iv: Model States

What we must chiefly bear in mind, then, is that physical society in time must never for a moment cease to exist while moral society as an idea is in the process of being formed; that for the sake of man's moral dignity his actual existence must never be jeopardized. When the craftsman has a timepiece to repair, he can let its wheels run down; but the living clockwork of the State must be repaired while it is still striking, and it is a question of changing the revolving wheel while it still revolves.

—Schiller, “Third Letter on the Aesthetic Education of Humanity”

And when some other minion said

stop! can't it all stop

for a moment?

that was high comedy

idealist tragedy

And now he's waiting for the same

time

as me

—Rodrigo Toscano, “Future Perfect"

Consciousness combs with the sterile

shalelike concentric accumulation of remainder.

A light in already clear

waters, as advancement a median of the ever ready tears in nine light

unanswered change, and brings dissolution.

The cemetery wheel of citizenship, a theory of chance will not change.

—David Micah Greenberg, “Common Will"

Although no one has succeeded in teleporting so much as a single sub-atomic particle, some have managed to teleport the quantum states those particles are in. These states describe the exact characteristics of a particle, so in theory a body could be reconstructed particle by particle if enough quantum states were teleported.

—*The Economist* (June 19, 2004)

Every generation has apocalyptic visions, can’t imagine its continuance, as in Rivette’s Paris nous appartient (1960), where the exiled American communist journalist, experi­menting with Art Brut in his SRO, warns Anne of converging super-militarized oligarchical death waves.

My apartment is bathed in the sounds of a Red Bull event by the river, men and women amplified, shouting and generating excitement that gets shunted into product, religious techniques, walking back and forth wireless.

A small amount of movement or sound has come to signify a mouse, a rebuke to systems of control by which people might be stamped out, round like a nickel and grey, with tails trail­ing and eyes bulging brown.

Citizens shouted very differently among their own remnants and ruins, Roman and otherwise, on 2/15/03, in the largest mass event and first global manifestation, against war or any­thing else, on record, detourning totalizing yelling into group demand, stamping the little silver cans into a huge reflective shield and straining to articulate what should follow, fighting enervation and daunting scale with dissolved caffeine and sucrose.

The scale of the problem feels daunting, as a state, partially because people create meanings in small groups. Steve says there’s a study: one can only love 200 in a life, which seems to be a kind of parameter for the processing of affiliation, a limit which not coincidentally seems to underlie clans and anar­chism.

If power, or the means for making and instantiating judgments, is changed in scale by relations that form by agree­ment, force, or ambient internalization, and if every articulation proposes, produces, or reifies sets of relations, then the distribution of power touches individual articulations, which form states.

The contradictions produced by power are shared, and their articulation, by poets and others, is a real, if unwanted, func­tion within society, as is the modeling, in poems and other media, of other possible modes of power, as on Saturdays on the tiny dancefloor at Rain, where I was first brought by poets, and where the men of the neigh­borhood admit me to a space of mutual movement that sub­sumes in an explicit manner never approached on the street, where I adjust my walk.

Power, an inevitable product of relations, necessarily alters bodies, often damaging, even if invisio-neuronally, or actually destroying them, as when conceptions of what is required for affiliation differ or get distorted when brought into proximi­ty and enforced.

The mechanics by which power travels and changes scale, through agreement, force, or ambient internalization, is politics, yet politics does not address bodies as such, except as instantiations of constructs in which power collects or doesn’t, categories that can have a directly physical exten­sion, like ‘food’, or a purely narrative function, like ‘justice’.

Narrative is a set of proposed links among artificially seg­mented perceptions; narration is the act of proposing such links.

In power, shifts correlate to alterations in relations, which are physical, and can be augmented or protected by gloves, cars, guns, neighborhoods, tractors, planes, lending rates, coats, and computers, all of which change the scale of power; in politics, shifts occur among sets of categories and catchments, also physical, casting shadows on never-fully-discrete bodies, and standing for them in the sense that it is to categories and catchments, or what get called subjects, rather than to bodies, that judgments are ascribed.

In film and fiction, such categories, or subjects through which social relations, and thus power, run, are characters, and turning people into characters is what makes some of us, we, squeamish about fiction, since doing so, reducing people to sets of attributes, is a kind com­modification, or at least a reification, one that encodes the quickly-spreading market system that spawned fiction in the 18th century as a kind of primer, and that, necessary changes having been made, still operates today.

Imagining commodification to be a result of market logic gets it backward, since turning people into products is a major part of sexual selection, a process regulated by mores and other constraints, through which people are treated as acquirable wholes that can be broken down into particular attributes, desirable or undesirable, centered on images of fitness, and out of which market logic falls, with shopping being a relation in which the ‘partner’ doesn’t talk back or experience transference.

Turning people into characters is a very effective political tool, since characters, like some commodities, do not suffer, die, or react in real time, and are constructed for per­formance within narrow bandwidths that are very restricted when compared with the actual conditions most people face, yet are alike enough that the reduction is possible, since to resist such reductions requires more energy than to acquiesce.

Although characters, unlike horses and people, cannot respond to an idea that takes the form of force, such as a lash against a coach-and-six that carries the message ‘go’, it is as characters that politics prepares people for power, even when attacking one’s material extension in space and attempting to reduce one to it. Death as message or story. Let’s roll.

Rabbits, who have brains and bodies, are of course extraordi­nary, and their fierce rabbity love, while occasionally seeming aloof or unintelligible, operates without apparent coercion, and is in fact one of the main model states.

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Rather than cleaving species, splitting characters from people can draw materialism out of humanism, as it makes the material bases of character more manifest.

Belief in the absolute material bases for staging character is a belief in politics as a relation, one that can accommodate a desire for affiliation without reduction.

Art, or situations of partially suspended disbelief, of fore­grounding, of heightening or intentional flattening, of pro­tected description and inflated proposition, is a locus, in any society at any scale, for staging provisional relations as a kind of model.

By mutual agreements that do not differ from those of regu­lar interactions, art provisionally proposes, rather than fully instantiates, sets of relations, raising, and attempting temporarily to appear to frame, the relations it produces, held like eye contact.

Interactions around art, when they work, produce sensations that require high levels of processing, so they tend to happen in relatively protected spaces, never absolute or guaranteed, analogous to airport cottages at Dayton, Spartan dachas outside of Reykjavik, or the space that we are maintaining right now.

Deliberation requires a provisional affiliation, in the sense of involuntarily imagining the consequences of sets of terms and the relations they propose, which makes deliberation disturbing, because affiliation can never be fully provisional, which is what lies behind objections to images of violence, which is why Spielberg claims to employ such images only within highly motivated meaning structures, preferring models of exchange based on art, as at the climax of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), where a French disco scientist and an enormous extra-planetary craft undertake a musical rondo under the auspices of a finally indulgent U.S. military, which holds fire while a highly amplified, visually interpreted five-tone sequence is put forth and is at first tentatively and then force­fully taken up by the hovering vessel, which goes on to offer fantastical variations upon it at speeds that only computers and geniuses at the site can process, finally allowing a large number of MIAs to be disgorged from the hull without inci­dent, along with a young blond boy who is the focus of the movie’s driving mother love, counterpoint to Dreyfus’s signa­ture lone-male sublimations, followed by the letdown of the anthropomorphic, infantilized aliens.

Ascribing decisions to character is an act of judgment, and judgment is what makes writing and film political, since judgment creates relations.

Aesthetic experience, or pleasure in sharing in proposing relations, art, can take place independently of explicit judgment, but is itself a form of affiliation, which has in the past led to critiques of the very ‘absorption’ that is necessary for many of its forms. Truffault plays the scientist.

Because relations are always material and judgment is always affiliation, in proposing sets of relations, any work that fails to examine the material bases on which it is itself predicated, at whatever level, risks contributing to its own misrecognition.

The myths of baseless relations and consquenceless judgments, and the problems they engender, is dramatized and parodied in Chabrol’s *Les Biches* (1968), where Jacqueline Sassard, intentionally young, striking and self-possessed in a manner that seems somehow greater, because incorporating reactionary classicism, than the impending soixante-huitards, produces, when asked her name by perfectly-groomed mid-30s socialite Stephane Audran, a contemptuous, clearly enunciated «je m’appelle 'Why’» that delights Audran’s character*,* who, after some negotiations on the Pont des Arts, appropriates Why, providing access to wealth and companionship that, when discontinued, eventually lead to her own character’s death.

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For the formalist, affiliation is a kind of death, the death of doubt, agency, and possibility, with the crucial exception of affiliation with method.

By imposing rules and proposing relations along strictly mate­rial lines, formalisms and other conceptual undertakings can analogize the limits imposed by resources and belief systems, tacit and explicit, and surround, alter or reorder their material instantiations, revealing their provisionality.

By demonstrat­ing that random position-takings and sets of rela­tions are potentially equally meaningful and subject to constraint, formalisms can work against a default or dominant sets of relations that present themselves as eternal and inviolable.

Affiliation with method can thus be a critique of fantasies of transcendent maximalist infinitude, of an endless supply of someone or something, including an idea.

Since it’s predicated on finitude, capitalism couldn’t work if people didn’t die.

Affiliation with method can thus produce an oppositional position of its own, struc­tured play, that, when taken as a model form of exchange, can change relations, but that, when received as a product, confines its effects to that of politico-aesthetic 'pressure valve’, or exhaust system for discharging the by-products produced by contradictions so that they might remain in place, as when Zola writes, in *Germinal* (1885) and elsewhere, of the effects of coffee and alcohol on workers.

It is also possible to cash in on a set of contradictions by making them central pivots of a work, foregrounding the absurdity of the relations that one is forced to help sustain while taking pleasure in their re-representation.

Such contradictions, produced by art itself, model the results of conventional affiliations, and, when examined closely, often produce apathy and fatigue, at least partially due to the scales, far beyond the scope of character, at which they operate.

Like science, which proceeds, theoretically, out of passionate materialist disinterest, but which, in actual practice, is almost wholly market-driven, maintaining contradictions is a busi­ness.

At the same time, the articulation of contradiction can produce catharsis and abreaction, the force of which can cause dis- and re-affiliation, a threat to forms of power.

Most projections ‘outside’ of a set of contradictions are rep­resented as criminal, as in Gun Crazy (1949), where the lovers, on recognizing one another’s interlocking needs and in attempting to manifest them fully and in concert, discover those needs to be unsustainable at the highest levels without constant infu­sions of money, triggering feelings of rage and neglect that spill over into escala­tions of the types of ‘jobs’ they do, including killing those who seem to judge their acts, eventually pushing the scale of their pursuit of money, shelter, and sustenance to the point of their being cornered, or isolated without adequate resources or means of further travel, and locked into an inarticulate choice between impris­onment or death.

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Because the media for articulation, forms and concepts, get fetishized and lose their power to stage relations, they change, seeking fresh access to the energy that inheres in contradiction.

Jauss’s restatement of beauty (1977), “the form in which aesthetic experience presents itself," forces one to talk about specific instances and encounters, and encodes the impossibility of fully generalizing about form.

At one particular point when further shifts seemed impossible, the ‘dematerialization’ of the art object was attempted, meaning there was a negotiated agreement among artists and others to treat encounters, procedures, and acts of documentation as art, in order to force disaffiliation from the object, and prevent fetishization.

Partially because disaffiliation is a kind of death, Fanon advocat­ed violence as a means to catharsis and abreaction, which are sometimes produced by the destruction of bodies, and are real material resources, even if invisio-neuronal.

The trauma pro­duced in survivors of violence, including those that inflict it, produces a tendency to replicate injury, perpetuating a ‘cycle’ that acquires narrative justification as nec­essary.

Semezdin Mehmedinovic’s *Sarajevo Blues* (1998) records instances of paramilitary beheadings within a non-colonial city that the perpetrators justify through citations of acts of violence from prior centuries.

Fanon’s own “Colonial War and Mental Disorders“ (1961) can be read as registering instances of such replication of injury, specific acts arising from internalized conditions of domina­tion and oppression.

Nonviolence arose partially as a means of addressing the cyclic nature of violence, but if the perpetrators of, say, large-scale economic violence are deliberately distributed across flattened, featureless characters and concepts, it is unclear if nonviolence holds the same force if there is no there there, no entity to shame, embarrass, or otherwise ascribe accountability.

At the same time, the scale of possible violence in the name of states remains a constraint. In nuclear death the brain may be fast enough to complete, before vaporization, the full-replay that some have reported; while the duration of the flash­backs is reportedly long, the time elapsed, apparently, is not.

Other forms of nonparticipation involve violence in the form of loss along with bodily destruction. Most of the suicides I have imagined have been passive: that of addressing the back of my head, in 1991, to the parking lot window of a first floor apartment in Providence so that bullets, whose trajectory would be perhaps a 20-degree-angle from the blacktop, fired by no one in particular, might pass between the burglar bars and into the cerebellum and stem, the old breathing brain, making little holes just at the top of the collar of the robe; that of falling from a fast-moving car and skidding slowly and painlessly, because blacking out, to a stop; that of putting a fake plastic Uzi in my yellow Freitag shoulderbag and taking the 4 or 5 train to Wall Street, where I walk up to the barricades around the Exchange, take out the gun and wave it in circles over my head, drawing a rain of extremely accurate, high-powered fire; that of, just now, of becoming active, and exerting enough force on the tongue of my belt so that it would puncture the point just where the ribs part, making a kind of lower stoma, and pulling up for a tiny blunt evisceration.

Because I have experienced my own death only through narcissistic fantasy, trying to imagine the deaths of others, as when reading journalistic accounts of them, is compromised by that same narcissism, as when encountering attempted re-representation of death at FoxConn, and then posting about it, because while accumulated posting may help ameliorate conditions, it does not address the contradictions that produce them.

And because the surface dependencies of 'my life’ depend of sets of relations that produce those conditions, the attempt to imagine and render them must inform any work that proceeds from it, to the point that, in imagining extreme forms of my own subjugation, I fantasize that in nuclear death the brain is fast enough to complete, before vaporization, the full-replay that some have reported, since a 'good death’ requires preparation, and while the duration of the flashbacks is reportedly long, the time elapsed, apparently, is not.

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FANON wrote in French, and French continues, in areas to which it was forcibly brought, to be taken up in exigency and desire as well as disgust and repudiation.

French produces econom­ic effects for anyone whom it subsumes or engages, and retains, like any language, natural or artificial, accumulative traces, some of which, for French specifically, remain from when it was taken up, some sixty years after France took Algeria, as Bergson's phenomenological instrument of durée, or something like duration, if not of time.

Time and duration depend on scale, in the sense that the sets of relations that produce them, gravitational and otherwise, are perceived as relatively stable and inviolate, though actual­ly localized and in flux.

Time now dominates perception to the point that people take drugs to restore duration for short periods.

States, or dynamic, non-isolable arrangements of matter, suc­ceed each other; time's incrementality marks, and thus repre­sents, different states.

Time assigns values to successive states, which are forced by brains into three dimensions, with six tightly curled further planes, unimaginable but modelable, exerting their own pulls, which are manifest in the telepathy heightened by reg­ular congress between electively affinitive persons, discrete units of what Foucault and Negri call biopower, which Haraway finds an absurd and flaccid reduction, despite Scarry's demonstrations of the innumerable ways in which that reduction is effected daily.

The more heightened such relations, the more character, in ecstasy, becomes what Hölderlin, in *Hyperion* (1798), calls “soul,” and it assumes, in the throes of congress, classical proportions, meaning that the relation affords access to further dimensions, as in grief.

To imagine all states, or to pick a state and then project or calculate its subsequent states from its trajectory, would be to travel in time, if the body be held stable.

Nostalgia is the wish to reinstate collapsed relations. Fate is the coding of a determinate universe, in the sense of a course by which, given a certain configuration, energy will dissipate along with the chains of consequence surrounding agency. Free will is the manner in which senses maximize access to possible relational configurations, with a pitch toward destruction if unmet. There is a possible consciousness that might comprehend all possible states, and thus all time, but it is not necessary to imagine it.

Narrative is a set of proposed links among artificially seg­mented perceptions marked by time; narration is the act of proposing such links, even if untrue, in order to saturate duration.

Dialects of English use of the subjunctive progressive to mark the unreal, constantly revised present as never fully experienced, as in *Stalker* (1979), where a glass of milk’s movement means either that superhuman powers are acquired through catastrophe, or that one moves a body without witness in belief.

I was sitting at home in these various states when the clock suddenly went out and the fridge stopped. Electromagnetic pulse or power failure. Long durée oddly calm, and then slowly lifted the phone. It worked, but that is a test that can no longer be employed.