

THE SPECTER OF THE AMERICAN  
REVOLUTION:  
A POST-NIHILIST REPUBLIC SEEN THROUGH  
MEMORY ASSEMBLAGES

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay presents a reading of Shajara Bensusan's *Memory Assemblages* alongside a dilemma in the U.S.A. over the meaning of its commonwealth. Across two and a half centuries, America's republic has drifted toward despotism under the disguise of a liberal democracy. A consolidating class of monopolists compete to reign over the commons like landlords, while an increasingly indebted majority struggle through anti-socialist politics to find any mutually persuasive solution and aim. This essay capitalizes on Bensusan's call to "reshuffle the archives" of memory as a method for imagining what may yet be added to this reality, bringing the unfulfilled republican ideals of the first American revolution to the forefront. The focus especially lies in restoring a notion of the commonwealth advanced by this revolution's founding philosopher, Thomas Paine, and how this notion might re-contextualize the troubled social projects which followed.

INTRODUCTION

The text below was first presented during the *Memory Assemblages* Symposium, held at The State House in London, England in April 2025. In September of the same year, I updated it slightly for readability and to include some recent events. You will see it is written more in the form of a polemic or philosophical journalism than a straightforward analysis.

Forgive me if I come off like a fish flailing around in its own falling fishbowl, but I couldn't help from reading this dense new book of philosophy against the daily news here in the United States. The U.S.A. is in the midst of an oligarchic-monarchic takeover of the government and economy.<sup>1</sup> It is selling off public

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<sup>1</sup> Oxfam America. "Is the U.S. Witnessing the Rise of Oligarchy?" *Oxfam America*, 2025.  
www.cosmosandhistory.org 334

lands,<sup>2</sup> cutting every social safety net,<sup>3</sup> privatizing public utilities,<sup>4</sup> raising taxes on everyone except said oligarchs,<sup>5</sup> censoring media,<sup>6</sup> increasing surveillance and widening enforcement,<sup>7</sup> disappearing civilians with unmarked “deputies”,<sup>8</sup> declaring war on American cities,<sup>9</sup> turning genocide into a real estate deal,<sup>10</sup> as well as causing economic and ecological crises for the siphoning benefit of a few and their Sovereign<sup>11</sup> — and who knows what will come next. With consequences forecasted to impoverish all life on the planet,<sup>12</sup> it has aptly been called a “revolution against the world”.<sup>13</sup>

The desire for a counter Revolution is palpably gaining steam in the U.S.,<sup>14</sup> however, non-violent protests have either been ignored or scared off by troops, while acts of revolting violence have largely just fortified public justification for the regime to entrench itself deeper into daily life.<sup>15</sup> Putting aside these failing means, even the ends presently set for such a coming Revolution aren’t exactly “revolutionary”. The American public has an endemic allergy to what it sees as the “woke, gay, and covertly authoritarian” imports of European socialism and

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<sup>2</sup> League of Conservation Voters. “The Trump Administration Has Threatened to Sell Off Our Public Lands and Waters Since Day One.” *League of Conservation Voters*, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Kallins, L. and Katz, E. “How Proposed Changes to Federal Safety Net Programs Could Affect the States.” *National Conference of State Legislatures*, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Kaufman, A.C. “Trump Is Trying to Steamroll the Tennessee Valley Authority?” *The Atlantic*, 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Congressional Budget Office. *Distributional Effects of Public Law 119-21*. 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Federal Communications Commission. *Gomez on Kimmel Suspension and Censorship*. September 18, 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Koebler, J. “Palantir Is Extending Its Reach Even Further into Government.” *Wired*, 2025.

<sup>8</sup> National Immigration Law Center. *Tracking the CECOT Disappearances*. 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Trump, D.J. “I love the smell of deportations in the morning... Chicago about to find our why it’s called the Department of WAR [three helicopter emoji]”; posted on *Truth Social*, 2025.

<sup>10</sup> American Jewish Committee. “What Is Trump’s Proposal for Gaza?” *AJC*, 2025.

<sup>11</sup> West, R. and Gutierrez, L.V. “Trump’s Tariffs and Economy of Uncertainty Are Already Causing Pain.” *The Century Foundation*, 2025.

<sup>12</sup> American Society of Naturalists. “A Technical Report on the Impacts of Federal Policies Since January 20, 2025 on Ecology, Evolution and Marine Science”, 2025.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick, S. “Trump Has Launched a Second American Revolution. This Time, It’s Against the World”. *Carnegie Endowment Emissary*, 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Protests against this regime have been among the largest in U.S. History, with an estimated gathering of 4-6 million participants.

See: Leingang, R; Gumbel, A.; Hellmann, M. “Millions across US turn out for ‘No Kings’ protests against Donald Trump” *The Guardian*, 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Morris, G.E. “America’s Reichstag Fire.” *Strength In Numbers*, 2025.

Marxism.<sup>16</sup> The patriotic see it as a sort of philosophical treason, the religious see it as a nihilistic secularism, and the oligarchs see it as a threat to their power in governance — so they’ve long established a tactical alliance here. Despite positive views of democratic-socialism increasing among young Democrats and independents over the past decade,<sup>17</sup> leadership of both major parties remains unabashedly anti-socialist.<sup>18</sup> The remaining “aim” of a revolt is either a liberal-conservative nostalgia, with - at best - some election reforms and a modest tax adjustment (see the Democratic Party 2025),<sup>19</sup> or else a “tear it all down” lack-of-vision.

The main thesis of Shajara Bensusan’s book hit me as extremely pertinent here, especially since the book culminates in the intriguing prospect of a “Post-Nihilist Marxism”. Bensusan’s *Memory Assemblages* turns out not only to be a groundbreaking work of post-metaphysical philosophy, but an inspiring book of political philosophy as well. The purported “ultra-metaphysics” in this book may best be described as a sort of paradoxical ontology that “spectrally” goes around the question of Being: subsending it by way of memory assemblages and transcending it by the ceaseless onslaught of addends. While at first this philosophy couldn’t seem more abstract from real-life politics, I ask: is politics not always the tension between collective memories and the anticipation of unexpected additions? — There is far too much to say on this new philosophy in its own right, but we need only grasp these great outlines presently.

In desperate times, there’s no time to be shy: in light of this spectral philosophy, how might our aim of a new American revolution refocus? It is desperate because, if we fail to reach higher, something far darker will descend. A nihilistic crypto-feudalism is aching to take control of the fate of our species. History may default to its worst authors. So, let’s begin by noting how this

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<sup>16</sup> Gonzales, M; Gorka, K. “How Cultural Marxism Threatens the United States—and How Americans Can Fight It” *The Heritage Foundation*, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> This increase undoubtedly had much to do with the presidential run of Democratic Socialist Sen. Bernie Sanders in 2016 and 2020.

See: Baker, N. “Anatomy of Bernie Sanders’ Socialism.” *Socialist Action*, 2020.

Also see: Hartig, H. “Stark Partisan Divisions in Americans’ Views of ‘Socialism,’ ‘Capitalism.’” *Pew Research Center*, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Gabbatt, A. “Why Have Top Democratic Leaders Failed to Endorse Rising Star Zohran Mamdani?” *The Guardian*, 2025.

<sup>19</sup> Meyer, N. “Which Party Wants to Preserve the Status Quo?” *Jacobin*, 2024.

authority is gained in the first place: a seizure of memory — that is, by means of narrative.

### RESHUFFLING THE NARRATIVE

One of the core concerns in *Memory Assemblages* is in fact a retrieval of narrative through the lens of an ultra-metaphysical spectral realism of memory.<sup>20</sup> Its stereoscopic philosophy grasps the modern lessons of critique - to distrust the once-and-for-all Truths presented in grand narratives - while also grasping the importance, even the indispensability, of narratives with respect to memory.<sup>21</sup> Echoing Nietzsche's brilliant essay on the Uses and Abuses of History, Bensusan finds that the task regarding history is to "reshuffle the archives" to form new operative memories.<sup>22</sup> This is not to use memory as a mythic blueprint of what will be, nor to give up the future pursuing what has been, but to use memory as a continual point of departure.<sup>23</sup> Bensusan writes, "[n]arratives attempt to do justice, and justice is not done to full presences but to traces, to foreshadows... There is a sense in which memory assemblages are brought about to attempt to do justice to the traces."<sup>24</sup> Put in the simplest possible terms: narratives help to assemble powerful, operable memories, and attract allies heading into the future. If one wishes to "seize the means of perception"<sup>25</sup> - as Andrew McLuhan nicely put it - one would be wise to follow this philosophy's insight that memory actually precedes and orients perception.<sup>26</sup>

Facing the forced Grand Narratives of M.A.G.A. and its nearby ally of techno-feudalism, as well as the ghost stories amongst Americans about communist projects, we need a narrative thread which helps us do justice to the traces left unfilled around this commonwealth — to situate, orient, and do good

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<sup>20</sup> See: Bensusan, S. (2025) *Memory Assemblages*. Introduction: The Speculative and the Spectral. Adding Something to the Past

<sup>21</sup> See: Bensusan, S. (2025) *Memory Assemblages*. 2. The Diachrony of Addition: Remembering

<sup>22</sup> See: Bensusan, S. (2025) *Memory Assemblages*. Coda: Post-Nihilist Marxism [Final Paragraph]

<sup>23</sup> See: Bensusan, S. (2025) *Memory Assemblages*. Introduction: The Speculative and the Spectral. Adding Something to the Past

<sup>24</sup> See: Bensusan, S. (2025) *Memory Assemblages*. 1. The Principle of Addition. Foreshadowing and Forgetting

<sup>25</sup> McLuhan, A. @amicusadastra, posted on X, September 3, 2025.

<sup>26</sup> See: Bensusan, S. (2025) *Memory Assemblages*. Introduction: The Speculative and the Spectral. Spectral Ultrametaphysics and Post-nihilist Marxism: The Book

by its originally revolutionary potential. We're going to start by reshuffling the memory of the first American Revolution to search for a specter of the revolution to come. In particular, I want to mine the unfulfilled and betrayed promises of its own republican ideals. Before you laugh, one man's pastiche is another man's ammunition.

#### THE EXPERIMENTAL IDEAL OF AN AMERICAN REPUBLIC

Interestingly, the original concept of an "American Republic" was itself a sort of collage ideal, aiming to redeem lost aspects of previous historical revolts which had failed. The most recent of these had been the British Civil War (1642 – 1651), which managed to destroy its Royal monarchy, only to establish an oddly authoritarian "Republic" for just 11 years, under the reign of "Lord Protector" Oliver Cromwell. This tense situation ignited a philosophical controversy over sovereignty in the absence of Royalty. Old man Thomas Hobbes' offered a justification for this authoritarian rule's definition as a "Republic", stating that any state could rightly be defined as such so long as it secured its dominance and claimed the "will of the people".<sup>27</sup> However, the young John Locke found a contradiction and injustice here, stating that the "will of the people" must come through active consent rather than passive obedience — that a free and sovereign Republic requires the power to elect and eject such a ruler; further, that the public itself should have real say in the governance of things.<sup>28</sup>

Following Locke, early American revolutionaries attempted to enshrine inalienable rights and even a "kill-switch" in the system if it failed to preserve them. It was a common sentiment to not only declare the right of people to rebel against a tyrannical sovereignty, but to declare it as a duty.<sup>29</sup> That "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God."<sup>30</sup> — A duty to the Republic which seems to have been forgotten by our false-red "Republicans", just as Democrats - mind you -

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<sup>27</sup> Hobbes, T. (1651) *Leviathan*

<sup>28</sup> Locke, J. (1689) *Two Treatises of Government*. This is especially relevant in the second treatise.

<sup>29</sup> This is evident on the famous Virginia State Seal, which depicts a personified Virtue with a fallen tyrant at her feet, crown displaced. The motto reads: "*Sic Semper Tyrannis*" — i.e., "Thus Always to Tyrants"

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Franklin proposed this as the official motto for the reverse side of the Great Seal of the United States, 1775.

have forgotten to hold elections and give say to their own constituents.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, America's Republican-Democracy did not have a pure and contradiction-free beginning.<sup>32</sup> Its idealistic revolution toward instituting inalienable rights for all was already being built on the alienation of native human beings. Its supposed duty to throw off tyrants was then painfully contradicted by its permissions to outright own other people, as if masters of livestock. It is these contradictions which led Hegel to forecast America's own Civil War a century prior.<sup>33</sup> We today are also not the first to experience the dissipation of fervor around America's revolutionary idealism, as we see signs of it already tampering down quickly after the nation's official founding. For this, I personally blame George Washington's failure to heed Thomas Paine's plea to help lead the Jacobins during the subsequent revolution in France, as they had helped the United States against King George III. At that time, Americans (and even more so Britons) were frightened by the bloody excesses of the Reign of Terror in revolutionary France, so Washington's leadership could have both tamed that terror for the French and secured the flickering flame of America's own revolutionary spirit.

Now, this is where forgotten ideals need reshuffled back to the top of our memory. In spite of this spiritual stagnation early on, some of the original American revolutionaries persisted against such broken promises, contradictions, and failures. Seven decades before Marx's work on the subject, there was a rising Republican notion which opposed Hobbesian authoritarianism and surpassed Locke's liberalist rejection of explicit monarchy as an all too abstract appeal to liberty. Namely, it aimed this revolutionary potency onto the ideal of a Republic

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<sup>31</sup> On the first point, I am referring to both the absence of primary debates against the incumbent candidate for President in 2024, Joe Biden, as well as his uncontested selection of Vice President Kamala Harris to succeed him. Secondly, I'm referring to the study by Gilens, M. and Page, B.I. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens," *Perspectives on Politics* (2014): 564–581. It showed that the ultra-rich have a substantial impact on government policy, while the average citizen has statistically none. This has held stable across presidencies.

<sup>32</sup> Hegel blamed these early failures on America's collective amnesia to history, as if millennia were lost at sea. Though this forgetfulness no doubt lended a sort of childlike energy to its Revolution. See: Hegel, G. W. F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, "Geographical Basis of History", 1837.

<sup>33</sup> See: Kelly, G.A. "Hegel's America." *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1972, pp. 3–36 and Hedwig, K. "Hegel On America". *Idealistic Studies*, vole 27, no 1/2, 1997, pp. 69–78.

as a shared public good; as its name suggests, a commonwealth, in an agrarian yet still-to-this-day radical sense. William Manning,<sup>34</sup> Mercy Otis Warren,<sup>35</sup> and Melancton Smith all warned of a new form of Leviathan on the horizon,<sup>36</sup> a covert Royalty creeping into society through liberal legal loopholes in order to reap the commonwealth privately. This covert Royalism was most conspicuous to them in the slave-trade and the property-based definition of rights — as if only property owners had any real “stake” in the common good. The latter was not only condemned for contradicting the public’s will over the public good, but also for granting a proto-monarchy to whoever owned land to sell. Land which, just before this new “civilization”, had no owner and belonged to all. In their prophecies of corruption, they noted that this monopolistic impoverishment of the commonwealth had already begun in their time in America — not only economically, but in familial and social life: a generalized laundering of irreplaceable values into exchangeable currencies. Even James Madison,<sup>37</sup> John Adams,<sup>38</sup> and Thomas Jefferson caught glimpses of this growing threat.<sup>39</sup> None other than Adam Smith warned that “[t]he interest of [businessmen] is always in some respects different from, and even opposite to, that of the public.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, despite the foresight, all these early republican revolutionaries and founders failed to come up with concrete plans to deal with this specter of monarchy arising through economic monopoly.

There was, however, one great exception to this. That thorn in Washington’s conscience, Thomas Paine — by far the most revolutionary founder: advocate for women’s suffrage, slavery abolitionist, draftsman of the 1793 French constitution, and likely the name-giver of the United States.<sup>41</sup> Most relevant for us here is his under-studied treatise titled *Agrarian Justice*. In these pages, he proposed a plan to preserve the commonwealth from the threat of property

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<sup>34</sup> See: Manning, W. *The Key of Liberty*, 1798.

<sup>35</sup> See: Warren, M. O. *Observations on the New Constitution, and on the Federal and State Conventions*, 1788.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, M. “Remarks, New York Ratifying Convention”, 1788.

<sup>37</sup> Madison, J. “The Federalist Papers: No. 10” *The Avalon Project*, 1787.

<sup>38</sup> Adams, J. “John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 15 November 1813.” *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*; 1959, pp. 397-402. *The Founders’ Constitution*.

<sup>39</sup> Jefferson, T. “Jefferson warns about the rise of an ‘Anglo-Monarchio-Aristocratic party’ in America (1797)”, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, A. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. 1776. Book I, Chapter XI, Part III.

<sup>41</sup> Powell, Jim. “Thomas Paine, Passionate Pamphleteer for Liberty.” *Foundation for Economic Education*, 1996.

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monopolization and its logical consequence of mass destitution. Published as a response to a sermon he heard called “The Wisdom of God in Making the Rich and the Poor” - which made much of the notion that “the poor will always be with us” - Paine concluded that it would be more godly to simply employ oneself in making the world less miserable.<sup>42</sup>

In this plan for America, each person, upon becoming an adult, would receive the sum to purchase a plot of land and basic means of production, on top of disability insurance and a pension. This fund for basic wealth would be paid through a progressive tax, set-up to ensure against both destitution and monopoly.<sup>43</sup> It was a wealth to be collectively and concretely ensured by one another, not a blank check without value behind it, nor a product to be sold to oligarchs. The plan was devised to establish a Republican economy and government worthy of the title, according to its own ideality: a common wealth secured from any who might impoverish it by uncommon possession (i.e., functional Sovereignty).

While the plan may appear to some as a cut-and-dry case of socialism, that would technically be anachronistic, since it was devised prior to the works of Henri de Saint-Simon and Karl Marx. But Paine makes clear that his plan was not intended to be a hoarded, crowning jewel for only the American revolution - though it would serve as a kind of proof of its achievement of true Republic - but rather it was intended to spur and guide others toward retrieving what naturally belongs to all people, of all nations, for all times.<sup>44</sup>

#### HOW MARX CONTINUED THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT

Today, you and I both know the basic history from here. Thomas Paine’s plan was forgotten, and industrialization ushered in a pervasive ownership of the commons. Marx had the privilege (or actually misfortune) of witnessing the development of Industrial Capital first hand, and noted that the underlying problem had spread far beyond the ownership of farmland, into the ownership of extremely powerful and expensive means of production: mines, factories,

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<sup>42</sup> See the Introduction of Paine, T. *Agrarian Justice*, 1797.

<sup>43</sup> This elegant solution reminds me of Plato’s plan to preserve his ideal Republic from privatized corruption, by forcing rulers to live on welfare, divesting all wealth and property completely.

<sup>44</sup> See the Conclusion of Paine, T. *Agrarian Justice*, 1797.

cutting edge equipment, systems for mass distribution. In a word, the commitment to an agrarian dream of justice had been immeasurably complicated by Industry: the problem could not be solved merely on that level now. Paine's "metaphysics of economy" was frozen to the day, left unprepared for those addends just around the corner which would change the fabric of economy and governmental power, unable to read the enormity to come by the small specters of industrialization around him. We may read Marx, then, as simply expanding the spectrum to understand the evolving landscape, as updating the vision which Paine and other early American Revolutionaries had: a crypto-Royalty growing itself through a "free and legal" economy which dubiously self-legislates — and how it may be possible to do without it.

While Marx credited industrial Capitalism with breaking the ancient chains of overt Royalty, dividing its power into a broader economy of "successful" individuals, the sense of any "common" wealth was lost in transition.<sup>45</sup> In some ways, this was even worse than overt feudalism. At least back then, a "good King" might shoulder the cost of, say, a famine for his subjects. But now, in Capitalism, no one takes responsibility for the commons at all. Thus also, Capitalism goes against the Republican ideal, as all classes eventually become detached from the Republic itself — the ruling class feeling above it, following irresistible incentives to exploit, and the rest feeling below it, submitting to ever-increasing exploitation in order to merely keep what they have. This basic detachment from a sense of commonwealth is, I believe, what Marx meant by that often overcomplicated term, alienation.<sup>46</sup>

The famous 'Industrial Justice' proposed by Marx was to "abolish private ownership of the means of production":<sup>47</sup> to seize the land, tools, and factories from their rulers, and have them, in some way, collectively owned. In this manner, our labor would be freed from crypto-Royalty, and could finally focus on to what's best and most necessary for all, rather than just a shrinking few.

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<sup>45</sup> Marx, Karl, and Engels, F. "Chapter I: Bourgeois and Proletarians." *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848.

<sup>46</sup> Marx makes most use of this term in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 1959.

<sup>47</sup> Marx, Karl, and Engels, F. "Chapter II: Proletarians and Communists." *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848.

## NOW, THE FAILURE OF MARXISM

Today, we have the privileged-misfortune of seeing how things played out after Marx. We finally turn to Bensusan's post-nihilist Marxism mentioned in the introduction.<sup>48</sup> In light of Bensusan's philosophy, it appears that even Marx's theory has failed to do justice to the problem we face regarding the condition and share of the commonwealth today, frozen to his own day. Bensusan ends *Memory Assemblages* with a call to salvage what remains promising in this philosophical project of materializing justice, despite finding it to have fallen prey to its own metaphysical nihilism.

The chief problem this ultra-metaphysical realism finds is Marx's metaphysics of economy is in the implicit belief that society's most essential contradictions could be fixed "once and for all" — that "communism is the riddle of history solved" — as well as Marx's risky wager that Capitalism would inevitably destroy itself. Doing this, Marx had replaced the Capitalist's mythos of eternal growth by exploits with a mythos of achieving economic equilibrium.<sup>49</sup> This metaphysical illusion of final truth and ultimate control limited Marx's own 'spectrum of speculations' around, yes, memories and specters: retained values and perpetual additions. Marxism has indeed been critiqued for its blurry view on structures of investment, incentive, and invention, as already pointed out by Deleuze,<sup>50</sup> Lacan,<sup>51</sup> and Simondon<sup>52</sup> respectively — critiques which deserve a unified treatment elsewhere.<sup>53</sup> But, deeper than all such blindspots, Bensusan finds there's a blindness in Marx's works as to the cosmopolitical catastrophe of our time: "artificialization".<sup>54</sup>

We might describe this artificialized economy as focused on the production of better and better replicas for things of value, better and better fakes, creating

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<sup>48</sup> This is, I believe, a sort of continuation of Derrida's search for a "Marxism without Marxism". See: Bensusan, S. *Memory Assemblages*, "2: The Diachrony of Addition: Messianicity", 2025.

<sup>49</sup> Bensusan says here, "capitalism is both the enemy and the model: it is the model because it advances the impetus of production; it is the enemy because it cannot fully unleash it." Bensusan, S. *Memory Assemblages*, "Coda: Production", 2025

<sup>50</sup> See: Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1977.

<sup>51</sup> See: Lacan, J. *Seminar XVII*, 2007.

<sup>52</sup> See: Simondon, G. *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> I plan on doing this myself, but invite others to join.

<sup>54</sup> Bensusan, S. *Memory Assemblages*, "Coda: Production", 2025

addends which less and less retain in any memory assemblage — creating a commons of waste. While Marx may be said to have foreseen aspects of such artificialization in the forms of commodification, alienation, and ideology, this inflation of false-wealth now seeks to reformat all relations under its artificial scarcity and artificial abundance. Exploitation itself may even be redefined as the artifice of exchange. This “common-waste” degrades precisely as it expands, as even the greatest wealth is devaluated. The richest man ends up living in a homeless man’s world. Artificial values take precedence to useful, material, and incorporative values. One need not even believe that money and markets are inherently evil to notice that when an “ontology of the universally exchangeable” sets the highest values, they backfire. It renders our economy of bullshit jobs, AI replacements, and pump-and-dump meme-economies where a few profit from global collapse. Worse still, here, sickness becomes more profitable than health, war more than peace. One today could technically make a monetary profit from destroying the whole World and all its means of production; impoverishing everything and doing justice to nothing. Worst of all, contrary to Marx’s great hope that this bubble of Capitalism would eventually pop itself, recent theorists like Nick Land have convincingly argued that techno-Capitalism may be more likely to survive and destroy humanity instead. Though it’s worth noting that Land lost hope and decided to just take the thrill-ride toward complete artificialization.<sup>55</sup>

In summary, for according to a spectral realism, Marx wrongly thought his covert metaphysical Truth could set the world free. Bensusan elaborates, saying “the will to truth cannot obliterate everything else. In particular, it cannot obliterate the quest for justice.”<sup>56</sup> By betting everything on the materialist intelligibility of labor exploitation alone, Marx had “chased away so many ghosts too quickly”.<sup>57</sup>

So, how might this ultra-metaphysical spectral realism propose to improve this limited notion of commonwealth, which itself limits the aim of revolution? Bensusan’s conclusion seems to avoid its own hasty resolution, remaining quite

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<sup>55</sup> See: Land, N. *Fanged Noumena*, 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Bensusan, S. *Memory Assemblages*, “4. The Logic of Addition: Truth and Retention”, 2025.

<sup>57</sup> Bensusan, S. *Memory Assemblages*, “Introduction: The Spek-root”, 2025. Bensusan here quotes Derrida’s reference to Marx.

open-ended. But we may proceed just a bit further by asking this philosophy simply: What are the commons? What is wealth?

#### WHAT IS A COMMONWEALTH IN LIGHT OF MEMORY ASSEMBLAGES?

Addressing this broad question today, a crucial lesson to bear in mind up front is that, according to this philosophy, by putting memory assemblages in the place of “ontology”, beginnings are ultimately irrelevant.<sup>58</sup> There can be no original and unchangeable identity to things, since “[n]othing can reinstate a beginning within the entropy of addends”.<sup>59</sup> In other words, Truths and Values aren’t anywhere permanently inscribed in Being, waiting to become intelligible “once and for all”. They exclusively propagate through their retention in memory through specters we inherit and reform. In the broadest sense, then, Justice itself can never be achieved “once and for all”, but rather justice is found in the orientation of memory towards addends. Bensusan clearly states: “[t]he picture recommended in this book is that retelling the past and the impact of addends on memory cannot be anything but part of the permanent effort to readdress issues concerning justice”.<sup>60</sup> In other words, Justice is the very modality which opens questions of truth, beauty, and goodness in the first place. Doing justice to things is what gets these off the ground! — I’m reminded here of my favorite quote from Nietzsche, that “it is blasphemy against the good, true, and beautiful to suppose that they have already fully manifested in the past.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Bensusan, S. *Memory Assemblages*, “1. The Principle of Addition: In the Beginning: A Fable and a Tale”, 2025.

<sup>59</sup> “The transfigurations brought about by production can promote a different cosmopolitical network of memory assemblages that would reshuffle the archives in ways that restore previous promises of justice. This is because they can reconsider previous social arrangements under the light that addends bring. What they cannot do, nonetheless, is to simply go back to the past as it supposedly was, to a previous state, spotless or uncorrupted, to a point of departure—there is no pure retention in a world with addends. Nothing can reinstate a beginning within this entropy. The beginning is irrelevant because no historical narrative can be retained independent of a memory assemblage. Addition, on the other hand, provides a blueprint for the past to be an indefinite source of specters that linger for as long as addends keep flowing.” - Bensusan, S. *Memory Assemblages*, “Coda: Post-Nihilist Marxism”, 2025

<sup>60</sup> Bensusan, S. *Memory Assemblages*, “Coda: Post-Nihilist Marxism”, 2025.

<sup>61</sup> Nietzsche, F. *The Portable Nietzsche*, 1976.

In the perpetual quest for normative truths and values, the commonwealth clearly cannot be determined by the unchanging sovereignty of command nor the technical equilibria of a perfectly planned economy, but by a more granular and continuous economy of retrieval and reception. Again, politics is always the tension between collective memories and the anticipation of unexpected addends. While the intentional or accidental nihilism in ontologizing values renders them artificial, this spectral realism finds the reality of values maintained through specters of justice, as explicitly held in commitments, projections, and promises made — forms of “messianicity”.<sup>62</sup> Such promises aren’t ever etched into existence once and for all, but rather every promise is first of all a promise to remember the promise. This does not strike me as an abstract call to promise whatever in the privacy of your own head, but to seek what is truly promising in realities - in matter and life - and to readdress them with a promise in kind. Justice cannot lay still and silent here, but must propagate through the orientation of memory toward coming additions. And oh how we make a living of forgetting. From this vantage point we speculate on what might be the “promise of promises” to be made, in accordance with this philosophy and the task of manifesting justice materially? — perhaps like an ultimate Hippocratic oath regarding the economy of all values.<sup>63</sup> This takes us naturally to the question of the commons.

Following the philosophical precedent set at the beginning of philosophy by Anaximander and Diotima, that the greatest Good is the Good of the Entire Cosmos,<sup>64</sup> Bensusan writes: “the way it is associated to justice — memory assemblages favor the right of the outside, of exteriority and its addends.”<sup>65</sup> This explicitly results in a speculative politics which “includes the non-human and its impacts on the past and on the future.”<sup>66</sup> But there can be no hasty totalization of all things since the “tribunal of addends” itself demands that our models and judgments are “always beholden to further judgment”. Simultaneously, every addend must be dignified in its own right within the ever-accumulating

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<sup>62</sup> Bensusan, S. *Memory Assemblages*, “2. The Diachrony of Addition: Messianicity”, 2025.

<sup>63</sup> Or, we might think this promise of promises question in comparison to Hegel’s negation of negation, Nietzsche’s revaluation of values, or Simondon’s aesthetics of aesthetics.

<sup>64</sup> Marx agreed, saying the happiest man makes the greatest number of people happy. Marx, Karl. “Reflections of a Young Man on the Choice of Profession”, 1835.

<sup>65</sup> Bensusan, S. *Memory Assemblages*, “3. The Hauntology of Addition: Specters and Cosmopolitics”, 2025.

<sup>66</sup> Bensusan, S. *Ibid.*, 2025.

assemblage of memory. It's a vigilant ecological-cosmopolitics for an expanding universe, where 'injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere,' as Martin Luther King put it.<sup>67</sup> I'm led to imagine a possible cosmopolitical analogue to Paine's Agrarian Justice here. But, as Bensusan stops shy of offering a concrete plan, this task remains a paradox and challenge for us: that production itself must somehow be turned against waste. That is, against the proliferation of artificial replacements for valuable realities. I personally wager that this all-important evaluation of "real values" can only be made by beings afflicted with memories of injustice (through sensitivity to injury) and the haunting of a "holy ghost" in unfulfilled promises.<sup>68</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Having broadly sketched out this ultra-metaphysics of commons and values, I believe it will be most fitting to end by honing in on the Leviathan seen through its expanded spectra: the Sovereignty of Artificiality. It's funny to note here that Hobbes himself defined the Leviathan as an "artificial person".<sup>69</sup> An old narrative that will help elucidate this threat of artificial persona is Socrates' heated debate with Thrasymachus in Plato's Republic (Book I). Thrasymachus of course argues that might makes right; that whatever the savvy and powerful decide simply is justice. In response, Socrates compares governance to building bridges or serving patients as a doctor. That is, it is rather more like an art or an oath of service to others than a personal exploit. And in this response, rather than arguing for some metaphysical proof of transcendental justice, Socrates merely raises the specter of commonwealth. It gleams like a gem the moment it's held up to light. In this moment, we notice Thrasymachus sought artificial governance — to produce artificial, redundant needs and desperations onto reality, with might posing as right, and authority as justice.

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<sup>67</sup> King, M. L. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail", 1963.

<sup>68</sup> More than a play on the language of "specters" for values, I take the notion of a Holy Ghost seriously-but-not-literally as an atheist. I go into great detail on this subject in my feature film *Why I'm an Atheist Christian*, 2025. Slavoj Žižek and Cadell Last have also made much use of this concept in an atheistic context, often citing Hegel's *Phenomenology* as their own prime influence (though my own was originally through Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*). See: Žižek, S. *Christian Atheism*, 2024; and Last, C. *Philosophy Portal* course: "Christian Atheism", <https://philosophyportal.online/christian-atheism>

<sup>69</sup> Hobbes, T. *Leviathan*, 2009.

Coming back to the boiling revolution in America, we find this Leviathan rising under the name of a so-called “dark enlightenment” and even “political realism”.<sup>70</sup> Being realists ourselves, we too see through the actual history of revolutionary Republics, that their promise of public rule has always ended up serving as a disguise for the rule of some “higher class”. We note too that these new Thrasymachans simply want to be that higher class. And with the thinnest veil possible, it seems! Many of them advocate that Capitalism - and even outright autocracy - is the original and eternal condition of man. We see this supposedly original condition as irrelevant and contingent. They are marked by their embrace of ontological nihilism, having stopped dreaming of any truer commonwealth. They cynically seize the narrative and promise of a Republic as a tool for personal exploit, to rob the commonwealth, and replace it with a nationalist or corporatist artifice. We - and I guess I’m using the Royal ‘We’ here - instead see these ideals of justice as unfulfilled promises, as continual points of departure. Although perpetually unfulfilled, justice is always being added by merely being maintained through time, and there’s no law in the universe which limits the addition of such improvements. Our task is to add a memory to honor.

About a month ago, I was walking through an antique store and found a piece of memorabilia from the American revolution: a flag that reads “An Appeal to Heaven”. Despite its lovely imagery of bold black text above a green pine tree floating in white, and despite the encouraging history to it, of early revolutionaries justifying their earthly aims beyond all mortal pre-eminence, it’s recently been used as a signal of support for Trump’s Loyalist insurrection. I thought to myself how badly I want this symbol to be reshuffled, reclaimed by the ones who actually like trees and want the earth to be more heavenly — at least less miserable. But as I continued walking around the store, I was struck by another piece of memorabilia from that first revolution. A pin with the slogan “Join, or Die” — give me liberty or give me death. Witnessing political murders nearby and livestreams of genocide abroad, I think I’ve prayed to the ghost of every God that a coming revolution might somehow be done peacefully, as a war of ideas and matter of democracy. Yet, as the Leviathan has already struck the heart of the world in their violation of millions, we cannot leave defenseless the specter of

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<sup>70</sup> Parisot, E. Phiddian, R. Barclay, K. “Dark Enlightenments: An Introduction”. *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 2024.

promise:<sup>71</sup> the retention of beings which cannot be replaced by artifice, the integration of addends which are otherwise abandoned, as well as the unleashing of production from all wastes of life — from artificial need and imposed scarcity. Their powers are profoundly historical, but not eternal; mighty, but not almighty. A spectral realism of justice may not determine the future, but either it or its refined simulacrum inevitably will. And against such nihilistic Leviathan,<sup>72</sup> I appeal to heaven — has the Sun ever shone on a more worthy cause?

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<sup>71</sup> Hobbes darkly reminds us, "[c]ovenants, without the sword, are but words". Hobbes, T. *Leviathan*, 1651, Book II, Ch. 17–19.

<sup>72</sup> As that old psalm sang: "*It was you crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.*" Psalm 74:14

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