Four Essays on Reparations

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Table of Contents

The First Essay:
On the Sublime Art of Making Reparations 3

The Second Essay:
On Leaky Designs and Superfluity 14

The Third Essay:
On Revaluation and Reparative Economy 21

The Fourth Essay:
On Rewilding and Reparative Ecology 33

Addendum One:
On Jurisprudence and Reparative Politics 37

Addendum Two:
On Addiction and Reparative Psychology 41
The First Essay:
On the Sublime Art of Making Reparations

In the last period of his work, Freud was preoccupied with new ways of thinking about the mind’s relation to reality. He noticed something new, the strange phenomenon he called splitting of the ego. In this phenomenon, the ego, when faced with a disturbing reality, neither represses it nor denies it. Rather it simultaneously accepts and rejects it, thereby splitting itself into mutually incompatible states. The “side” of the ego that rejects the disturbing reality replaces it with a wish fulfilling fantasy. Here, we see the basic operation of primary process – wish fulfillment and defense working in tandem to get rid of a disturbance. But the new angle on this process is that the ego clearly would not undertake such a complex defensive manoeuvre if it did not in some way know exactly what it appears not to know. [...] [W]hat the ego knows, but defends against, is on the “side” of increased tension, the pain of life. The “side” of the ego that rejects the disturbing reality is self-destructively using wish fulfillment and defense to maintain inertia, the reflexive withdrawal from certain kinds of pain. In other words, the ego attacks its own knowledge of precisely what it needs.

— Alan Bass from The Work of Analysis: Play

The more that I consider my facticity — my thrownness in space, time, nature, and culture; my being a black man living in the United States of America four-hundred some years after the docking of the White Lion, not a descendant of African American slaves but a descendant of peoples who survived the Belgian genocide in the Congo and the depredations of German and British imperialism in East Africa — that is to say, in other words, the more that I wonder at the world that I must make my home, for better or for worse, the more and more compelled I am to articulate my position on the matter of reparations.

I do not imagine that my position on reparations is of great significance to my world: I am a black man lacking in stature and authority, who can only speak for himself. Yet I feel compelled to speak on the matter of reparations precisely because few care if I speak, precisely because of my lack of stature and authority, precisely because I am only able to speak for myself and for no one else. It is not that I would gain stature and authority by speaking, nor that I would have the ability to speak for others. To the contrary, above all else, it is because I can only speak for myself that I feel I ought to speak on the matter of reparations. You see, I would like to inspire others who know what I know to do as I am doing, to speak for themselves on the matter of reparations.

Indeed, I am very much speaking to you, my friend and fellow traveler. I am inviting you to speak in chorus with me on the matter of reparations, in spite of the fact that no one has asked us to speak
and so few care if we do. As I see it, all radical cultural transformations begin when those who are supposed to remain silent and be spoken for begin to stand up and speak for themselves, taking great care to articulate what they know as best they know how. Ay, and reparations, as I imagine them, would be the most radical of cultural transformations.

So, here goes nothing, I shall speak for myself as best I know how...

America appears to be in the midst of a low-intensity civil war. This apparent civil war is being fought between two rival factions: let us call them the white nationalist faction and the liberal globalist faction. As I see it, both of these factions are expressions of the unraveling American capitalist supremacy.

America was founded on white supremacy, on the genocide of indigenous peoples and the enslavement of black peoples, and the white nationalist faction in America's apparent civil war embraces white supremacy as the central foundation of American identity. Against the white nationalists, the liberal globalist faction repudiates white supremacy, not because white supremacy is a bad thing in and of itself, but because white supremacy no longer offers American capitalism the meaningful advantages that it used to. The liberal globalists would ditch white supremacy for an ethno-cultural pluralism that is more compatible with capitalist globalization. This is not to say, however, that the liberal globalists mean to make meaningful reparations for any atrocities committed in the name of white supremacy. Rather to the contrary, liberal globalists hold that making meaningful reparations would disadvantage American capitalism far more than the maintenance of white supremacy would. Indeed, rather than making reparations, the liberal globalists want to put the atrocities of white supremacy behind them as quickly as they possibly can.

The liberal globalists claim that the white nationalists are backwards looking reactionaries and they denounce the white nationalists for holding America back. In turn, the white nationalists call the liberal globalists traitorous opportunists and hypocrites, and they denounce the liberal globalists for turning their backs on their nation’s white supremacist past while reaping the rewards of this very same past. The white nationalists, protesting against ethno-cultural pluralism, berate the liberal globalists, “You would be nothing without us and we will not be so easily forgotten! You owe us everything!”

Those who have been oppressed by white supremacy in America are caught between a rock and a hard place. On one front, oppressed peoples must protect themselves from white nationalists, who would compound past oppressions with further oppressions in the present and future. On the other front, oppressed peoples must confront the liberal globalists, who believe that they can continue to capitalize on past oppressions without contributing to further oppressions in the present and the future. These liberal globalists refuse to admit that to capitalize on past oppressions in the present and future is to further oppressions in the present and future. Indeed, oppressed peoples who see through liberal obfuscations agree with the white nationalists on one fundamental point: the liberal globalists are hypocritical opportunists.
The liberal globalists are smug in their hypocrisy. The liberal globalists tell oppressed peoples that they only have two options available to them: either (i) seek protection from a progressive global capitalism and endure its hypocrisies or (ii) fall prey to a regressive white supremacy and its atrocities. Either way, the liberal globalists tell us, reparations are not an option, “You need to move on. What’s done is done. What has been broken either cannot be repaired, or, if it can be repaired, doing so is not worth the effort.” Indeed, from the perspective of the liberal globalist, the oppressed peoples of the world who seek reparations are even more backwards looking than the white nationalists.

What the liberal globalists refuse to understand, of course, is that abolition and decolonization without reparations is a misnomer, a contradiction in terms: America will remain a white supremacist nation, a nation defined by genocide and chattel slavery, until it makes reparations. The liberal globalists who say otherwise are either white supremacists in denial or apologists for white supremacy. To put a very fine point on the matter, until America makes reparations, to be pro-American without pronounced reservations is to be pro-genocide and pro-slavery.

The white nationalist hears the word “reparations” and understands the word to mean “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”: they fear that the tables will be turned on them and that white peoples will be re-educated, enslaved and/or exterminated by black and indigenous peoples. The liberal globalist hears the word “reparations” and understands the word to mean “compensation”, sums of money paid by the oppressor to the oppressed for their oppression, like the paying of back wages. Neither of these cold and calculating notions of reparations are what I have in mind here. When I use the term reparations, I am referring to an art of making amends rather than a science of finding equivalents. Indeed, I am referring to a very specific art of making amends that eschews the finding of equivalents: the sublime art of making reparations, as I imagine it it, is the art of kintsugi writ large as a metaphor for radical cultural transformation.

**sublime (adj.)** - from Latin *sublimis* "uplifted, high, borne aloft, lofty, exalted, eminent, distinguished," from *sub* "up to" + *limen* "lintel, threshold, sill".

**reparation (n.)** from Latin *reparare* "restore, repair," from re- "again" + *parare* "make ready"

**kintsugi (n.)** - unadapted borrowing from Japanese 金継ぎ, from 金 (kin, “gold”) + 継ぎ (tsugi, “repairing, mending; joining”). Referring to the practice of repairing broken ceramics by gathering their fragments, re-assembling them, and gluing them together using a lacquer mixed with powdered gold. “There should be no attempt to disguise the damage, the point is to render the fault-lines beautiful and strong. The precious veins of gold are there to emphasise that breaks have a philosophically-rich merit all of their own.”
Let me put it this way: to make reparations is to make repairs, and repairs can be either made artfully or artlessly. The white supremacists and the liberal globalists would only ever conceive of artless reparations, of artless repairs. Those who call for abolition and decolonization, by contrast, would conceive of artful reparations, artful repairs. The question that follows from this is, of course, “How does one differentiate artful from artless repairs?”

Christopher Alexander, writing in *The Timeless Way of Building*, answers this question admirably by distinguishing between a commonplace use of the word repair and a more novel use of the word.

*In the commonplace use of the word repair, we assume that when we repair something, we are essentially trying to get it back to its original state. This kind of repair is patching, conservative, static.*

*But in this new use of the word repair, we assume, instead, that everything is changing constantly: and that at every moment we use the defects of the present state as the starting point for the definition of the new state.*

*When we repair something in this new sense, we assume that we are going to transform it, that new wholes will be born, that indeed, the entire whole which is being repaired will become a different whole as the result of the repair.*

*In this sense, the idea of repair is creative, dynamic, open.*

What Alexander calls “patching, conservative, static” repair is the making of artless reparations. What Alexander calls “creative, dynamic, open,” repair is the making of artful reparations.

Those who call for abolition and decolonization are the exponents of artful reparations. White supremacists are the enemies of all reparations, no matter whether artful or artless. Liberal globalists claim to sympathize with calls for reparations but they refuse to admit that artful reparations are possible and they argue that all reparations are artless. The liberal globalist speaks of brave new peoples for whom the past is dead and the future is a boundless frontier. Exhausted by the liberal globalists’ speeches, those who call for abolition and decolonization retort, *The past is never dead. It's not even past.* The past is still alive in the present but it is living in fragments and it is becoming ever more fragmented. Brave are those peoples who *(re-)create the past anew*, taking great care to piece together every recoverable fragment of the past that they have access to."

*To *(re-)create the past anew.* — The sublime art of making reparations hinges on this paradoxical phrase. In this essay, I hope to help you imagine what this phrase means, but I must first give you a clear idea of what this phrase does not mean. To be brief, to *(re-)create the past anew* does not mean indulging in wishful thinking and in defensive rationalizations that cover up disturbing realities.
The student of psychoanalysis will tell you that the psyche disavows disturbing realities in and through the construction of two different kinds of fantasies. To quote Alan Bass, a profound interpreter of the work of Sigmund Freud, “One [way] is to replace something disagreeable with something pleasant – this is wish fulfillment. The other [way] is to eliminate the disturbance by attempting to render it nonexistent – this is defense.” Wish fulfillment is exemplified by the battered wife who says, “He hit me, and it felt like a kiss. Beating me, he teaches me the true meaning of love.” Defense is exemplified by the battered wife that says, “I know, I know: it looks like he hit me, but it isn’t what it looks like. It was an accident. He didn’t really hit me; I ran into his fist.”

A wishful fantasy is a (mis)representation that acknowledges the character of the disturbing event, “He hit me”, but disavows the disturbing affect accompanying the event, substituting a pleasing affect for the disturbing one, “And it felt like a kiss.” A defensive fantasy, by contrast, is a misrepresentation that acknowledges the disturbing affect but disavows the character of the disturbing event, “It was an accident. He didn't really hit me; I ran into his fist.” Wish fulfillment and defense are together the primary processes that enable a person (e.g., a battered wife) to avoid confronting disturbing realities.

Returning to the subject of genocide and chattel slavery in America, I want to take some time to recognize the wish fulfillments and defenses that are characteristic of the oppressed and the oppressor in America. Keeping the example of the battered wife in mind, let us first consider the oppressed, the indigenous and black peoples of America. You must recognize that it is difficult, extremely difficult, for indigenous and black peoples in America to acknowledge the disturbing events that have shaped and continue to shape the American experience for them. Indeed, for indigenous and black peoples, it is an almost unbearably disturbing reality that America has refused to make reparations for genocide and chattel slavery and that America continues to reap the rewards of genocide and chattel slavery. This reality is most unbearable for those indigenous and black people who would “get ahead” in the service of America’s most powerful political economic institutions. To “get ahead” in America, many indigenous and black persons engage in wish fulfillment, “America hit us, and it felt like a kiss. In and through genocide and slavery, America has taught us the true meaning of freedom and democracy.” Other indigenous and black persons seeking to “get ahead” in America will engage in defense, “I know, I know: it looks like America was built on genocide and slavery, but it isn’t what it looks like. These were accidents of history. White settlers stumbled upon indigenous and black peoples in a fit of absent-mindedness. An ensuing series of horrible misunderstandings, fueled by mutual fear and ignorance, eventually lead to genocide and slavery. In other words, we ran into white men's guns, germs, and steel.”

Shifting our focus from the oppressed to the oppressor, the very same processes, wish fulfillment and defense, are at work in the oppressor’s refusal to empathize with the oppressed. It is wish fulfillment that allows the white nationalist to believe that the horrors of genocide and chattel slavery are part and parcel of either a “divine plan” or the “natural order” of things. The white nationalist in the guise of the Christian fascist proclaims, “Genocide and chattel slavery are horrors, yes, but they are like the horror of original sin: they are part of God’s plan.” Alternatively, the white nationalist as scientific racist proclaims, “Genocide and chattel slavery are horrors, yes, but the lion
hunting the gazelle is also a horror. It is only natural for higher races to either dominate, educate, or exterminate lower races whenever possible and profitable for them."

Defense, by contrast, allows the liberal globalist to deny that America has been and continues to be shaped by genocide and chattel slavery, echoing the defenses of the oppressed, "I know, I know: it looks like America was built on genocide and chattel slavery, but it isn’t what it looks like. These were accidents of history. White settlers stumbled upon indigenous and black peoples in a fit of absent-mindedness. An ensuing series of horrible misunderstandings, fueled by mutual fear and ignorance, eventually lead to genocide and chattel slavery. In short, black and indigenous peoples ran into white men’s guns, germs, and steel."

Having given you an idea of what (re-)creating the past anew does not entail, I now feel prepared to tell you what (re-)creating the past anew does entail. To be brief, as I understand it, the sublime art of making reparations, of (re-)creating the past anew, is a two-step process. The first step, preparing to make reparations, is the artful deconstruction of wish fulfillments and defenses so as to enable us to acknowledge that which disturbs. The second step, making reparations, is the sublimation of disturbances via the artful reconstruction of that which has been disturbed.

As I see it, we who call for abolition and decolonization are still in the midst of the first step in this process. The wishful fantasies of white nationalism — the fantasy of God’s design and the fantasy of the white man’s natural superiority — no longer prevail in America as they used to, but they are still quite prevalent. What’s more, the decline of the wishful fantasies of white nationalism has only ushered in the rise of the liberal globalists’ defensive fantasy of “guns, germs, and steel”. Those who call for abolition and decolonization have certainly done remarkable work to “see through” wishful and defensive fantasies that cover up the deeply disturbing realities of genocide and slavery, but there is a great deal of work to be done with respect to artfully deconstructing these fantasies, uncovering the deeply disturbing realities of genocide and slavery so that we no longer have to “see through” a cover up.

At this point, I feel that I ought to state for the record what I regard to be the deeply disturbing realities of genocide and chattel slavery.

Above all else, the wishful fantasies of white supremacists and the defensive fantasies of liberal globalists try to convince us that there is a divine plan, a natural order, or a historical accident beyond pleasurable and profitable cultural artifice that could explain genocide and chattel slavery in America. As I know it, however, the extermination indigenous peoples and the enslavement of black peoples was not a part of God’s plan, nor was it a part of the natural order, nor was it a historical accident. Much to the contrary, genocide and chattel slavery are both forms of pleasurable and profitable cultural artifice, and Americans exterminated indigenous peoples and enslaved black peoples for pleasure and for profit. In other words, Americans proposed, perpetrated, and perpetuated the cultural artifices of extermination and enslavement in order to get off and to get rich.
Going further and digging deeper, the cultural artifices of extermination and enslavement did not emerge in a vacuum, but were constructed atop other, pre-existing cultural artifices in order to enhance pleasures and profits derived thereby. Indeed, as I understand it, (i) the pleasures enhanced by the cultural artifices of extermination and enslavement were, first and foremost, the pleasures derived from the cultural artifices of patriarchy, and (ii) the profits enhanced by the cultural artifices of extermination and enslavement were, first and foremost, the profits derived from the cultural artifices of capitalism. It follows from this that the wishful and defensive fantasies that disavow the deeply disturbing realities of genocide and chattel slavery are but secondary elaborations of the wishful and defensive fantasies that disavow the deeply disturbing realities of patriarchy and capitalism. Just as there is no divine plan, no natural order, and no historical accident beyond pleasurable and profitable cultural artifice that could explain genocide and chattel slavery, there is no divine plan, no natural order, and no historical accident beyond pleasurable and profitable cultural artifice that could explain patriarchy and capitalism. What’s more, it also follows from this that the sublime art of making reparations as practiced by those calling for abolition and decolonization is a secondary elaboration of the same art as practiced by feminists and anti-capitalists.

Indeed, the reality of the matter is this: if reparations are to be made for the horrors genocide and chattel slavery, reparations will also need to be made for the horrors of patriarchy and capitalism. It is no wonder that the liberal globalist wants to repudiate white supremacy without making reparations for it: making reparations for genocide and chattel slavery would call capitalism into question. It is also no wonder that the white nationalist is also a misogynist: the pleasures that they take in oppressing peoples of other races are built on the pleasures that they take in oppressing women. The example of the battered wife that I used to introduce wish fulfillment and defense earlier was not chosen arbitrarily. As I see it, the deeply disturbing character of men who dominate women with threats of deprivation and violence are at the root of capitalism, genocide, and slavery.

- Capitalist oligarchs are, above all else, men endowed with the means to take advantage of women threatened by poverty. Some capitalist oligarchs use their endowments for their own direct pleasure. Others take indirect pleasure in hoarding and lording their endowments over men who are not so well endowed, brandishing their stockpiles of wealth as if they formed an oversized phallus.
- Genocidal murderers are, above all else, men endowed with the means to take advantage of women threatened with extermination. Some genocidal murderers use their endowments for their own direct pleasure. Others take indirect pleasure in hoarding and lording their endowments over men who are not so well endowed, brandishing their stockpiles of weapons as if they formed an oversized phallus.
- Slave masters are, above all else, men endowed with the means to take advantage of enslaved women. Some slave masters use their endowments for their own direct pleasure. Others take indirect pleasure in hoarding and lording their endowments over men who are not so well endowed, brandishing their retinues of docile bodies as if they formed an oversized phallus.
Before making any meaningful reparations for slavery and genocide, we will need to uncover the reality that so many of our customs and institutions are cultural artifices that enable men to take direct and indirect pleasure in the domination of women. Again, it is not enough to “see through” the wishful and defensive fantasies that cover up this disturbing reality: this disturbing reality must be uncovered and exposed for us to see. Going further, we must recognize that the uncovering of disturbing realities is but a first step. The art of making reparations must go beyond uncovering disturbing realities concealed by wishful and defensive fantasies; it must also enable fantasies that (re-)integrate and (re-)frame disturbing realities.

The art of making reparations is not hostile to fantasies in general; it is only hostile to wishful and defensive fantasies that cover up disturbing realities. Fantasies that (re-)integrate and (re-)frame disturbing realities, instead of covering them up, are called sublimating fantasies, and the art of making reparations appreciates and enables sublimating fantasies.

Sublimating fantasies are the gold powdered lacquer used to glue together the fragments of the shattered teacup: they do far more than simply expose the disturbing realities that wishful fantasies and defensive fantasies cover up. Sublimating fantasies draw our attention to disturbances, yes, but they also draw our attention to the fragility of that which has been disturbed. Going further still, sublimating fantasies draw our attention to the fact that we can and should take care to artfully repair the precious teacup that has been disturbed and broken, for there are wonders to be had in doing so. That being said, however, it is important to stress that sublimating fantasies do not prevent future disturbances and breakages. The tea cup that has been shattered can always be shattered again and again, by unforeseeable accident, by negligence, or by design.

Those of you who know me personally will have guessed where I am heading with all of this. For those who haven’t guessed it, I shall put all my cards on the table: the precious teacup that has been shattered by the advance of patriarchal capitalism is the precious teacup of primitive matriarchal communism, the supplement at the origin of human culture. Ay, and the sublime art of making reparations that I am proposing here is the art of (re-)creating primitive matriarchal communism anew. Again, however, you must understand that the art of making reparations never returns anything to back its primitive state. The art of making reparations is not patching, conservative, static; rather, it is creative, dynamic, open. To (re-)create primitive matriarchal communism anew is to transform it, and the result of the art of making reparations would be something queer that both defers to primitive matriarchal communism and differs from it. It is, of course, true that every repair tends to a more primitive structure that precedes it but, as Christopher Alexander writes, “[artful] repair not only patches [primitive structures] — it also modifies [them], transforms [them], sets [them] on the road to becoming something else, entirely new.”

The art of making reparations is not what white nationalists imagine it to be: it is not the tit-for-tat revenge of primitive matriarchal communists against “advanced” patriarchal capitalists. Neither is the art of making reparations what liberal globalists imagine it to be: it is not compensation paid by those who have gained more under “advanced” patriarchal capitalism to those who would have gained more under primitive matriarchal communism. The art of making reparations for the
“advancement” of patriarchal capitalism would transform existing forms of cultural artifice so as to (re-)create primitive matriarchal communism anew, restoring the potentials of primitive matriarchal communism. Tit-for-tat revenge and compensatory pay-offs will never (re-)create primitive matriarchal communism anew because they are not transformations of customs and institutions. Ay, the art of making reparations is, above all else, the art of transforming customs and institutions: it deconstructs those customs and institutions that conceal the disturbing realities of “advanced” patriarchal capitalism and it reconstructs these customs and institutions in order to restore the potentials of primitive matriarchal communism.

Sublimating fantasies of a return to primitive matriarchal communism are the fantasies that enable us to restore the potentials of primitive matriarchal communism. White men sneer at fantasies of returning to primitive matriarchal communism. They are sneering at me now as they read this. Projecting their own bad conscience onto others, white men make such fantasies out to be wishful and/or defensive fantasies, like their own fantasies of primal fathers dominating their harems and hordes. Certainly, some fantasies of primitive matriarchal communism are wishful and some are defensive, but that does allow us to dismiss all such fantasies tout court. White men who indulge patriarchal capitalist fantasies but are quick to dismiss fantasies of primitive matriarchal communism are, of course, apologists for patriarchal capitalism. These white men are deathly afraid of encountering sublimating fantasies of primitive matriarchal communism that would expose and draw attention to disturbing realities that they are desperate to keep covered up.

Sublimating fantasies of primitive matriarchal communism would reveal that there is nothing divine, nothing natural, and nothing accidental about patriarchy, capitalism, genocide, and slavery: these are cultural artifices proposed, perpetrated, and perpetuated by violent and rapacious men who take pleasure in dominating women. At the same time, however, sublimating fantasies of primitive matriarchal communism also reveal that there is nothing divine, nothing natural, and nothing accidental about primitive matriarchal communism: primitive matriarchal communism is only the cultural artifice of peoples who take pleasure in creating and nurturing life.

The apparent civil war between white nationalists and liberal globalists in America is a reaction against the fact that oppressed peoples have successfully begun to artfully deconstruct and uncover the disturbing realities of patriarchy, capitalism, genocide, and slavery. Indeed, this apparent civil war revolves around determining what is the best way to keep these disturbing realities covered up: the white nationalist faction would double down on the offensive wishful fantasies of divine dispensation and natural superiority; the liberal globalist faction has forsaken offensive wishful fantasies and embraced the defensive fantasy of historical accident, “guns, germs, and steel”.

Liberal globalists tend to be rich white men for whom deprivation is a better means of oppression than violence. The defensive fantasy of guns, germs, and steel protects what is most vital for rich white men: the cultural artifices that endow these men with the means to take advantage of women threatened by poverty.
White nationalists tend to be poorer white men, those who can only oppress women and others if they have recourse to displays of violence. There are, of course, many rich white men in the white nationalist camp: these rich white men side with poorer white men because they have a penchant for violent behavior and cannot find gratification through deprivation alone. The offensive wishful fantasies of divine dispensation and natural superiority protect what is most vital for poorer white men and rich white men with a taste for violence: the cultural artifices that endow these men with the means to threaten women with displays of violence.

Putting all of this together, America’s apparent civil war is revealed to be a class war amongst white men: rich white men have repudiated the offensive wishful fantasies of white supremacy and they are threatening to deprive poorer white men of their patriarchal powers. Oppressed peoples are the proxies of rich white men in this apparent civil war: rich white men hypocritically claim to have repudiated the offensive wishful fantasies of white supremacy in the name of oppressed peoples; poor white men are hypocritically avenging themselves against rich white men by attacking oppressed peoples; and oppressed peoples of all races and sexes are being forced to devote more time and energy to defending themselves against poorer white men and they are being cajoled into the arms of rich white men.

Rich white men cajole the “best” amongst the oppressed (i.e., the most “professional” and most “marketable” amongst the oppressed) by “helping” them “earn” more and more money. The liberal globalist holds (i) that non-white men who “earn” enough money should be allowed to exercise the same patriarchal powers over poor women that rich white men do, and (ii) that women of all races who “earn” enough money should be protected against the indignities endured by women haven't “earned” enough. Rich white men cajole the “rest” of the oppressed peoples, the “wretched of the earth”, by “helping” them “learn” that the experience of deprivation under liberal globalism beats the alternative, the experience of both violence and deprivation under white nationalism. These two ways in which rich white men cajole oppressed peoples—“helping” oppressed peoples to “learn” and to “earn” the goods of patriarchal capitalism—are what define “philanthropy” under liberal globalism.

Rich white men will be even better off if things go their way. Those who have “earned” the title of “best of the oppressed” will live comfortably beside respectable rich white men, apologize for rich white men, and make rich white men’s “philanthropic” practices their own. The “rest of the oppressed” will turn to rich white men and their sycophantic apologists for protection from a new untouchable caste of poor, backwards, and violent white men. Poor white men have, of course, a sense that they are becoming a new untouchable caste but, alas, this has made a good portion of them cling more tightly to wishful fantasies of divine dispensation and natural superiority, and this is music to the ears of rich white men.

It should be clear to you now why America’s civil war is only “apparent”. From the vantage point of oppressed peoples who can see disturbing realities through a cover up, this apparent civil war over the uncovering of patriarchal capitalism’s disturbing realities is itself, in actuality, only a new way of covering up the disturbing realities of patriarchal capitalism. The student of psychoanalysis will
also recognize this fact. A good Freudian will tell you that the psyche tends to create false conflicts between wishful and defensive fantasies when disturbing realities become more and more difficult to cover up. What’s more, a good Freudian will also tell you that psychoanalysis often stalls and becomes interminable when its subject becomes increasingly skilled at playing wishfulness and defensiveness against each other in order to cover up disturbing realities that the psychoanalyst threatens to uncover. We who would practice the sublime art of making reparations are in a position similar to that of the psychoanalyst in this regard: we have managed to artfully deconstruct many of the old wishful fantasies and a few of the newer defensive fantasies that separately work to cover up the disturbing realities of patriarchal capitalism, but we have not yet managed to artfully deconstruct the apparent conflicts between wishful and defensive fantasies that are now working to cover up these same disturbing realities. Ay, and our preparations for the making of artful reparations have stalled and become interminable as a result.

Delighted at the fact that our preparations for the making of artful reparations have stalled, the liberal globalists are doubling down on their argument. Liberal globalists are telling us that now is not an auspicious time to radically transform American customs and institutions because these flawed and fragile customs and institutions are the only thing keeping the white nationalists at bay. The question is, however, has there ever been and will there ever be an auspicious time to radically transform American customs and institutions? Going further, mustn’t the sublime art of reparations always be an untimely art? If we are practicing an untimely art, there is no reason why we shouldn’t persist in our efforts to artfully deconstruct the wishful and defensive fantasies that condition American customs and institutions, and we should continue to insist upon sublimating fantasies as we endeavor to reconstruct American customs and institutions otherwise. Rich white men and their sycophantic apologists of all races and sexes will snarl and snap at us, but they will always snarl and snap at those who persist in pointing out the disturbing realities of patriarchal capitalism and insist upon making artful reparations.

The reader will, no doubt, have realized that this essay is a small contribution to the artful deconstruction of the apparent conflict between liberal globalism and white nationalism that defines American politics today. For those of us calling for abolition and decolonization, this apparent conflict is a devious trap, and I have written this text in order to help myself and my fellow travelers better recognize this trap. My fellow travelers, we must avoid and disarm this trap if we are to continue the work of abolition and decolonization, the work of exposing the disturbing realities of patriarchal capitalism and restoring the potentials of the most primitive matriarchal communism, the general economy of leakiness and superfluity that animates the (de-/re-)composition of Mother Earth.
The Second Essay:
On Leaky Designs and Superfluity

The strata are judgments of God; stratification in general is the entire system of judgments of God (but the earth, or the body without organs, constantly eludes that judgment, flees and becomes destratified, decoded, deterritorialized).
— Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, from *A Thousand Plateaus*

Thinking about race with and through schizoanalysis, I am struck by the fact that race is not a fluent matter. Rather, race is a code, a way of channeling and filtering fluent matter(s).

Schizoanalysis has taught me a great deal about flows and codes. First and foremost, it has taught me that codes are the *filters* and *channels* through which flows pass. Codes *filter* out determinate elements from the flows that pass through them, and they *channel* these determinate elements in different directions. Codes do not transcend the flows that they filter and channel but are *immanent* to the flows that they filter and channel: they are the *intra-actions* of flows, *expositions* of fluent matter(s) as opposed to impositions on fluent matter(s).

Going further, schizoanalysis has taught me that fluent matter(s) are indeterminate until they are coded. Coding, the filtering and channeling of flows, is the process of generating determinate elements from indeterminate matter(s). This is to say, in other words, that the determinate elements that are filtered and channeled from a given flow do not exist as determinate elements until *after* a given flow has been filtered and channeled.

Thinking about race with and through schizoanalysis, I am struck by the fact that neither black individuals nor white individuals are determined as such prior to their racial coding, prior to the filtering and channeling of flows by race. Before the racial coding of flows there only exist fluent matter(s) of an indeterminate race or, in other words, that the determinate elements that are filtered and channeled from a given flow do not exist as determinate elements until *after* a given flow has been filtered and channeled.

Going even further still, schizoanalysis has also taught me about stratification. It has taught me that the filtering and channeling of fluent matter(s) can lead to stratification but need not necessarily do so. To be brief, stratification *only* takes place when determinate elements are filtered out and channeled from an indeterminate flow in a way that minimizes or reduces their confluence and remixing. Which is to say, in other words, that stratification *does not* take place when the determinate elements that have been filtered out from a flow are *promptly* channeled back to a confluence where they are (re-)mixed together into an indeterminate flow.
Thinking about race with and through schizoanalysis, I am struck by the fact that the racial stratification of black individuals and white individuals, which privileges the latter over the former, only exists (and persists) insofar as black individuals and white individuals are filtered out from racially indeterminate flows and channeled apart in ways that minimize or reduce their confluence and (re-)mixing. What’s more, thinking about race in its broader social context, I am struck by the fact that our societies are stratification by race is compounded with and through stratification by sex, by wealth, by education, by nationality, and many other codings. Alongside the codes that filter black from white and channel them apart, we must also deal with the codes that filter and channel apart men from women, rich from poor, educated from uneducated, First World nationals from Third World nationals, etc.

*Artful reparations*, as I imagine them, would deconstruct these many social strata in order to (re-)create confluences where men and women, black and white, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, First World and Third World are (re-)mixed into indeterminately *queer* and *créole* flows. That being said however, artful reparations, as I imagine them, would not create a world in which all social distinctions have been eliminated. To the contrary, artful reparations are artful because they do not deconstruct all filters and channels that create social distinctions but, instead, select for deconstruction only those filters and channels that create and maintain social strata. All social stratifications are the products of *pipelines*—streamlined designs that filter and channel determinate elements apart from each other for extended periods of time—and *artful reparations only deconstruct pipelines*.

The concept of a “pipeline” is my own: it is not a schizoanalytic concept, but it is informed by the schizoanalytic concepts of “territorialization” and “deterritorialization”. What schizoanalysis calls “territorialization” is the *extension* of the duration for which one determinate element is filtered and channeled apart from others. What schizoanalysis calls “deterritorialization” is the *abbreviation* of the duration for which one determinate element is filtered and channeled apart from other elements. Stratification occurs when the duration of a determinate element’s separation from others is *extended* beyond a critical point so as to break the determinate element’s fluent connection to the indeterminate flow from which it was parted. Ay, and a pipeline is just that: a channel reserved for a determinate element that has been *extended* beyond a critical point, breaking a determinate element’s fluent connection to the indeterminate flow from which it was parted.

Let us take, for instance, the pipelines that convey the richest and most “educated” white men of the First World to lives of leisure and luxury and the pipelines that convey the poorest and least “educated” black women of the Third World to lives of service and squalor. These pipelines break the fluent connections between rich white men of the First World and poor black women of the Third World so that the two feel no empathy and responsibility for one another. Rich white men of the First World only “care” about poor black women of the Third World in order to signal their own virtues to other rich white men of the First World. The charitable and philanthropic efforts of rich white men of the First World do not repair broken connections between them and the poor black women of the Third World but, rather, cover up the fact that the connections are broken. Artful
reparations, as opposed to charity and philanthropy, would deconstruct the pipelines that have broken the fluent connections between rich white men of the First World and poor black women of the Third World, and artful reparations would repair these broken connections so as to (re-)create mutual empathy and responsibility amongst rich white men of the First World and poor black women of the Third World.

In this essay, I will focus on black-white racial stratification in America, and I will take as my primary example the manner in which the “white progressive” perpetuates racial stratification.

The white progressive believes that “there are poor blacks who deserve better”, and the white progressive endeavors to create pipelines that convey “poor but deserving blacks” to institutions of “higher learning” and to “lucrative” careers. Thinking with and through schizoanalysis, I am struck by the fact that the white progressive’s “noble” endeavors effectively reinforce stratification by race, by education, and by wealth. The endeavors of the white progressive effectively maintain the filters and channels that generate pools of poor blacks and, taking these pools for granted, the white progressive endeavors to filter out “deserving blacks” from these pools and channel these “deserving blacks” along pipelines to privilege, leaving “undeserving blacks” to stew in poverty.

Going one step further, the white progressive also endeavors to filter out “undeserving whites” from pipelines to privilege and to channel these “undeserving whites” into poverty alongside “undeserving blacks”. The results of these endeavors are perverse. The “undeserving whites” being filtered out of pipelines to privilege and into poverty watch as “deserving blacks” are filtered out of pipelines to poverty and into privilege, and these “undeserving whites” become resentful of “deserving blacks”. Meanwhile, “deserving blacks” become self-righteous at being found “deserving” and, here’s the rub, white progressives become doubly self-righteous for being counted amongst “deserving whites” and for being the benefactors of “deserving blacks”.

America’s leading political parties devote a great deal of attention to the pipelines that are supposed to channel “deserving blacks” from poverty into privilege. The Republican party appeals to the resentment of “undeserving whites” who have been filtered and channeled out of pipelines to white privilege. Republicans demand the narrowing or the elimination of the pipelines channeling “deserving blacks” to privilege, arguing that too many “undeserving blacks” are being “mistakenly” channeled from poverty into privilege, taking the place of more deserving whites. The Democratic party, by contrast, appeals to the hopes of poor blacks, the self-righteousness of white progressives, and to the gratitude of “deserving blacks”. The Democratic party wants to broaden and multiply the pipelines to privilege for “deserving blacks”, arguing that there are more “deserving blacks” than the existing pipelines can presently handle and, what’s more, there are too many “undeserving whites” still being pipelined to privilege. Both the Republicans and Democrats, in spite of their differences, take racial stratification for granted. The question for both parties is how best to deal with “deserving blacks” and “undeserving whites”: neither party cares to actually disrupt racial stratification.
Thinking with and through schizoanalysis, I am struck by the fact that those who would make artful reparations and disrupt racial stratification are those who would deconstruct pipelines in order to (re-)create leaky designs. The filters and channels that lead to stratification are precisely those that aim to prohibit or preclude leakiness: these filters and channels develop into pipelines so as to keep segregated flows from polluting and being polluted by one another. But whereas a pipeline (or streamlined design) prevents pollution by maintaining segregation, a leaky design dilutes flows in order to undermine the conditions of possibility for pollution. Recognizing that over-concentration is the process that turns an otherwise benign element into a malignant pollutant that must be separated from others, leaky designs are filters and channels that are (de)constructed so as to dilute over-concentrations, enabling determinate flows to course openly and confluently, to spill over into one another, and to (re-)mix together and back into indeterminate flows. In so doing, leaky designs deconstruct fixed social strata and (re-)construct fluid social distinctions in their place.

Returning to the issue of black-white racial stratification in America, both the Republicans and the Democrats haven’t simply failed to prevent over-concentrations of wealth and privilege, they have promoted over-concentrations of wealth and privilege. Hence their fear of leakiness and pollution. On the one hand, they are concerned that the flows filling the pools of the privileged will be polluted by the “undeserving”, both white and black. On the other hand, they are concerned that the flows filling the pools of the poor will be polluted by the “deserving”, both white and black. What’s more, both Democrats and Republicans take it for granted that it means one thing for blacks to be “deserving” and that it means something different for whites to be “deserving”, which, in turn, means that there ought to be different pipelines for “deserving blacks” and for “deserving whites”. The two political parties mainly differ with respect to their definitions of “deserving blacks” and “deserving whites”; they do not differ on the point that the “deserving” need to be pipelined to the pools of the privileged and that the pools of the privileged mustn’t be polluted by the “undeserving”. The two parties both rally against leaky designs that allow the deserving-and-undeserving, black-and-white, to be (re-)mixed together and back into indeterminate flows, wherein neither one can be strictly distinguished from the other.

The need to strictly distinguish the deserving from the undeserving is, above all else, justified by (the appearance of) scarcity. We are told, “There is not enough to go around, so we need to know who deserves a livelihood and who is undeserving. The right resources need to go to the right people, to those who rightly deserve them.” This logic tells us that leaky designs are to be disparaged for squandering scarce resources on the undeserving. Thinking with and through schizoanalysis, however, I believe that we should disparage (the appearance of) scarcity as opposed to leaky designs. Those who endeavor to fight against leaky designs but don’t bother to fight against (the appearance of) scarcity are not to be esteemed: they are friends of scarcity and the champions of stratification. Indeed, the Republicans and the Democrats are but two factions of the friends of scarcity, two factions of the champions of stratification. By contrast, the champions of leaky designs are, above all else, the enemies of scarcity. The champions of leaky designs want, above all else, to
create a superfluity of livelihoods so that there is no longer any need to strictly differentiate the deserving from the undeserving.

Indulge me by attending to a rather specific problem: to the problem of making a livelihood as an artist in America.

As I am sure you know, one can scarcely find a livelihood as an artist in America, and the general assumption is that there are those who deserve a livelihood as an artist and there are those who do not. Many “activists” will point, with one hand, to the undeserving white artists pipelined to the privileged pools of career artists, and then, with the other hand, point to the deserving black artists pipelined to the pools of the impoverished, unable to make a living as an artist. These “activists” argue that the right thing to do is to channel undeserving (white) artists out of pipelines to privilege and to channel deserving (black) artists into pipelines to privilege.

Thinking with and through schizoanalysis, I propose that we ask more fundamental questions, “Why can one scarcely find a livelihood as an artist in America? Why can’t there be an abundance of artistic livelihoods in America? How can we create a greater abundance of artistic livelihoods in America?” These questions do not diminish the importance of anti-racist activism. To the contrary, they heighten the importance of anti-racist activism. It ought to be clear that white supremacist racism is one reason why artistic livelihoods are scarce: white supremacist racism survives and thrives by promoting (the appearance of) scarcity, by making livelihoods (appear) scarce, and by claiming to guarantee scarce livelihoods to whites who “truly deserve” them. What’s more, it ought to be clear that white supremacist racism is allied with other “-isms” (e.g., sexism, capitalism) in promoting (the appearance of) scarcity. For instance, white supremacist racism and capitalism are allied when it comes to creating (apparent) scarcities of livelihoods because capitalism revolves around profiting from (apparent) scarcities of resources and opportunities. That being said, however, capitalism is a fair weather friend of white supremacist racism because capitalism can accept the filtering out of “undeserving whites” and the filtering in of “deserving blacks” as long as this filtering out and filtering in does nothing to prevent (the appearance of) scarcities.

If we aim to create a greater abundance of artistic livelihoods in America, I would propose that we deconstruct pipelines and (re-)create leaky designs. It would be a mistake to create an abundance of artistic livelihoods exclusively for “deserving (black) artists” and to regard “undeserving (white) artists” as contaminants to be filtered and channeled out of the pools of artists that can make a living. Instead, let us create a superfluity of livelihoods for artists, so that artists whom we consider undeserving can just as easily make a living as those that we consider deserving, so that there can be no reason for any one group to resent any other group’s definition of “being deserving”. This does not mean creating more and more jobs for specialists in the arts but, rather, it means encouraging art-making to spillover into increasingly more livelihoods, into livelihoods that would otherwise be considered non-artistic.

Many artists in America are, unfortunately, conditioned to over-concentrate in art and to live in fear of (the appearance of) scarcity. They are conditioned to continually prove that they “deserve” to
make a living as an artist in order to gain access to pipelines for dedicated career artists, and they do not endeavor to create a superfluous of artistic livelihoods. This conditioning runs so deep that many American artists who do make decent livelihoods and could further the (re-)creation of leaky designs, choose instead to hoard opportunities for themselves and the few they believe to be “deserving”: transforming themselves and their cliques into new pipelines for “deserving” artists.

Let me finish this text by citing myself as a case study. I am a black artist in America who has yet to find a livelihood for himself as an artist: I have never even approached the possibility of feeding and housing myself and my family with my art. It follows that I am desperate to prove that I “deserve” to be an artist: I am desperately seeking access to an artistic career through the pipelines available to me. Thus far, I have failed on three fronts:

- My art is not “marketable”, so it has not been found “deserving” by the commercial pipelines to artistic careers.
- The academic pipelines to artistic careers, supported by grant seeking and teaching, are closed to me because I have no credentials and, at least for now, I refuse to become a glorified debt peon in order to “earn” credentials in the arts that can hardly assure me a livelihood.
- What’s more, I have, thus far, been shut out of the pipelines for “deserving black artists” due in no small part to my lack of marketability and credentials but also, in part, due to the fact my art has not, until now, directly addressed my “being black”.

Having no proper pipelines to an artistic career, I have been looking for ways in which I might surreptitiously seep into a pipeline that wouldn’t otherwise have me. To be specific, recognizing that I could pass for an academic artist in spite of my lack of credentials, I have been seeking out the faults and fissures in the academic pipelines to an artistic career so that I might improperly convey myself to a livelihood as an artist. But I wonder… Could I do something more radical? Seeping through the faults and fissures in the academic pipelines does not seem very radical to me. Although I am not accessing the academic pipelines through the proper filters and channels, I am still working to prove that I “deserve” an artistic livelihood to those who are accessing the academic pipelines through the proper filters and channels. Indeed, all that I am really doing is asking proper artist-academics to recognize me as “deserving” and to let me in on their pipelines to scarce livelihoods through improper side-channels. In other words, I am only accepting and navigating the (apparent) scarcity of livelihoods available to artists: I am not (re-)creating leaky designs so that art-making spills over into increasingly more livelihoods.

So, of course, I have been wondering how I might (re-)create leaky designs so that art-making spills over into increasingly more livelihoods. Or, in other words, I have been wondering how to develop an artistic practice that makes non-artistic livelihoods increasingly more artistic, so that I need not judge myself or other artists as “deserving” or “undeserving”. In the same vein, being a black African in America, I have been wondering how I might do something other than accept and navigate the (apparent) scarcity of livelihoods available to black people, how I might do something other than prove myself a “deserving” black person who should be filtered out from the pool of
“undeserving” black people and pipelined to privilege. Indeed, I have been wondering how I might (re-)create leaky designs so that my livelihood needn't depend on my being judged “deserving” or “undeserving” according to a double standard that discriminates by race.

Considering the above, I hope that it now makes sense to you, dear reader, why I have come to formulate a concept of artful reparations. All of my ideas regarding the “art of making reparations” betray my desire that art-making spillover into labors that disrupt social stratification and repair broken connections between the different social elements kept apart by social stratification. In other words, the ideas expressed in this essay and the preceding essay betray my desire to confuse my aesthetics and my politics. Ay, and I hope you realize that my confusion of aesthetics and politics is not the flaw that mars my ideas but the sought after feature that defines the ideas that matter most to me.
The Third Essay:
On Revaluation and Reparative Economy

Part One. The Idea of Money

The reasons why anthropologists haven't been able to come up with a simple, compelling story for the origins of money is because there's no reason to believe there could be one. Money was no more ever “invented” than music or mathematics or jewelry. What we call "money" isn't a "thing" at all, it's a way of comparing things mathematically, as proportions: of saying one of X is equivalent to six of Y. As such it is probably as old as human thought.

— David Graeber, from Debt, The First 5,000 years

Let me begin this essay by proposing that money is an idea.

The proposition that money is an idea is, in and of itself, neither a novel nor a controversial proposition. Indeed, the proposition has currency in many academic and political milieus. At the same time, however, this proposition is, more often than not, qualified in ways that dismiss money's significance as an idea. It is often said that “money is just an idea” or that “money is a mere idea”, with the qualifiers “just” and “mere” serving to indicate that the idea of money is not itself significant but, rather, that the idea of money signifies something of greater significance: e.g., Marxian “relations of production” or Foucauldian “power formations”.

I propose, however, that there is no such thing as a “mere” idea, that no idea is “just” an idea. Indeed, I propose that ideas are signified by other things rather than being signifiers of other things. The dollar notes, euro notes, pound notes, or yen notes that you may have in your wallet are not themselves money but, rather, they are signifiers of the idea of money, or, to be rather more precise, they are things that promise to be of monetary significance.

What economists call the four functions of money are, in light of my proposition, four ways in which things promise to be of monetary significance. This is to say, in other words, that a thing promises to be of monetary significance when it functions as (i) a unit of account, (ii) a store of value, (iii) a means of payment, or (iv) a standard of deferred payment. That being said, however, a promise to be of monetary significance is just that: a promise. A thing may promise to be of monetary significance by functioning in one or more of the four aforementioned ways but never deliver on its promise. Thus, the question for me is never, “Is X, Y, or Z money?” Instead, the question is, “What are the conditions under which X, Y or Z promises to be of monetary significance and delivers on its promise?”

Let me pause here and consider an idea other than the idea of money in order to clarify what I mean when I say that something is an idea. Say, for instance, that you have an idea for redecorating
your living room in a mid-century modern style. In light of your idea for redecorating, every piece of furniture that you encounter that is of mid-century modern design, or that bears a resemblance to something of mid-century modern design, or that might complement something of mid-century modern design will promise to be of significance with respect to your idea for redecorating. These pieces of furniture will lure you in and you will notice them in light of your idea for redecorating. If you hadn't any idea at all or if you had a different idea, you either wouldn't notice these pieces or you would notice them differently.

Going further, some of these pieces of furniture promise to be of significance in more senses than others: e.g., the piece that promises to fit snugly in the northwest corner of your room, the piece that promises to complement the stain of the wood paneling in your room, and the pieces that promise to fit within your redecorating budget — each of these pieces could be said to have promised to signify your idea in more senses than other pieces. That being said, however, it is only after you select certain pieces of furniture that are promising and attempt to redecorate your living room with these pieces that you discover whether or not the selected pieces of furniture deliver on their promise to be of significance with respect to your idea for redecorating. If the pieces of furniture that you select do not deliver or if they deliver less than what you bargained for—by not fitting the room quite right or by looking tacky—the selected pieces fail to signify your idea for redecorating, and you may decide to return them, to resell them, to give them away, or to put them in storage. If the pieces of furniture that you selected do deliver or deliver more than you bargained for—fitting perfectly in your living room and looking quite stylish—the selected pieces succeed in signifying your idea for redecorating.

Let us now return to the idea of money. The idea of money, as I understand it, is the idea of using one good or service to take a measure of the value contained in another good or service. In light of the idea of money, any and every good or service that promises to be of monetary significance is a good or service that might be able to take a measure of the value contained in another good or service. But a promise is only a promise: we only discover whether or not a selected good and service delivers on its promise to be of monetary significance after we attempt to use the good or service to take a measure of the value contained in other goods and services.

Those goods and services that we have come to call money are only those goods and services that have so often delivered on their promise to be of monetary significance that we have come to fetishize them and identify them with the idea of money. Indeed, many of the goods and services that have become fetishes for money are goods and services that have been designed to serve no other purpose than to express the idea of money and take measures of value. Still, however, even if these goods and services have been designed for no other purpose than expressing the idea of money, to say that these goods and services are themselves money and nothing more, is like saying that a 1-pound object designed for no other purpose than to measure the weight of another object is itself a weight and nothing more. Certainly, speaking casually, we do call a 1-pound object designed to measure weights a “weight” but, in practice, we know better than to treat it as if it was “weight itself” rather than a particular expression of the idea of weight. Similarly, although we casually refer to goods and services designed for the express purpose of taking measures of value
as “money”, in practice, we should know better than to treat these goods and services as if they were themselves money rather than particular expressions of the idea of money.

Consider, for instance, the fact that a weight labelled “one pound” might promise to weigh one pound, but this labelled weight may fail to deliver on its promise if it does not balance a scale when measured against other weights that we hold to be one pound weights. Similarly, the currency in terms of which other goods and services have been priced might promise to be of monetary significance, but the currency only fulfills its promise to be of monetary significance when someone actually pays the price for a good or service using that currency. There is, of course, nothing wrong with using the terms “weight” and “money” casually. In fact, I will use the term “money” quite casually throughout this text. The problem is only in assuming that what is casually called money will always deliver on its promise to be of monetary significance.

As I have already stated above, goods and services commonly promise to be of monetary significance by either functioning as a unit of account, a store of value, a means of payment, or as a standard of deferred payment. Indeed, it can be said that a good or service that functions in all four of these ways promises to be of monetary significance in every common sense of the idea of money. That being said, however, depending upon the circumstances at play, a good or service may only function in one common sense in order to promise to be of monetary significance, and it is possible that a good or service can function in none of these common senses and still promise to be of monetary significance. What’s more, a good or service that functions in every common sense might still fail to deliver on its promise to be of monetary significance, while a good that does not function in any common sense might successfully deliver on its promise to be of monetary significance. How is this possible?

That which promises (from pro "before" + mittere "to release, let go; send, throw") is that which sets out in some way. That which delivers (from de "away" + Latin liberare "to free," from liber "free, unrestricted, unimpeded") on a promise is that which sets out and makes it, having overcome encumbrances (from in- "in" + combrus "barricade, obstacle") along its way. In light of these etymological and tropological ideas, I find that a useful metaphor with respect to any idea of "promising" and "delivering", of "setting out" and "making it", is the sending and receiving of letters by post. Ay, and, with respect to the idea of money, I hold that the issues involved in posting letters (dis-)simulate the issues involved in promising monetary significance in the most profound ways.

The posted letter promises and sets out to convey a message to its addressee and the letter conveys its message when it is delivered and makes it to its addressee intact. Similarly, the good or service which promises to be of monetary significance sets out to take a measure of the value contained in other goods and services, and it delivers on its promise to be of monetary significance if and when it makes it and takes a measure of the value contained in another good or service. Just as letters don’t post themselves, the good or service that promises to be of monetary significance does not take measures itself. In other words, just as the posting of a letter assumes the existence of postal services, the promise to be of monetary significance assumes the existence of financial services. Indeed, what economists have called the four functions of money are, in fact, only the four most
common financial services: accounting services, payment processing services, debt services, and value storing services.

An unscrupulous postal service provider can wreak havoc by intentionally mis-delivering letters and by taking advantage of the information conveyed in letters. Similarly, an unscrupulous financial service provider can wreak havoc by mis-delivering on promises of monetary significance and by taking advantage of the value conveyed in promises of monetary significance. Those who claim that money is the root of all evil by citing the bad behavior of unscrupulous financial service providers, are like people claiming that letters are the root of all evil by citing the bad behavior of unscrupulous postal service providers. The benefits of being able to post letters are immense and, knowing the great harm that can be done by unscrupulous postal service providers, we have developed social conventions that enable us to recognize and seek reparations from unscrupulous postal service providers. Similarly, the benefits of being able to take measures of value are immense, and we have also developed social conventions that enable us to recognize and seek reparations from unscrupulous financial service providers. If we complain that money is the root of all evil but do not complain about letters in the same breath, this is because the social conventions that we have developed around postal services are effective at outing unscrupulous postal service providers but those that we have developed around financial services are ineffective at outing unscrupulous financial service providers. Unscrupulous financial service providers are, of course, happy to have us believe that it is money that corrupts because, in fact, it is they who use the idea of money to corrupt, systematically biasing measures of value, tipping the scales to their own advantage.

Many societies have built public infrastructures to guarantee a modicum capable and scrupulous postal services at a fair cost for all, but few societies have built public infrastructures to guarantee a modicum of capable and scrupulous financial services at a fair cost for all. Imagine if all letters addressed to the underprivileged and powerless were held for ransom by postal service providers until their ransom victims overpaid to receive them or took out usurious loans from postal service providers in order to receive them. Ay, that is how the underprivileged and powerless often relate to financial service providers. Goods and services that promise to be of monetary significance for the underprivileged and powerless are often held for ransom by financial service providers and the underprivileged and powerless overpay and take on debt in order to receive them. What’s more, financial service providers curry favor with powerful and privileged actors who are not themselves in the business of providing financial services, helping these actors maintain and extend their power and privilege via investments in exploitative financial services. It is as if postal services not only held the letters of the underprivileged and powerless for ransom but also read letters held for ransom in order to inform the privileged and powerful of goings on amongst the underprivileged and powerless.

Privilege and power maintained and extended by way of financial services that exploit the underprivileged and powerless: this is precisely what Randy Martin has called the “financialization of everyday life” and it is the basis for what Sheldon Wolin has called the “inverted totalitarianism” of liberal globalism. Today, many of us are shocked by Abteilung M – Department M of the Stasi,
which monitored letters posted in German Democratic Republic in order to find out the vulnerabilities of the East Germans. Tomorrow, others will be shocked by the Big Three Credit Bureaus in America which monitor the financial histories of Americans so that financial firms can find out which Americans are financially vulnerable and exploit their vulnerabilities, making it more and more costly for financially vulnerable Americans to gain access to financial services and making less and less costly for rich Americans to gain access to financial services.

With this in mind, let us return to the thesis of this essay. While I recognize that the idea of money is the condition of possibility for the wretched actions of unscrupulous financiers, I also recognize that the idea of money is no more responsible for the wretchedness of unscrupulous financiers than the idea of the letter is responsible for the wretchedness of blackmailers who hold purloined letters over their victims. The idea of the letter is the condition of possibility for exploitative miseries, like the holding of letters for ransom, as well as for creative marvels, like epistolary literature; similarly, the idea of money is the condition of possibility for both exploitative miseries and creative marvels. In and through this essay, I hope to encourage the creative marvels that the idea of money makes possible and to discourage the exploitative miseries that the idea of money makes possible. The exploitative miseries in and through which the unscrupulous financier consolidates power and privilege are what I shall call artless expressions of the idea of money or exploitative financial services. What I shall call artful expressions of the idea of money, or reparative financial services, are the creative marvels that would counter the exploitative miseries of the financialization of everyday life and dissipate power and privilege thereby.

**Part Two. The Fluidity of Value**

The [financialization] of daily life means the imposition of impersonal rules and regulations; impersonal rules and regulations, in turn, can only operate if they are backed up by the threat of force. And indeed, in this most recent phase of [financialization], we’ve seen security cameras, police scooters, issuers of temporary ID cards, and men and women in a variety of uniforms acting in either public or private capacities, trained in tactics of menacing, intimidating, and ultimately deploying physical violence, appear just about everywhere—even in places such as playgrounds, primary schools, college campuses, hospitals, libraries, parks, or beach resorts, where fifty years ago their presence would have been considered scandalous, or simply weird.

— David Graeber, from *The Utopia of Rules*

Imagine, if you will, a river flowing through a valley, a fluid in flux, feeding fauna, flora, and fungi along its course.
Imagine walking up to this river and dipping a vessel into it, a small cup. In doing so, you take a measure of water from the river. You now possess a cup of water that you may drink, hold onto, or give away. At the same time, in and through dipping the cup into the river and taking a measure of water, you have also generated some spillage, some overflow. As you walk away from the river and up the hillside with your measure of water, you will notice that, along the course that you take up the hillside, water drips and drops from the cup and from your hands, leaving behind little puddles, droplets, and rivulets that feed fauna, flora, and fungi that happen across them.

Now, imagine that you have walked from the river to the hilltop that overlooks it and, having reached the hilltop, you drink the measure of water that you took from the river. After drinking this measure of water, while in the midst of enjoying the hilltop view, very suddenly, you suffer a heart attack and you die. Over the next few hours, days, weeks, scavengers and decomposers consume your dead body, each of them taking from your body some measure of the measure of water that you took from the river. Ay, and each and every scavenger and decomposer produces some spillage, some overflow as they take a measure of your water, leaving a trail of drippings and droppings behind them as they abandon your carcass, and these drippings and droppings feed fauna, flora, and fungi that happen across them.

Then comes the rain. What remains of the puddles, droplets, and rivulets of water that you left behind you as you walked uphill, what remains of the drippings and droppings of the creatures who consumed and decomposed your corpse, and what remains of your last gulp of water in your decomposing carcass—all of this flows back down the hill and returns to the very river from which you took your last measure of water, feeding fauna, flora, and fungi on the re-course, on the return journey to the river.

Let us stop here and take a step back. Reflecting upon this scenario, you will recognize that a cup’s capacity to take a measure of water from a stream or reservoir can serve five different purposes, can function in five different ways:

- First, a cup can be used to take and hold a measure of water from a stream or reservoir: that is to say, the cup can serve as a store of water.
- Second, a cup can serve as a unit of account for measures of water taken from a stream or reservoir: for instance, water taken from the river may measure a cup, ½ cup, ¼ cup, etc.
- Third, one can give a cup containing a measure of water to someone else in exchange for something else: that is, the cup can serve as a means of payment.
- Fourth, I can give you a full cup of water now if you promise to take the cup back down to a stream or reservoir and bring back an equal measure of water for me: that is to say, the cup can function as a standard of deferred payment.
- Fifth, and finally, one can let water overflow and spill from the cup as it takes a measure of water, and one can leave a fortuitous trail of drippings and droppings as one conveys this measure of water elsewhere: that is to say, the cup can serve as a dissipator of water thanks to its in-ability to contain all that it draws in and its ability to leave behind a trail of fortuitous drippings and droppings wherever it goes.
Let us stop here and take another step back. I hope that you have come to two realizations at this point but, if you haven’t yet done so, allow me to propose two realizations for you. First, I want to propose that value is the fluid that sustains living cultures akin to the fluid that sustains living creatures, akin to water. Second, I want to propose that a good or service that promises to be of monetary significance is a receptacle with the capacity to take measures of value from streams and reservoirs of value, akin to a receptacle with a capacity to take measures of water from streams and reservoirs of water. Alas, I will not speculate on the nature (or artifice) that characterizes the fluidity of value in this essay, as my focus in this essay is economics rather than metaphysics. Knowing full well that this focus leaves much to be desired, I shall beg your pardon and ask that you read on to judge my idea of the fluidity of value according to whether or not it enables you to take note of things that you would have otherwise overlooked.

Indeed, in light of the idea of the fluidity of value, I would first like to reconsider what it means to possess value. Water courses through the different ecologies that make up the biosphere, the global ecology, in such a way that no one person can truly claim ownership over streams and reservoirs of water. Similarly, value courses over and through the different economies that make up the global economy in such a way that no one person can truly claim ownership over streams and reservoirs of value. That being said, however, people do claim ownership over streams and reservoirs of water and of value, and they maintain their ownership claims with threats of violence. My point here is that one can only claim ownership over streams and reservoirs of water and of value in and through denying others access to streams and reservoirs of water and of value: a billionaire’s claim to possess certain streams and reservoirs of value is a false claim that is maintained with threats of violence, akin to the threats of violence with which a despot makes a false claim to possess certain streams and reservoirs of water. It is might that makes property rights over streams and reservoirs of value.

Going further, I would next like to reconsider what it could mean to determine the amount of value in a stream or reservoir of value. We speculate the measure of water flowing through the biosphere to be 326 million trillion gallons without being able to actually deposit all of the water in the biosphere in actual gallon jugs. Similarly, we speculate the measure of value flowing through the global economy to be 87,752 trillion American dollars without being able to convert the global economy into American dollars that can be deposited in an account. Going further still, a significant measure of the water in the biosphere is contained in lifeforms and cannot be converted into actual gallons of water without liquidating lifeforms, without killing living creatures. Similarly, a significant measure of the value of the global economy is contained in lifeways and cannot be converted into deposits, without liquidating lifeways, without killing living cultures. David Graeber, in Debt: The First 5,000 Years, has pointed out that throughout human history periods during which deposits (as opposed to speculations) form the basis for economic activity are periods during which lifeways are constantly under threat of liquidation, and periods during which speculations (as opposed to deposits) form the basis for economic activity are periods during which lifeways are spared so many threats of liquidation. In other words, those who need to make deposits will feel...
more compelled to liquidate their lifeways, while those who can speculate instead of making deposits will feel less compelled to liquidate their lifeways.

In light of all of the above, I prefer to speak of three different kinds of financial services.

- First, I speak of financial services that enable people to gain access to and draw value from streams and reservoirs of value: these financial services are what I call “valueworks” by analogy with “waterworks”.
- Second, I speak of financial services that enable the liquidation of lifeways so as to make deposits (as opposed to speculations): these financial services are what I call “devaluations”.
- Third, I speak of financial services that enable the continuation of lifeways by making speculations (as opposed to deposits): these financial services are called “transvaluations”.

When considering the four more common financial services that economists attend to (accounting services, payment processing services, debt services, and value storing services), I consider whether and how these different services contribute to valueworks, to devaluations, and to transvaluations. I say that a financial service is artless to the degree that it contributes to devaluations, and that it is artful to the degree that it contributes to transvaluations. Contributing to valueworks in and of itself neither makes a financial service artless nor artful, but contributing to valueworks in a way that promotes devaluations makes a financial service artless, and doing so in a way that promotes transvaluations makes a financial service artful.

The financialization of everyday life in America is defined by artless financial services that devalue the lifeways of the underprivileged and powerless multitudes. The financial services that prevail in America today give privileged and powerful oligarchs exclusive access to bountiful streams and reservoirs of value, so that these privileged and powerful oligarchs are never in desperate need of deposits, but these very same financial services only allow the underprivileged and powerless multitudes to access meager streams and reservoirs of value that cannot be easily drawn from and, as a result, the underprivileged and powerless multitudes are constantly facing pressures to devalue and liquidate their lifeways whenever they need to make deposits.

If you will indulge an ecological metaphor, devaluation is akin to desertification. Just as desertification creates natural landscapes in which deposits of water become harder and harder to find, devaluation creates cultural landscapes in which deposits of value become harder and harder to find. Today, as a result of the financialization of everyday life, powerful and privileged oligarchs and their retinues live in value oases with plentiful deposits of value that are manufactured and maintained by elaborate valueworks. In turn, the underprivileged and powerless multitudes live in growing value deserts with meager deposits of value, and these value deserts are manufactured and maintained by the same elaborate valueworks that maintain the value oases of the powerful and privileged.
Part Three. The Swapping of Options

Poverty and debt have a very different meaning for those who build their lives around relationships with others: it is much more likely to mean being unable to provide birthday presents for one’s daughter, or watching her develop symptoms of diabetes without being able to take her to a doctor, or watching one’s mother die without ever having been able to take her off for a week or two of vacation, not even once in her life.

— David Graeber, from *The Democracy Project*

I would like to conclude this essay by proposing that exploitative financial services that devalue cultural landscapes can (and should) be countered by reparative financial services that revalue cultural landscapes.

Revaluing a cultural landscape that has undergone devaluation is like rewilding a natural landscape that has undergone desertification. A natural landscape cannot return to what was before being undone by desertification. Similarly, a cultural landscape cannot return to what was before being undone by devaluation. Rewilding and revaluation both tend to and mend what has come before, yes, but in so doing they also amend what has come before and create something new and different. Rewilding (re-)creates natural landscapes anew and weaves delicate and intricate webs of differing and deferring lifeforms anew. Similarly, revaluation (re-)creates cultural landscapes anew and weaves delicate and intricate webs of differing and deferring lifeways anew.

*Revaluations* are species of valueworks that make more transvaluations possible and, in so doing, making fewer devaluations necessary. Species of valueworks that do the opposite, that make more devaluations necessary and fewer transvaluations possible, are *overvaluations-and-undervaluations*. All revaluations begin by deconstructing overvaluations-and-undervaluations and then proceed to (re-)construct potentials for transvaluation. I shall describe this two step process step-by-step.

The deconstruction of overvaluations-and-undervaluations begins with the recognition that there is no overvaluation that is not also the flip side of an undervaluation. For instance, there are exploitative valueworks that overvalue computing services performed by men, giving men engaged in computing exclusive access to bountiful streams and reservoirs of value. These exploitative valueworks simultaneously undervalue house cleaning services performed by women, denying women engaged in house cleaning access to bountiful streams and reservoirs of value and only giving these women access to meager streams and reservoirs of value. Thanks to these exploitative valueworks, these overvaluations-and-undervaluations, women engaged in providing house cleaning services face greater pressure to devalue and liquidate their lifeways whenever they need to come up with deposits, while men engaged in providing computing services are safe in their lifeways.
Imagine, if you will, a Hatian cleaning lady named Grace who cleans the homes of Silicon Valley tech bros. Imagine that, this year, Grace needs to come up with some money to pay for a medical procedure. Every year before this one, Grace had traveled back to Haiti in December to visit her aging mother for the Christmas Holiday but, in order to make money to pay for her medical procedure, Grace has devalued and liquidated this custom this year in order to work through the month of December and make some extra money. The following January, however, Grace’s mother in Haiti passes away suddenly from a stroke, and Grace realizes that she devalued her last opportunity to spend Christmas in Haiti with her beloved mother. Still reeling from the news of her mother’s death, but also still working hard to make money for her procedure, our protagonist stumbles upon a bank statement that one of her tech bro employers carelessly left out for her to see. Reviewing the bank statement, Grace discovers just how easily her employer could have both paid for her medical procedure and her annual trip to Haiti and still had deposits to spare.

This imagined scenario, the overvaluation of the tech bro and the undervaluation of the cleaning lady, is a prime example of how an artless expression of the idea of money leads to tragic devaluations and liquidations of living customs. How might we make artful reparations for such an artless expression of the idea of money? How might we revalue Grace’s custom of visiting her mother in Haiti every December, especially now that her mother is dead and gone? Going further, how might we transvalue this custom after it has been revalued so that Grace might afford the medical procedure that she needs?

I do not intend to answer these questions fully in this essay. I only hope to convince you that these are the kinds of questions that we ought to be asking ourselves if we are interested in artful expressions of the idea of money and in reparative financial services. We are asking artless questions (i) when we ask how we can subsidize healthcare for people performing low paying "menial" labor, and (ii) when we ask how we might retrain the workforce in order to create more highly paid "hi-tech" laborers. The artful question to ask is how to revalue delicate and intricate webs of lifeways so that overvaluations-and-undervaluations do not lead to devaluations and liquidations. In the specific scenario above, we might rephrase the artful question as follows, “How might we revalue the custom of periodically visiting far away family members so that overvaluations-and-undervaluations do not precipitate the devaluation and liquidation of the custom?” Again, I do not intend to answer this question fully in this essay. That being said, however, in order to convince you that this is the right question to ask, I will imagine the beginnings of a possible answer in order to spark your imagination.

As I imagine them, revaluations artfully insure against overvaluations-and-undervaluations. Art-less insurance, as an exploitative financial service, comes in the form of compensation in the event of an overvaluation-and-undervaluation: a pay-off for your troubles. By contrast, art-ful insurance, as a reparative financial service, comes in the form of options that precede, exceed, and succeed any event of overvaluation-and-undervaluation. In finance, an option is an agreement that conveys to its holder the opportunity, but not the obligation, to access and draw from a stream or reservoir of value in the interim between two specified events. Revaluations, as I imagine them, would deconstruct exclusive property rights over streams and reservoirs of values so as to (re-)construct
options to access and draw from streams and reservoirs of value. As I imagine them, reparations for Grace would deconstruct the exclusive property rights that her Silicon Valley tech bro employers have over streams and reservoirs of value, and they would give Grace, as their employee, options to access these very same streams and reservoirs of value in the event that she needs to pay for an expensive medical procedure, or in the event of her annual visit to Haiti in the winter, or in accord with some other ordinary and extraordinary events that one can speculate upon.

Indeed, revaluations, as I imagine them, would transform all economic relations (e.g., the employer-employee relation, landlord-tenant relation, and creditor-debtor relation) by (re-)founding them anew on the basis of options instead of property rights. Revaluations would deconstruct exclusive property rights on streams and reservoirs of value that are held by employers, landlords, and creditors, and they would give employees, tenants, and debtors options to access and draw from these very same streams and reservoirs of value in accord with ordinary and extraordinary events that can be speculated upon by the employer and employee, the landlord and tenant, the creditor and debtor.

As a result of the revaluations that I imagine, employer-employee, landlord-tenant, creditor-debtor, and all other kinds of economic relations would be founded on options that precede, exceed, and succeed any and all payments and property rights, and the transvaluations that would follow from such revaluations would be swaps of options. In finance, a swap of options is a speculative arrangement between two counterparties to exchange options on different streams and reservoirs of value in accord with ordinary and extraordinary events that can be speculated upon. For instance, an employee of a small business concern might swap options for a time with a friend or relative who is employed by a large business concern in the event that they require a medical procedure that they could not have paid for by drawing from the streams and reservoirs available to them via the small business concern. In the meantime, the friend or relative involved in the swap will meet their own needs by accessing and drawing from the streams and reservoirs of the small business concern which they gained access to in the swap. In effect, swaps of options create confluences and crossings between different streams and reservoirs of value, allowing value to flow more freely over a given cultural landscape. Indeed, swaps and options together are what you might call leakily designed financial services or dissipators of value.

The practice of designing options and swaps, as I understand it, revolves around speculating upon the events that govern the terms of options and swaps. Insofar I aim to revalue and transvalue lifeways, I hold that the events that govern the terms options and swaps ought to be life-events that are integral to lifeways: either (i) life-events conditioned by lifeways or (ii) life-events that condition lifeways. Options and swaps that are governed by no more than the passage of time, like an option for a period of twelve months or a swap for a period of twelve weeks, are art-less options and swaps because of the fact that their terms do not specify any life-events that are integral to lifeways. By contrast, art-ful options and swaps are contracted for intervals between specified life-events and, as such, they revalue and transvalue the lifeways that specified life-events are integral to. Life-events integral to lifeways that could govern the terms of options and swaps could include births, deaths, meals, comings of age, illnesses, extreme weather events, marriages,
divorces, vacations, hirings, firings, resignings, retirings, relocatings, bandings together, disbandings, reunions, and more.

Putting all of this aside, my point is this: our protagonist, Grace, and others like her will never have reparations for lifeways that they have had to devalue and liquidate for as long as they know that, when misfortune strikes again, they will have no option other than to devalue and liquidate their lifeways again in order to make deposits. In this text, I have only imagined one possible way by which Grace might have reparations by being given options other than devaluation, but there are many, many other ways that can be imagined. I invite you to imagine alternative ways for yourself and I challenge you to try and bring them into being.
The Fourth Essay: On Rewilding and Reparative Ecology

We tried ruling the world; we tried acting as God’s steward, then we tried ushering in the human revolution, the age of reason and isolation. We failed in all of it, and our failure destroyed more than we were even aware of. The time for civilisation is past. Uncivilisation, which knows its flaws because it has participated in them; which sees unflinchingly and bites down hard as it records – this is the project we must embark on now.

— Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine, from Uncivilization

Is there any reality that is more disturbing than that of the ongoing rape and abuse of Mother Earth?

This reality disturbs me more than genocide, more than slavery, more than the rape and abuse of women — and these realities already disturb me to no end. I imagine that I am so deeply disturbed by the rape and abuse of Mother Earth because I sense somehow that this reality conditions the rape and abuse of women which, in turn, conditions genocide and slavery.

The reality of the ongoing rape and abuse of Mother Earth has become so violent and extreme over the past two-and-a-half centuries that no one can effectively deny it anymore. It has been noted that the sum total of the harm inflicted on Mother Earth since the Second World War, the last “hot” war to consume the entire globe, exceeds the ravages that another world consuming war would have left behind. Yet still, in spite of its obviousness, the reality of the ongoing rape and abuse of Mother Earth is still spoken of in euphemisms: so few of us speak openly and honestly of ongoing ecocide. What’s more, most of our customs and institutions still express wishful and defensive fantasies that bunglingly attempt to cover up and deny the ongoing rape and abuse of Mother Earth; this is to say, in other words, that our most of our customs and institutions still indulge in anthropocentrism and anthropodenial.

**Anthropocentrism** is the wishful fantasy of human beings who would deny the reality of the ongoing rape and abuse of Mother Earth. Anthropocentrism and its privileged customs and institutions tell us that Man’s dominion over the Earth is a matter of divine dispensation or of natural superiority. Anthropocentric customs and institutions hold that either (i) God made the Earth for Man’s pleasure or (ii) Man has conquered the Earth because Man is a conqueror by nature. Either way, Man can and should have his way with Earth because the Earth is Man’s property.

**Anthropodenial** is the defensive fantasy that attempts to cover up the rape and abuse of Mother Earth. Anthropodenial and its privileged customs and institutions tell us that human beings can’t have an abusive relationship with Mother Earth because there is no such thing as Mother Earth. Anthropodenial claims that the idea of Mother Earth is a primitive anthropomorphism, a
superstition that human beings need to put behind them in order to meet their Sustainable Development Goals. Those who engage in anthropodenial will tell you that the Earth does not have feelings and, as such, the Earth cannot be raped and abused. The Earth can only be used or misused: that is to say, it can be used effectively and efficiently or it can be used ineffectively and inefficiently. The Sustainable Development Goals that anthropodenialists hold dear are primarily concerned with making more effective and efficient use of the Earth, choosing success over failure in order to avoid collapse. They do not aim to develop ever deeper and ever more meaningful relations with Mother Earth.

Anthropocentrism as wishful fantasy and anthropodenial as defensive fantasy are both “human, all too human” or artless anthropomorphisms: they anthropomorphize humans and de-anthropomorphize non-human so as to keep humans from meaningfully relating to non-humans. Opposed to anthropocentrism and anthropodenial, those who would acknowledge and make reparations for the rape and abuse of Mother Earth find meaning and purpose in animisms.

_Animisms are “beyond human” or artful anthropomorphisms._ Animisms anthropomorphize non-humans and de-anthropomorphize humans so that humans can relate to non-humans in increasingly more meaningful ways, flipping the script of anthropocentrism and anthropodenial. Animisms tell us that we have feelings for the Earth and that the Earth has feelings for us, and animisms invite us to take care not to hurt the Earth’s feelings and to make amends for having hurt the Earth’s feelings. This is to say, in other words, that _animisms are sublimating fantasies_ that enable human beings to better acknowledge and make reparations for the harm that they can do and have done to non-human others.

I hear both the anthropocentrists and the anthropodenialists sneering at me, accusing me of “vain superstition and womanish pity” when I talk about the Earth’s feelings. Indeed, I hear them quoting Spinoza at me, aware of how fond I am of the 17th-century rationalist, “The rational quest of what is useful teaches us the necessity of associating ourselves with our fellow men, but not with beasts, or things, whose nature is different from our own.”

The disdain that anthropocentrists and the anthropodenialists have for the animisms of primitive peoples is but an expression their refusal to admit the reality of ongoing rape and abuse of Mother Earth. Anthropocentrists and anthropodenialists would find it difficult to live with themselves if they made an earnest effort to imagine how Mother Earth feels and to express the feelings they imagine. Anthropocentrists and anthropodenialists cannot claim that it is impossible to imagine how Mother Earth feels because primitive peoples have proven again and again that this is possible to imagine how Mother Earth feels in ways that are meaningful. Instead, anthropocentrists and anthropodenialists argue that imagining Mother Earth’s feelings is an irrational activity, a waste of time, and they claim that primitive peoples are irrational peoples with too much time on their hands. “Be smart,” say the anthropocentrists and anthropodenialists, “Do not waste our time and yours, for we have important things to do.”
To their chagrin, I and others like me continue to persist in our idiocy and we insist upon wasting everyone’s time with sentimental stories about Mother Earth. This is because we believe that making reparations for the rape and abuse of Mother Earth must involve (re-)creating primitive animisms anew. Indeed, my fellow travelers and I, in our endeavors to (re-)create primitive animisms anew, are what you might call neo-primitives.

Switching from the psychoanalytic register to the schizoanalytic register, we neo-primitives find that modern human societies are defined by increasingly streamlined designs, by proliferations of pipelines dedicated to conveying human wants and needs hither and thither apart from the wants and needs non-humans. These streamlined designs are breaking fluent connections between human and non-human wants and needs, and anthropocentrism and anthropodenial are, above all else, expressions of the fact that fluent connections between human and non-human wants and needs have been broken. In endeavoring to (re-)create primitive animisms anew, we neo-primitives aim to deconstruct the streamlined designs of “advanced” patriarchal capitalism and to (re-)construct leaky designs in their place, enabling human and non-human wants and needs to become confluent again. As we neo-primitives see it, the animisms of ur-primitive peoples were expressions of their societies’ leaky designs and the confluences of human and non-human wants and needs that their societies enabled. We neo-primitives aim to (re-)create primitive animisms anew by (re-)creating the potentials that yielded primitive animisms: by (re-)creating human societies with leaky designs so as to (re-)generate confluences humans and non-human wants and needs.

The eco-modernism of liberal globalism is the foil of neo-primitivism. Eco-modernism is the extreme form of anthropodenial that is the logical endpoint of our Green New Deals and Sustainable Development Goals. Eco-modernism aims to decouple the global economy from the ecology of the biosphere and, in so doing, it would sever whatever fluent connections still remain between the wants and needs of humans and non-humans. Eco-modernism would take streamlined designs to new heights, plugging up every fault and fissure to be found in existing pipelines and creating new seamless pipelines that would ensure that human wants and needs do not leak out into and pollute non-human environments. Indeed, this is what the eco-modernist calls environmental conservation.

Instead of working to conserve environments, neo-primitives work to rewild the world. Rewilding is not a matter of removing humans from nature and letting nature do its thing. Humans, so long as they exist, are inextricable from nature, and nature cannot become wild again without human beings also becoming wild again—unless, of course, the human species becomes extinct. Rewilding, insofar as it is a human practice, is about (re)creating confluences of human and non-human wants and needs.

The eco-modernist snarls and snaps, “Luddites! Neo-primitives are the enemies of progress, science, and technology!” I implore you not to take them seriously. Neo-primitives are in no way the enemies of science and technology, unless science and technology are definitively characterized by seamless and streamlined designs. If there are sciences and technologies that can be characterized
by seamful and leaky designs—and I assure you there are—then there are neo-primitive sciences and technologies. Rewilding, as the neo-primitive understands and practices it, is only about eschewing the seamless and streamlined and embracing the seamful and leaky. In light of this, the neo-primitive finds that making the world wild again is not the impossible feat that “advanced” capitalist man makes it out to be. The mistake is to think that rewilding is about sustaining nature as it is or returning nature to what it was. When undertaken by neo-primitives, however, rewilding is about making nature differ wildly again, it is about (re-)creating potentials for things to wildly differ. Indeed, going even further, we neo-primitives find life’s meaning and purpose in asking and answering the following question, “How can we defer to what wildly differs?”

I will stop here, leaving this question and many others unanswered. These unanswered questions are to remain unanswered in theory because they ought to be answered in practice. Indeed, henceforth, I hope I might refrain from theorizing apart from the theorizing that is needed to relay me from one practice to another: from the practice of rewilding natural landscapes to the practice of revaluing cultural landscapes and vice versa. What I have not made clear in the words that I have written above, I hope I might make clear in deeds performed in light of these words, in deeds that deliver on the promise of what I have written.
Addendum One:
On Jurisprudence and Reparative Politics

[It]’s not a human rights issue, and it’s not a justice issue. It’s a matter of jurisprudence. All of the abominations through which humans have suffered are cases. They’re not denials of abstract rights; they’re abominable cases. [...] They are situations for jurisprudence.
— Gilles Deleuze, from L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze

This addendum to my Four Essays was written in response to a reader who asked the following question, “Philosophically, I can understand what you mean, but what do you mean in political terms?”

The following questions were implied by my respondent’s explicit question, “What political party can you support? Who can you vote for? What legislation can you pass? How can you enforce this legislation?”

Harried by these implied questions, I explicated each question and gave to each of them the same reply, “I would prefer not to.”

My respondent then asked me, “Well, tell me concretely: what would you prefer to do?”

And I responded to this question with the text below.

[...] So, what does the art of making reparations look like as a political practice?

Well, in “abstract” terms, I hold that reparative politics would, first, artfully deconstruct political organizations that establish and enforce claims to property, these being organizations that privilege pipelines; and, second, reparative politics would (re-)construct political organizations that foster shared access and responsibility, these being organizations that privilege leaky designs.

In “concrete” terms, I hold that reparative politics couples direct action with due process: it takes direct action to challenge statutory and regulatory laws that establish and enforce claims to property, then it defends direct action with due process, creating case law in favor of shared access and responsibility.

Reparative politics proceeds case by case, and it prefers agitating and litigating over and above legislating and regulating. But don’t get it twisted: reparative politics is not hostile to statutory and regulatory law in general; rather, it is only hostile to statutes and regulations that are not vital to practicing direct action and defending the practice of direct action with due process.
Why should reparative politics eschew legislation and regulation in favor of agitation and litigation? Well, as I see it, any and all reparations achieved via legislation and regulation without agitation and litigation would be, by definition, artless reparations and, concomitantly, the only artful reparations are those that are achieved in and through direct action and defended by due process. Statutes and regulations that are applied without due process could only ever make reparations that are “patching, conservative, static” because they would not attend to particular situations and to present needs but, instead, they would only attend to generalizations derived from past experience. Recall here that the making of artful reparations assumes that “everything is changing constantly: and that at every moment we use the defects of the present state as the starting point for the definition of the new state.” This assumption is, of course, the fundamental assumption that conditions all due process. As Ivan Illich puts it in *Tools for Conviviality*, “[due process] applies existing law to actual situations. Like cases are decided alike, or the facts are found to be of a different significance today. [...] In the process the social experience of the past is readapted to present needs. The present decision will in turn serve as reference in future cases.”

As I see it, direct action is the practice that discloses our particular situation, our present wants needs. In turn, due process readapts past experience to attend to our particular situation, to our present wants and needs and, going further, due process also registers the particularities of our situation and our present wants and needs for future reference. In other words, it is through direct action that we prepare to make reparations, artfully *deconstructing* wish fulfillments and defenses so as to enable us to acknowledge that which disturbs; and it is through due process that we make reparations, sublimating disturbances via the artful *reconstruction* of that which has been disturbed.

To make my position more clear, I ought also to state that direct action is *not* a form of protest. On this point, I defer David Graeber, who articulates difference between direct action and protest with both concision and force in the following passage from *The Democracy Project*:

> [T]he difference between protest and direct action [is that] protest, however militant, is an appeal to [existing] authorities to behave differently; direct action [...] is a matter of proceeding as one would if the existing structure of power did not exist. Direct action is, ultimately, the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free. [...] Everyone is perfectly well aware the power structure does exist. But acting this way denies any moral authority to the inevitable, usually violent, response.

If we assume that we will be oppressed and we do not act because we fear being oppressed, we shall never discover whether or not we truly are oppressed or if our oppression is a wishful or defensive fantasy that we have constructed in order to keep us from exercising our freedom. The surest way to deconstruct wishful and defensive fantasies that deny freedom is to act as if we are free and to face whatever oppression comes: and this precisely what direct action is all about. Protest, by contrast, is an appeal to an oppressor for a reprieve from oppression and, as such, protest acknowledges the “legitimate” authority of the oppressor, maintaining wishful and defensive fantasies that deny freedom.
● Direct action is practiced by black peoples, indigenous peoples and women when they act as if white men are not god’s favorites, as if white men are not naturally superior, as if white men are not on the right side of historical accident, as if nothing could ever justify white male privilege. By contrast, protest in this regard justifies white male privilege by appealing to the authority and privilege of white men and asking them for a reprieve from oppression.

● Direct action is practiced by the “undeserving” when they act as if there is no way to legitimately separate the “deserving” from the “undeserving”, as if no one truly “deserves” greater access and more resources than anyone else. By contrast, protest in this regard is an appeal to authorities who believe that they can legitimately determine who is “deserving” and who is “undeserving”.

● Direct action is practiced by the underprivileged and powerless multitudes when they act as if nothing is stopping them from accessing and drawing from streams and reservoirs of value that privileged and powerful oligarchs have fraudulently claimed for themselves. By contrast, protest in this regard is an appeal to authorities who believe that they can legitimately determine who owns a given stream or reservoir of value.

● Direct action is practiced by humans who revere Mother Earth when they act as if nonhuman wants and needs are fluent with and insubordinate to human wants and needs. By contrast, protest in this regard is an appeal to the authority of humans over nonhumans.

But direct action on its own does not make reparations, it only prepares the way. Reparations are made when due process is used to defend those who practice direct action from whatever oppression they face in response to their direct action. Such a use of due process by the oppressed runs counter to the use of due process by the oppressor: the oppressor believes that due process is primarily a means for them to justify their oppression of others, and they are outraged by when due process serves to defend direct actions by the oppressed against their oppression. Ivan Illich, in *Tools for Conviviality*, once again puts a fine point on the matter:

> The use of [due process] for the purpose of hampering, stopping, and inverting the [advance of patriarchal capitalism] will appear to its managers and addicts as a misuse of the law and as subversion of the only order which they recognize. The use of [due process] to [defend direct action] appears corrupt and criminal to the bureaucrat, even one who calls himself a judge.

Reparative politics is about jurisprudence, but not the analytic and normative jurisprudence that the oppressor uses to justify oppression. Reparative politics is about “transformative jurisprudence” — it is about the prudence that tells us to engage in direct action only if and when we are prepared to defend direct action with due process. Transformative jurisprudence tells us that, before we practice direct action, we ought to have an idea of the case we wish to make and of the statutes and regulations that must be amended in order to defend our case. This is not at all to say that one must be certain that one can make a case before one acts; rather, it is only to say that one must have an idea of the case one wishes to make before one acts. Transformative jurisprudence encourages and supports our *attempts* to make cases: it does not prevent us from failing to make cases but, instead, helps us learn from our failures to make cases.
Returning to your question, political organizing for the making of artful reparations does not mean organizing to win elections, nor does it mean organizing to pass legislation, nor does it mean organizing to enforce regulations. Winning elections, passing legislation, and enforcing regulations are only peripheral concerns with respect to making artful reparations. Indeed, whenever possible, reparative politics will eschew the running of political campaigns, the setting of legislative agendas, the filing of appeals to regulators.

Political organizing for the making of artful reparations means organizing for direct action and for due process in defense of direct action. This is to say, in other words, that the agent of reparations identifies themself as an agitator and litigator first: they may occasionally run for election, pass legislation, and enforce regulations, but they only do so in order to complement the practice of direct action and to complement due process in defense of direct action. If winning elections, passing legislation, and enforcing regulations demands that we forsake participating in direct action and that we cease defending direct action with due process, then we, as agents for reparations, ought to forsake the winning of elections, the passing of legislation, and the enforcement of regulations. It is only the agent of oppression who identifies themself as an executive, a legislator, or a regulator first.

Indeed, one knows that one is dealing with an agent of oppression, as opposed to an agent of reparations, when one is being told to prioritize the winning of elections, the passing of legislation, and the enforcement of regulations over and above the practice of direct action and due process in defense of direct action. If one would practice reparative politics, one should ask oneself the following question, “Is the victory of this candidate, the passage of this legislation, or the enforcement of this regulation a vital condition for a prospective direct action or for due process in defense of direct action?” If so, declare your support for the campaign, the law, or the appeal to a regulator. If not, withhold your support. If you can’t tell either way, proceed with caution to probe the matter in order to find out.
Addendum Two:
On Addiction and Reparative Psychology

This addendum to my Four Essays was written in response to a reader who wanted to know more about my sense and understanding of the psychology of white supremacy. Specifically, the reader wanted to know what I thought the origins of white supremacy were.

Though not without a fair bit of hesitation, I offered the following response.

Growing up black in the United States of America during the halcyon years of the neoliberal New World Order, I was taught from a very young age that I was descended from African peoples that were either uncivilized or less (than) civilized.

I was taught, sometimes implicitly but often quite explicitly, that white peoples from Europe had developed the world's most advanced civilization, enabling them to conquer and dominate the world. My teachers couldn't tell me for sure whether this was because white peoples were naturally superior to other peoples (making black peoples naturally inferior) or because white peoples were on the fortunate side of a series of historical accidents (making black peoples victims of their misfortunes). In the end, however, such details didn't really matter. Africa, the land of black peoples, was the exemplar of the “underdeveloped” or “developing” world, characterized by less (than) civilized peoples. Europe, the land of white peoples, was the exemplar of the “developed” world, characterized by its advanced civilization. And last but not least, of course, the United States of America—an experiment in “democracy” launched by enlightened white peoples from Europe who had settled the “New World”—was the apotheosis and crowning achievement of advanced civilization.

By the age of twelve, I had learned this lesson well and I had taken it to heart. Taking it to heart, however, brought a compound question to mind, “What is civilization and what good is it anyway?”

I asked myself this question incessantly for more than two decades, seeking to answer this question by and for myself. I first found my own answer to this question nearly a decade ago but I could not accept it. My answer frightened me. I tiptoed around it and I sought for other answers in vain. I knew full well that the answer I had first found was the answer that I needed, but the answer demanded too much of me at the time. It has taken me nearly a decade to find the courage to stop tiptoeing around it and to embrace my answer. Having finally embraced my answer, I now profess it so that I may act on it.

So, what is civilization and what good is it anyway?
As I know it, civilization is another name for a complex of addictive behaviors to which many peoples have become vulnerable and to which many peoples have succumbed: the more advanced a people’s civilization the more addicted that people, the less advanced a people’s civilization the less addicted that people. The wretched history of civilization begins some five thousand years ago when peoples first became addicted to patriarchy, addicted to the rush of conquest and domination. The history of civilization has progressed in its wretched fashion for the past five thousand years with notable grace periods, but recent centuries have seen its wretchedness redouble and accelerate ever since peoples became addicted to capitalism, addicted to the rush of growth and progress in addition to the rush of conquest and domination.

To say that white peoples from Europe developed the world’s most advanced civilization is to say that white peoples from Europe have been the most addicted to the speedball of patriarchy and capitalism, to the rush of conquest and domination commingled with the rush of growth and progress. Indeed, white peoples from Europe have not only sought to conquer and dominate the entire world in order to get their fix, they have also threatened to destroy the entire world in the process.

During the twentieth century, having come to dominate the world, white peoples from Europe in search of a fix were the instigators of two hotly contested world wars that were premised on prospects for genocide, and they were the instigators of a cold world war that was premised prospects for mutually assured destruction and nuclear holocaust. Far more profoundly and far more importantly, jonesing white peoples from Europe also instigated the still raging War Against Life on Earth, a war premised on prospects for ecocide.

The War Against Life on Earth, which I have taken to calling the “Last War”, has killed off half the world’s wildlife, it has cut down half the world’s forests, and it has wiped away half the world’s topsoil. The Last War has created a suffocating atmosphere, fouled by high concentrations of greenhouse gases that threaten to increase aridity inland and rising sea levels along littorals, displacing untold numbers of human and nonhuman beings from their dwellings. Alongside mass extinction, habitat destruction, soil degradation, and climate change, the Last War has precipitated a great thinning of nature: “the numerical robustness, the plenitude within nature, has dwindled.” A naturalist writes, “Half a century ago, there was simply much more of everything – more wild flowers, more birds, more butterflies and moths, more insects [...] the fabric of life in the natural world, once so rich, [has] become threadbare, ragged and frayed. ” The species managing to survive the Last War are becoming ever more scarce, small fractions of their populations survive.

Never has an addiction caused so much death, destruction, and suffering, and yet, at the same time, never has an addiction been so poorly recognized by both the addict and the enabler alike. To bring the Last War to a halt and to give life on earth a chance to thrive again, we must treat clinging to civilization as the addiction that it is and we must recognize its addicts for what they are: desperate peoples. Yes, though many of them live lives of extreme luxury, the white peoples of Europe and America and others who continue to cling to advanced civilization are desperate peoples.
On this point, the point of desperation, I would like to quote at length from *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, a book by the physician of addiction Dr. Gabor Maté.

*The mind and brain processes are the same in all addictions, no matter what form, as is the [despair] that resides at its core. [..]*

*Addiction is neither a choice nor primarily a disease. It originates in a human being’s desperate attempt to solve a problem: the problem of emotional pain, of overwhelming stress, of lost connection, of loss of control, of a deep discomfort with the self. In short, it is a forlorn attempt to solve the problem of human pain. All drugs—and all behaviours of addiction, substance-dependent or not, whether to gambling, food, sex, alcohol, cigarettes, the internet or cocaine—either soothe pain directly or distract from it. Hence my mantra: “The question is not why the addiction, but why the pain.”*

*[..] Not only is the urge to escape pain shared by all addicts, substance users or not, the same brain circuits are involved in all addictions, from shopping to eating to dependence on heroin and other opioids. The same brain circuits, the same brain systems involving pleasure and reward and incentive, the same neurochemicals—not to mention the same emotional dynamics of shame and lack of self-worth, and the same behaviors of denial and dishonesty and subterfuge.*

Addiction to civilization is, like all other addictions, an escape from pain. The white peoples of Europe addicted to civilization are not evil peoples; they are traumatized peoples who desperately need care and compassion from other peoples. Their claims to natural superiority and to historical good fortune are subterfuges that express their shame and lack and endeavors to inflict shame and lack on others. Alas, the subterfuges of white peoples have been remarkably successful: they have traumatized many, many other peoples, spreading desperation and greater addiction across the globe.

I do not want to speculate here upon the specifics of the traumas that white peoples have escaped in and through their addiction to civilization. Instead, what I want to do now is make it clear that the art of making reparations that I am proposing is an art that endeavors to heal the traumas of all peoples, white peoples and nonwhite peoples alike, and it endeavors to heal all traumas, including traumas that pre-date the plague of whiteness. Many peoples had already been addicted to patriarchal civilization and its rush of conquest and domination for a very long time before white peoples started using and pushing the modern speedball of patriarchy and capitalism, that cocktail of conquest, domination, growth, and progress. For many peoples, the art of making reparations will have to involve exposing and healing much older, pre-modern traumas.

I shall stop here, leaving you with a hypothesis that would put all that I have said to the test. Consider this: if the advance of patriarchal capitalism is the worsening of an addiction, perhaps the treatment of addiction and the rehabilitation of the addict might constitute the return of primitive matriarchal communism.