

THE LOBSTER LOOP

A woman wraps up her raincoat in a determinate movement. She has a black scarf around her neck. As she leaves the sauna into the cold of the season, a hesitant muddle of autumn or winter drafts, she faces upwards to the grey sky, "it doesn't look higher than seven floors tall," she thinks, "this city must have a permanent cap on its ideas." She's awaited at the Lobster Loop for their weekly meeting. As she walks over, the sound of her steps trace images of the flickering lights that adorned the 45 degrees Celsius / 100 per cent humidity cabin she had just been in. "Angels' urine," she thought as she contemplated the light beams cutting through the water vapor.

Along with two transgender woman, they were the only recognizable gendered bodies in the sauna, everyone else had obliterated any recognizable visual features from legacy relations. As they coincidentally left the building together, someone called out "tschüß ladies!" reminding them of the intractable negotiations between performing the self and eroding matters of otherness. At that moment, something she had recently read came to mind, "to understand the future, we study the past. (...) We know the past best by the future it dreams." This was attributed to Louise Michelle, a committed anarchist who was an ambulance nurse and soldier in the Paris Commune, part of the Montmartre sixty-first battalion, in 1871. Michelle had supposedly raised the first black flag of the anarchist struggle, the same black as her scarf, the all-expansive color everyone worn as some sort of sartorial item at the Lobster Loop.

At the entrance of Lobster Loop hung a draped image of Robert Fludd's 1617 cosmic black square, representing the nothingness that was prior to the universe, "the background that is a foreground, the retinal pessimism of the nothing to see," as comrade Thacker once noted. This image had been raised in Lobster Loops around the world long before she was born. It was considered cordial to the cause wearing black in homage to Fludd and to the movement itself, for it represented the color of non-existence, of pre-existence, of an un-universe prior to its possibility.

She was quite a recent addition to the Lobster Loop, a fantastic plenum of Fourierists who met weekly to address the quarrels of representation. The lack of operative political forces in face of environmental disarray in the last years had given away to instant sensational visibility, which had led to crossness, growing exasperation and, finally, public upheaval. Many had been contaminated by the introduction of crustacean heat-shock proteins (HSPs), also known as stress proteins, in calcium-enriched nourishments—a deliberate adaptation to the accelerated pace of this intricate global infrastructure that subtracted intentions and affectabilities from its subjects. International outcries first arose with the new millennia, when quantification of

different stress responses in lobsters served as early indicators of the degradation of environmental health.¹

The Lobster Loop appeared in response to this flat abyss that we experience as corporate and environmental deregulation. The Lobster Loop's motto? "Every Society Invents the Failed Utopia It Deserves." None other than a product of its time, the Lobster Loop was an international chain of dive bars modeled after Charles Fourier's phalansteries, communal buildings designed for self-contained utopian communities, free of external regulation, plentiful of mutual benefit, that plotted toward the fifteenth stage of Fourier's sixteen possible societies. A panel behind every bar read: "Savagery, Barbarism and Civilization. Soon they will come to an end, and all the nations of the earth will enter the fifteenth stage, which is *Simple Harmony*. Great men of all the centuries! Newton and Leibnitz, Voltaire and Rousseau, do you know in what you are great? In blindness. You will soon seem like no more than great madmen for having thought that civilization was the social destiny of the human race."² Signed Charles Fourier, 1851.

With Fourier, she was firmly convinced that humans like herself and her HSP enhanced more-than-human comrades would voluntarily adopt their plan for the fifteenth stage of society if it were convincingly presented. Louise Michelle, contrary to the French utopian socialist, believed class struggle and political revolution were necessary for socialism to emerge. In 1895, at the height of much uncertainty about the future of the workers' movement, she met Marie Violette Tranchot, also known as Octave Obdurant, "a cross-dressing cosmologist of all possible worlds."

Author of many stirring pamphlets, Tranchot was an important figure for the Paris Commune. Towards the end of her life, when Michelle met her in Brussels, Tranchot showed her the *Conducteur à Comparaisons Cosmographiques* [Cosmographic Comparator], an early computational contraption based on the small and constructible model universe called "L," populated by empty sets of civilizations that could be iterated to build increasingly bigger sets. In any given universe of sets, endlessness would come in many measures providing indisputable evidence on the nature of successive human civilizations, the answer to Fourier's *onus probandi*. Herewith infinity was as an actual, complete, and docile object— the stressed lobster's hopeful loop.

¹ Ernest S. Chang, et al. "Quantification of Stress in Lobsters: Crustacean Hyperglycemic Hormone, Stress Proteins, and Gene Expression" In *American Zoologist*, 1999 Jun; 39(3): 487-495; Ernest S. Chang. "Stressed-out lobsters: crustacean hyperglycemic hormone and stress proteins" In *Integr Comp Biol*. 2005 Jan; 45(1): 43-50.

² Beecher, Jonathan and Richard Bienvenu. *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier. Selected Texts on Work, Love, and Passionate Attraction*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1972.

She had finally arrived to the steep staircase ascending to the Lobster Loop, where she first ordered a “Bora Bora,” a casual citrus flavored socialist cocktail. That evening the comrades read something that could have been drawn from Derek Jarman’s *Jubilee* (1978), but emanated from the so-called ‘great’ historian Hippolyte Taine, who asserted that history is an obscure knowledge of a distant past, and that we have nothing to expect from the future. He denounced the sociopolitical astrolabe as outsourced toxicity and the fifteenth civilization as unwieldy mathematics.³ Revolution reckoned by nameless astronomy.

The future contaminated by history was part of the Lobster Loop’s deep commitment to happy endings. “Every Society Invents the Failed Utopia It Deserves,” was as much a realist motto as was the comrades’ obstinate desire for showing that different variants of infinity could be reached,⁴ something that Fludd’s black square and Fourier’s syncretic theory-of-everything had attempted to demonstrate. In response to Taine, her group voiced Tranchot: “The reach of a society’s dreams”, they said, “always exceeds its grasp. The measure of this excess—the degree by which a utopia fails, the area between the curves of reality and aspiration—is a periodic function, a law of history. Once known, this formula is the philosopher’s stone of the [artist] and the revolutionary.”

— Sofia Lemos

³ The Paris Commune was a radical socialist and revolutionary government that ruled Paris from 18 March to 28 May 1871. In 1873 the German mathematician Georg Cantor formulated a theory of infinite numbers that became fundamental in mathematics. None of the events are formally related. In 1871, Blanqui published a brochure entitled *Eternity by the Stars: Astronomical Hypotheses*, where he affirms the radicalism of his communist commitments by drawing consequences from Newtonian's mechanics and the infinite size of the universe. It is possible that Louis August Blanqui wrote the pamphlet knowing of Cantor’s theories via his correspondence with mathematician Pierre Laplace. Blanqui was incarcerated for his apparent responsibility for the Paris Commune, although he had already been imprisoned when the insurrection erupted.

⁴ Hartnett, Kevin. “Mathematicians Measure Infinities, Find They’re Equal” In *Quanta Magazine*. Sept 12 2017. [Accessed online: Sept 17 2017]

This text was written in the context of the show *The Lobster Loop*, featuring works by Tomaso de Luca, André Romão and Andreia Santana at MONITOR Lisbon.

Biographical Note:

Sofia Lemos has been involved in the research and organisation of exhibitions in various institutions including PRAXES (Berlin), The David Roberts Art Foundation (London) and MACBA (Barcelona). In recent years, she worked as research coordinator for an artist studio in Berlin, and public programme coordinator at Contour Biennial 8. Presently she is research associate at Haus de Kulturen der Welt and associate editor at the art publication *Drawing Room Confessions*. Lemos is part of the international curatorial network SYNAPSE of the Haus de Kulturen der Welt. Her writings have appeared in *vdrome*, *art-agenda*, *...ment*, *Archis/Volume*, *Thresholds*, and *PLAT*.

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