the human do without the subject? The promise of a humanity beyond the modern bourgeois subject as property holder can of course be found in Marx and in many later Marxist and non-Marxist thinkers, including Deleuze and Haraway.⁵²

For Marx, the historical process was to culminate in the overcoming of alienation and the full realisation of the human, beyond stunted forms of bourgeois subjectivity that depend on the sale or acquisition of labour-power or other commodities; on property and objectification. The realisation of human freedom was to be not an autocratic rule of the human subject over the rest of the world, but rather the end of such autocracy: 'The view of nature which has grown up under the regime of private property and of money is an actual contempt for and practical degradation of nature ...'; in this sense Thomas Müntzer (c. 1489–1525) declares it intolerable that 'all creatures have been made into property, the fish in the water, the birds in the air, the plants on the earth – all living things must also become free'.⁵³

The realisation of a human and humane society would then also end the enslavement of the nonhuman – which does not mean that humans would become animals, à la Kojève. This is precisely where an author such as Donna Haraway picks up where Marx left off. Building on her critical account of primatology, Haraway also floated an influential feminist 'cyborg myth', noting that 'By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism', and that the cyborg 'is a creature in a post-gender world'.⁵⁴ Whereas Haraway has since adopted an eco-feminist focus on the current 'human animal' and its cohabitation with other species, others have placed greater emphasis on the transcending of the human through technological change (and drugs), as in Nick Land's (b. 1962) 1990s drugs and techno-driven mash up of Deleuze and Guattari, Haraway and science fiction.⁵⁵ More recently, Paul B Preciado (b. 1970) has literalised Haraway's cyborg notion in embracing 'the medical and biotechnological dimension of gender production' and in making possible new (trans)gender identities.⁵⁶

In today's networked capitalism, a generalisation of affect has resulted in something that reads like a parody of such theoretical *démarches*: myriads of ego-affirming post-Fordist subjects become mechanically

New York, 2013, p 33,
p 106

entangled on Facebook and in the Twittersphere, where the cumulative effects of human agency can take on quasi-meteorological forms (*shitstorms*, as flame wars are known in 'German English') even while data trails left behind by users result in their objectification courtesy of government agencies and corporate entities. And in the mazes of the network, of course, are those whose labour is not of the post-Fordist variety: construction workers in Abu Dhabi, the illegal immigrants in Europe – or the inmates of US prisons whose unpaid labour keeps the prison-industrial complex going, much like Facebook users keep that company afloat. Perhaps we are witnessing an *acceleration of prehistory* that takes us all the more securely forward into the past. Slavery and submission become more varied and diversified as the human becomes ever more blurry and ill-defined.

In the meantime, we may well agree with Fredric Jameson that the 'sense of history' or 'historical consciousness' has been weakened due to the spatialization of society and culture and by a focus on instantaneousness or presentness over long duration: 'In this new dialectic of omnipresent space and the living or temporal present, history, historicity, the sense of history, is the loser: the past is gone, we can no longer imagine the future.'⁵⁷ The sequence 'history, historicity, the sense of history' is intriguing: it is not quite clear whether these are meant as synonyms or as a progression. Can history be equated with 'the sense of history'? Practices of refusal and resistance create new antagonisms, new histories. Even before any question of 'viable systemic alternatives' arises, we can speak of history (or at least prehistory) wherever there is inequality and antagonism, no matter how latent. However, if such practices are spontaneous, instantaneous and short-termist, without a wider horizon, they may well fall short of what is needed. Today we see history racing forward, downward, in despite of or because of the decline of historical consciousness. But this decline, with the concomitant short-termism and blindness to consequences, produces a certain kind of history – a history devoid of futurity, beyond human agency, and thus of proper historicity.

Radical practice must ask itself if, and to what extent, it contributes to the undoing and redoing of 'actually existing history' – the history that has so far remained prehistory in part due to limited conceptions of historicity in teleological terms, leading up to a final battle near Jena or elsewhere. In a condition in which the underclasses and potential new (sub)species often appear as human flotsam or refuse to be managed, they appear as posthuman objects rather than posthuman subjects.⁵⁸ In the prehistory of the posthuman, the fundamental task is to identify in one's praxis and surroundings those moments of objectivity and subjectivity that could make other histories possible: dumb inertia and swift moves; visible actions and opaque tactics; algorithmic rigour and all too human detours.

57 Fredric Jameson, *An American Utopia*, Verso, London, 2016, p. 13

58 See Achille Mbembe and Thomas M Blaser, 'Africa and the Future: An Interview with Achille Mbembe', 20 November 2013, <http://africasacountry.com/2013/11/africa-and-the-future-an-interview-with-achille-mbembe/>

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