

Introduction

Remain × Remain(s)

Ioana B. Jucan

History is time that won't quit.

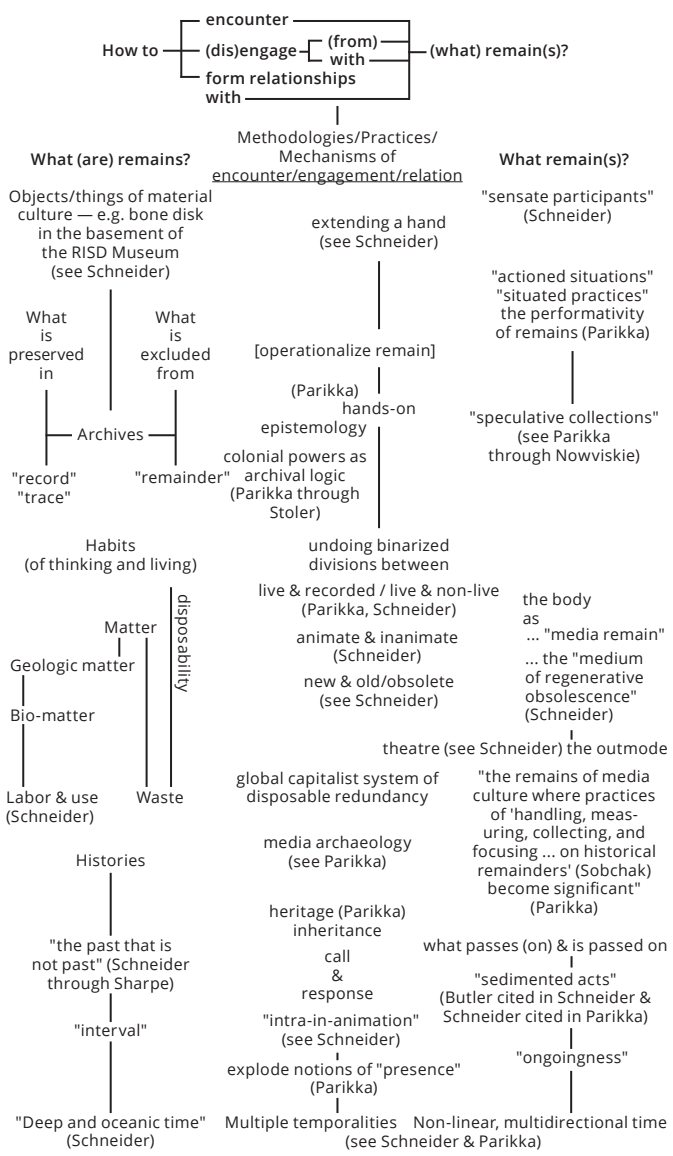
—Suzan-Lori Parks

What remains in the wake of centuries of technological and scientific developments and in the wake of histories of modern progress—which is also to say histories of dispossession, displacement, and exploitation? How are remains and remainders, and the process of remaining, to be understood, engaged, and entered into a relationship with? What is the place of remain(s) in a global capitalist, consumerist culture that is constantly rushing after the next “new” thing on the market? What and where are the leftovers of this culture, and how do “we” (consumers of the new) live with what we leave behind? How is the past that is not past, subject as it has been to denials and erasures, to be engaged and lived with—and through? What is the matter and temporality of remains? And why and how does what remains matter?

Through their complex relations to times and spaces that are plural and nonhomogeneous, “remain(s)” accumulate a multiplicity of meanings and open a multiplicity of possibilities of thought and (re)encounter. The two essays in this book, by Rebecca Schneider and Jussi Parikka, gesture toward some of these meanings and

- x enact some of these possibilities. This introduction aims to point to an open interval of conversation and exchange between them. Taking my cue from Schneider's and Parikka's essays, I begin with a diagram that seeks to stage some of the possibilities of thought gathered around the concept of *remain* used as a verb, noun, call (hail, imperative), state, or process of becoming.

The authors of this book approach the question of remain(s) from the directions of their inherently interdisciplinary fields of scholarship: theater and performance studies (Schneider) and media studies—more specifically, media archaeology (Parikka). Remark- ing that performance studies “resists a definitive delimitation,” Schneider (2007) proposed in an interview to think performance studies—particularly, performance studies in its ampersand rela- tion to theater and theatricality—as “an invitation to put ideas into play” and as “a wonderful arena for thinking about cross-temporal engagements.” Some of the ideas that she has put into play in her work—in different shapes and in relation to a wide range of concerns—are those of “cross-temporal liveness” (Schneider 2007); the “undecidable space between registers of what is live and what is passed,” on which theater has a “particular purchase” (Schneider 2012, 155; see also Schneider 2011); and—through the concept of “intrainanimation”—“the ways the dead play across the bodies of the living, and the living replay the dead” (Schneider 2017). In *What Is Media Archaeology?*, Parikka (2012, 2, 4, 5) wrote that media archaeology (as approached and practiced in his book) “offers an insight into *how to think media archaeologically* in contemporary culture” and proposed that this mode of thinking start from the premise of “the entanglement of past and present.” Elsewhere, he wrote about media archaeology as “executed media philosophies of time” and as “a method for excavation of the repressed, the forgotten, or the past” as well as “an artistic method close to DIY culture, circuit bending, hardware hacking, and other exercises that intervene the political economy of information technology” (Parikka 2015, 7; Hertz and Parikka 2015, 142). One direction in which Parikka has explored the complexity of the entanglements



xii of pasts, presents, and futures is that of *A Geology of Media*, where he focuses on “the literal deep times and deep places of media in mines and rare earth minerals” and on the earth as an “archive” of a variety of technological and chemical traces often constituted as residues/waste (Parikka 2015, 5, x). This inquiry into “a geology of media” intersects with media ecology, the latter of which refers to “the concrete connections that media as technology has to resources . . . and nature” (Parikka 2013, 75).

Notably, Parikka’s and Schneider’s different approaches to remain(s) intersect in the kind of thinking—and (re)conceptualization—of time and matter that, they seem to imply, an engagement with the epistemological and ontological complexity of remain(s) calls for. “The remain is not something neatly placed on the linear scale of old and new,” writes Parikka in his essay. Instead of this binary old–new option, he proposes addressing “the urgency of the remainder as a question that can be tackled in media theory as a mapping of *heterochronia*.” The latter concept brings into focus the “multiple temporalities” entangled around (what) remain(s) as well as the remains’ distributed “locatability.” Connecting technology’s thrall to newness and “Western history’s linear time-machine” to modernity’s “so-called march of progress” (Schneider, this volume), Schneider too thinks remain(s) outside of the binarized distinction between new and old. In (what I call) the capitalist system of disposable redundancy, the (planned, programmed) production of the new is in equal measure the production of the obsolete. As Schneider phrases it, through Wendy Chun, “each so-called new is essentially the new outmode according to habit.” Despite modernity’s fantasy of erasing the old so as to construct the (purely) new, the outmode does not go away—it only goes elsewhere. Or, in Parikka’s (2015, 141) words from *A Geology of Media*, “obsolescence returns”—and remains. In the appendix of that book, featuring an essay written together with Garnet Hertz titled “Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archaeology into an Art Method,” Parikka engages the concept of “planned obsolescence,” initially proposed by Bernard London as a solution for ending the Great Depression.

Hertz and Parikka (2015, 142) remark that, “far from being accidental, discarding and obsolescence are in fact internal to contemporary media technologies.”

To build off Parikka’s thoughts, discarding and obsolescence are in fact internal to the capitalist mode of production and consumption more broadly, which both produces and feeds off the habit of disposability. A paradigmatic embodiment of this habit is disposable plastics, which Parikka evokes through Kristina Lindström and Åsa Ståhl’s *Plastic Imaginaries*. Schneider too evokes disposable plastics as the “strangely non-vanishing secret of obsolescence” (through Boyan Slat, CEO of the Ocean Cleanup). As historian Jeffrey Meikle (1995, 190) explains in *American Plastic*, by 1950, “an endemic oversupply” of plastics left over from the war “led producers to think not of durability but of disposability” in relation to plastic, and to market it as a valueless thing meant for limited—often single—use, a thing produced to be discarded. Since 1940, not only plastics but also everything that is caught up in this system has arguably come to be treated as disposable. This includes human beings (or “human resources”), whose subjectivity—modeled on plasticity as flexibility, adaptability, and an obsession with the new (as the latest thing on the market)—is (re)produced, sold, and bought (again and again) as part of the game of relentless profit making.

But there is a long history to disposability that extends much further than the 1930s and 1940s emergence of “planned obsolescence” as a driving principle in the consumer market. This history is still at work. It is a history in which capitalism and colonialism—both systems of appropriation and exploitation of land and labor (see also Wolfe 2016)—have been inextricably intertwined, as Schneider reminds us in her essay, citing Glen Coulthard. At the core of this intertwining are the institution of slavery and the dispossession, displacement, and elimination of indigenous peoples. In his book *Traces of History*, where he argues that “race is a trace of history,” Patrick Wolfe (2016, 3) traces different regimes of race and logics of racialization and the different yet related histories with which they are associated. These are, more specifically, “a history

xiv of bodily exploitation” in the case of enslaved populations and “one of territorial dispossession” in the case of indigenous populations. In the case of both these threads of histories, “the pernicious logics of racialization” has been in the business of rendering disposable “numerous individuals and populations around the globe”—and it continues to do so, in the name of white supremacy (Weheliye 2014, 15). These histories, of slavery and of colonial dispossessions and erasures, remain. They remain in different ways—of being, doing, and thinking.

A correlate of thinking remain(s) outside/beside modernity’s linear conception of forward-marching time is that “the past, then, is not past, nor is the future future” (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as cited in Schneider, this volume) and that “the past that is not past reappears” (Christina Sharpe, as cited in Schneider, this volume). In her book *In the Wake*, Christina Sharpe (2016, 53) asks: “[H]ow does one memorialize chattel slavery and its afterlives, which are unfolding still? How do we memorialized an event that is still ongoing?” This notion—of the *ongoingness*, the unfolding, of a past that is not past—is key to the thinking of (what) remain(s), and it appears prominently, in different forms, both in Schneider and in Parikka’s essays.

Schneider stages “an ongoing, deep time, *live scene*” of encounter with a bone disk artifact in the basement of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. This is, in Schneider’s words, a “scene of extended circulation,” stretching through “cross-temporal exchange” to the Roman Empire; it is, in her words again, “a scene of significant duration, spanning millennia, in which this bit of bone has been passed hand to hand to hand and in which hands have reached out to receive it.” Schneider unfolds this scene through the trope, gesture, and practice of “extending a hand.” Thinking extension as in-hand brings attention to what moves off the hand and what passes from hand to hand across temporal and spatial intervals. It also attends to the modes of repeating, preserving, and hailing that happen through this kind of “handwork” that is inextricably tied to “iterability.” And it attends to the “call and

response that weaves past and future in intervallic resonance” and the “response-ability” that comes with it, both in the sense of calling “the past to appear for account” and of being called by “the past to respond with account.”

The work of nonlinear, multidirectional time takes place in and through matter, and matter embodies the work—or (differently articulated) bears the weight—of time. As used here, “matter” is plural, heterogeneous, differentiated into a multiplicity of beings and ways of being—and it is a matter of relation. “Extending a hand,” as Schneider theorizes it, attends to the work of time through/in plural matter, to matters of circulation and relation. Challenging binarized divisions between animate and inanimate, between live and not-live, and between human and nonhuman, Schneider conjoins the concept of “extending a hand” with that of “intrainanimation” (derived from Fred Moten and John Donne as well as from Karen Barad and Donna Haraway). This concept shifts the emphasis “off of a generalized claim about the animacy of everything” (a claim made in certain strands of new materialist writings)¹ “onto the idea of interstitial relations across varieties of heterogeneous beings engaging in call and response.” As it moves from the scene of the encounter with the bone disk to the “Savage Curtain” episode from the third season of *Star Trek* (and back, in various directions and senses), Schneider’s essay enacts, it seems to me, this very idea. The idea has ethical and political implications, toward which Schneider gestures when she asks, “How can we approach the *matter* of intrainanimacy with respect for all lifeways that circulate among us all, across vast stretches of time, vast stretches of space as well as at the tiniest increment of a single quivering leaf or bit of detritus of bone?”

In conversation with Parikka’s “turn to mineral and chemical matter as geologic remains of media,” and with his statement that “media starts much *before media becomes media*,” Schneider focuses in particular on what she terms “the *performance* remains of media”—more specifically, “bio-matter” (“the live body”) and “geologic matter” as “prehistorical matter of media.” Her interest

is in “the in-handedness of media,” in the ways in which the live body, “flesh and bone,” as well as the “labor and use” (the latter understood to include “rituals, habits, and encounters”) with which they are associated, are media components and mediatic remains, perhaps “pre-historic” ones. In this way of thinking media and the body, media are not “the extensions of man” (as Marshal McLuhan [2013] proclaimed); rather, the body is “itself *already* mediatic,” itself a “means to extension” and, thus, a means of relationality and circulation.

Engaging the question of (what) remain(s) from the direction of media archaeology, Parikka too thinks remain(s) in terms of relationality. He emphasizes becoming as a mode of remaining, a mode that is “situated in particular spaces of making/thinking but also in historical situations” (Parikka, this volume). Giving particular attention to archives and archiving, to what gets preserved and what excluded in the constitution of archives, his approach is to “operationalize remain,” to take it as “an active formation, a situated practice.” Through this approach, in his words again, “the remain(s) become more of an event that summons new relations and potentials than merely a thing to be classified; it expands outside its cabinets, classifications and index systems to the histories, archaeological sediments, and the great outdoors from which it comes from.”

Parikka highlights the Media Archaeological Fundus as an example of “a place where the relation to remains is staged.” Hosted by media theorist Wolfgang Ernst at Humboldt University in Berlin (Germany), the Fundus is “a collection of various electromechanical and mechanical artefacts as they developed throughout time”; the aim of the Fundus is “to provide a perspective that may inspire modern thinking about technology and media within its epistemological implications beyond bare historiography.”² The artifacts in the collection are to be engaged “hands-on,” in a way that resonates with “the work of critical making.” Parikka refers to this performative mode of engagement with the collection in terms of a “*hands-on* epistemology” (emphasis added). As Parikka notes, “the hands that are operating, pointing, opening up a

remain of a thing become partial agents in this play” and in the videos from the Fundus. In ways that resonate with Schneider’s theorization of hand and body, Parikka thinks of hands as something of an “obsolete sort of a remainder” and of “the body as a sort of a threshold—not a celebration of the human body, but a mobilization of its possibilities as part of the thresholds, interfaces that move across scales, and make the body already something else than it is.” Yet, even as they share a dynamic understanding of the archival and as they “move beyond oppositions of live and documented, live and recorded, to the productive liveness of the archival as an embodied situation,” “hands-on epistemology” and Schneider’s “extending a hand” differ notably. As discussed earlier, for Schneider, “extending a hand” is a matter of what moves *off* the hand in scenes of exchange and circulation that take place across temporal and spatial intervals spanning significant durations. This is different from the idea of manipulating remains in a lab space, albeit “technologically ‘infected’ humanities labs” (Höltgen, as cited in Parikka, this volume).

Thinking with Ernst, Parikka writes that, in this kind of hands-on engagement with collections as “hybrid sites of learning, theory and to some extent collecting,” the artifacts are “not props for a writing of a historical narrative but production of history that is itself executed in place.” For Ernst, this idea of the artifacts not being props for writing a historical narrative implies “radically de-historicizing the archive” (as the title of one of his essays reads) through media archeological approaches. In the case of digitized archives, an example of a media archeological approach would be to apply “creative algorithms to experiment with new forms of navigating enormous amounts of archival signals and data” (Ernst 2016, 10). Ernst’s goal for the kind of dehistoricization that he proposes is to decouple the modern archive from the “territorial nation state” and from narrative (11). However, by focusing exclusively on technical–mathematical operations, the kind of dehistoricization he proposes, it seems to me, risks to evacuate the social and to participate in (further) erasures of histories, which “official” (colonial and colonized) archives have relentlessly perpetrated.

xviii The erasures, gaps, or silences in the archive, too, (are) remain(s), forms of the past that is not past. Saidiya Hartman, for instance, writes about the “silence in the archive” in relation to the archive of Atlantic slavery and about the violence of this archive. How is one to engage this silence and the constitutive violence of this archive? “Straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration,” Hartman (2008, 11) proposes the method of “critical fabulation” in her essay “Venus in Two Acts.” This method, as she practices it, writes Hartman, involves “playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, . . . representing the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view” (11), without, however, giving up narrative altogether. In Hartman’s words again, “the outcome of this method is a ‘recombinant narrative,’ which loops the strands of incommensurate accounts and which weaves present, past, and future in retelling the girl’s [Venus’s] story and in narrating the time of slavery as our present” (12).

Departing from Ernst while keeping his stance in perspective as one set of possibilities of operationalizing remains, Parikka goes on to think hands-on epistemology in the direction of “speculative collections,” a concept he borrows from Bethany Nowviskie (2016), who in turn took inspiration “from theory and practice in Afrofuturism and other forms of speculative art and design, from the concepts of *kairos* and temporal modeling, the Caribbean ‘otherwise,’ a striving toward ‘impossible archival imaginaries’ and ‘usable pasts,’ and from emancipatory research, a notion of ‘archival liveness,’ and the ethics of care.” Like Hartman’s “critical fabulation,” “speculative collections” take seriously “the gaps and uncertainties” in and of the archive (Nowviskie 2016). Hartman’s (2008, 3) focus is on the question of “how does one rewrite the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects, as a counter-history of the human, as the practice of freedom.” Relatedly, yet with a somewhat different emphasis, the driving

question of Afrofuturism, as cyberculture critic Mark Dery (as cited in Nowwiskie 2016) formulates it, is, how “can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out . . . imagine possible futures?” Working in the fields of digital scholarship and digital cultural heritage, Nowwiskie takes inspiration from “the Afrofuturist notion of cultural heritage not as content to be received but technology to be used,” and asks, “How do you position digital collections and digital scholarly projects not as statements about what was, but as toolsets and resources for what could be?”

In his essay from this volume, Parikka takes the idea of “cultural heritage not as content to be received but as technology to be used” in different directions and areas of practice—specifically, those of (media) arts and design—with a particular focus on questions of infrastructure (and the labor it takes to build it) as well as on “a wider ecology of remains.” As he pursues these questions, he brings attention, among other things, to “possible toxic legacies of technological culture” and to “possibilities of reuse of materials.” Toxicity, which spreads (contamination) both spatially and temporally, remains and, in its remaining, troubles any binary division between so-called animate and so-called inanimate matter. Schneider touches on this idea, too, in relation to the “queer intimacy” between mineral and live body in the experience of “mercury poisoning” recounted in Mel Y. Chen’s *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Toxicity is thus another form of ongoingness, of the “unfolding” (to repeat a term that Parikka uses often) of remains playing out across extended temporal and spatial intervals and scales. Across such intervals and scales, much (else) remains to think through, respond to, handle, care for, relate to. The essays that follow unfold some of these remains.

Notes

- 1 See, e.g., Jane Bennett’s (2010) *Vibrant Matter*.
- 2 This description is taken from web page about the Media Archaeological Fundus hosted on the website of Humboldt University, accessible at <https://www.musikundmedien.hu-berlin.de/de/medienwissenschaft/medientheorien/fundus/media-archaeological-fundus>.

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