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Receding resilience: On the planetary moods of disruption

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Abstract

The term *disruption* has been offered as both an ethos and set of practices framed as a broad response to all manner of social and political ills. This article offers a speculative reflection on disruption as a planetary mood, and the sensory qualities of a change in politics no longer defined by governance and what is governable, but by a series of continuous experiments hedged upon the creation of new geopolitical frontiers and life forms that position all matter and contingency towards a specific kind of value tied to chaos. In thinking about the kinds of authority and legitimacy being fashioned around visions of so-called disruptive futures, I draw on materially-grounded illustrations of disruptive dispositions to examine three different arrangements of affect, feeling, and intensity being animated to give disruption its power of transmissibility and adaptability, as well as its unintuitive emphasis on disorder and 'breaking things' as both a moral good and unconditional response to questions concerning global conflict, crises, and instability. Ultimately, disruption as a planetary mood draws on a libidinal economy that does not bend towards justice or equity, thus warning against misanthropic commitments to collapse and the consequences of investing in a world premised on an ethos of erasure.

Keywords: Disruption; Resilience; International Relations; Affect; Structures of Feeling; Disorder; Politics; Chaos

Introduction

The term *disruption* has been offered as both an ethos and set of practices framed as a broad response to all manner of social and political ills. The prolific circulation of the term across multiplying sectors of governance, economy, and society complicates efforts to state what exactly disruption means, and to trace its effects. At one level, the evocation of disruption seems to reflect another rhetorical attempt to reproduce the mythic promise that, like other capitalist fantasies, unending growth and profit await those who are bold enough to tap into its destructive forces by upending markets and skipping over the stark realties of peak resources, labour inequality, global public health crises, and climate instability. At another level, it seems to gesture towards an ecclesiastical conviction that our contemporary condition demands all manner of systems and social orders be continually erased and replaced. *Disrupt or Die*. *Your Money or Your Life*. As disruption asserts its cultural and political influence through the demand that we surrender to the ceaseless energies of turbulence, uncertainty, and chaos, what does it mean to be constantly confronted with a version of the world where everything must be premediated along a path towards its own destruction?

This article is a speculative reflection on the politics of disruption as a 'global concept of feeling',[1] one that speaks to the sensory qualities of a change in politics no longer defined by

[1]Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 44.

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governance and what is governable, but by a series of continuous experiments and beta-tests hedged upon the creation of new geopolitical frontiers and life forms. In thinking about the kinds of authority and legitimacy being fashioned around visions of so-called 'disruptive futures' – from the compulsory exchange of biometric information for faster shipping options, to the fabrication of mountains to increase rainfall in the desert, to moves beyond this planet to dominate orbital space – it is clear that whatever bonds to these futures exist, they cannot be premised on demonstrations of capability in the present, nor on the promise of a kinder world.[2] What compositions of affect, feeling, and intensity are being animated to give disruption its power of transmissibility and adaptability?

My central undertaking here is to explore how the concept of disruption names more than simply a marketing strategy or description of the effects of any singular technology. Instead, I want to register the expression of a planetary mood – with different tonalities – that positions all forms of matter and contingency toward a specific kind of value tied to chaos. By way of an introduction, I offer an overview of the term disruption itself, outlining its origin story as a Harvard-spun business model, as well as a number of critiques of disruption that have been proposed across different disciplines. I then locate disruption conceptually in relation to discourses of risk, resilience, and preemption. The importance of this inquiry for international studies lies in part on the diffuse nature of discourses of disruption, and how a seemingly unintuitive emphasis on disorder and 'breaking things'[3] presents challenges to the ways in which, for example, questions of conflict, climate crises, housing insecurity, and global economic instability have been commonly framed in terms of these more thoroughly examined concepts. Both resilience and disruption offer powerful narratives for interpreting the cyclical crises of capitalism and how to navigate the profound political vulnerabilities it generates.[4] However, unlike resilience-centred discourses that foreground the self-managing subject who adapts to changes in times of uncertainty, disruption maligns these impulses as inhibiting fast-paced innovation cultures and enhances a public disposition towards continuous destruction rather than reform, repair, or change.

My main intervention, however, veers from these evaluative frameworks to introduce three facets of disruption as ambient dispositions and modes of governance that sometimes overlap while remaining distinctive enough for each to hold form. These sections highlight different materially-grounded illustrations of disruptive dispositions, which are offered not as case studies or proof of a theory, but rather as introductions to the start of a conversation about forms of attachment and subjectivity generated within the orbit of disruption's destructive moods. What I call *instrumental disruption* gives name to a normative investment in leaning into the chaos that resilience attempts to manage in an effort to maintain existing relations of capital and social hierarchy; *justificatory disruption* names the ways in which social breakdown, government abandonment, and political violence are reframed as 'inputs' and 'outputs' for 'innovating' modes of governance through the language of experimentation and testing; *annihilative disruption* names an investment in destruction for its own sake, and the abandonment of any telos of progress or betterment.[5]

[2]Nicole Sunday Grove, 'Welcome to Mars: Space colonization, anticipatory authoritarianism, and the labour of hope', *Globalizations*, 18:6 (2021).

[3]M. Y. Vardi, 'Move fast and break things', *Communications of the ACM*, 61:9 (2018), p. 7.

[4]See Claudia Aradau, 'The promise of security: Resilience, surprise and epistemic politics', *Resilience*, 2:2 (2014), pp. 73–87; Myriam Dunn Cavelty, Mareile Kaufmann, and Kristian Søby Kristensen, 'Resilience and (in)security: Practices, subjects, temporalities', *Security Dialogue*, 46:1 (2015), pp. 3–14; James Brassett, Stuart Croft, and Nick Vaughan-Williams, 'Introduction: An agenda for resilience research in politics and international relations', *Politics*, 33:4 (2013), pp. 221–8; David Chandler, Kevin Grove, and Stephanie Wakefield (eds), *Resilience in the Anthropocene: Governance and Politics at the End of the World* (London, UK: Routledge, 2020).

[5]In important ways, this typology emerged from an attempt to bring together and respond to multiple generous conversations and prompts facilitated by the editors of *RIS* over more than a year. See contributions from Louise Amoore, 'Machine

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Without suggesting that disruption should be understood as a totalising framework for the present moment, it seems important to try to examine the workings of a term that, as Marina Levina argues, 'prioritizes conflict, discontinuity, and constant alterity over sustainability, memory and community'.[6] The continued insistence of disruption as a myth, a discourse, and for some, a gospel, should compel us to take a closer look at its enduring allure, affording us the possibility of observing its multiple agencies in international politics. As these different messages are interactively interpreted through different cultural codes and policy prescriptions, we should consider what modes of governance are emerging around an emphasis on disruption, the consequences of investing in a world premised on an ethos of erasure, and how this is shaping the way we navigate living together in more and less ethical ways.

Disruption: Myth, ritual, critique

The Oxford English Dictionary provides two definitions of disruption: it is described as a disturbance or problem that interrupts the normal order of an activity or process, with synonyms including disarrangement, agitation, disorder, havoc, ruining, and breaking; it is also defined as a radical change to an industry or market as a result of technological innovation. The latter definition, usually framed in terms of *disruptive technology* and *disruptive innovation*, supports disruption's most popular origin story. The term 'disruptive technology' first appeared in Harvard Business School professors Clayton Christensen and Joseph Bower's 1995 essay 'Disruptive Technologies: Catching the Wave'.[7] The concept was later expanded upon in Christensen's books *The Innovators Dilemma* and *The Innovator's Solution*.[8] These texts offered a business theory for understanding how rapid technological developments allowed for the creation of new competitors and shifts in markets that were able to displace larger, more established firms and corporate alliances. The ensuing emphasis on 'disruptive innovation' was intended to shift the focus from technologies as having intrinsic disruptive qualities towards a more comprehensive business model that would allow firms respond to and thrive amid market shifts spurred by rapid technological change.[9] For proponents of Christensen's business model, the markers of disruption are said to occur in 'market-driven business management vacuums',[10] where larger companies with an established customer base are replaced by newer more flexible companies. This often happens *because* the innovation model of larger companies is based on incremental changes that follow consumer demand, rather than 'breaking' conventional demand and supply structures to offer something consumers have presumably never encountered before.[11]

Over the last two decades, Christensen's theory of disruptive innovation has been framed as a positive social and economic force, making products and services more widely available and affordable to larger numbers of people.[12] Countless government initiatives, military operations,

learning political orders', *Review of International Studies* (2022), pp. 1–17; and Charmaine Chua in this *Review of International Studies* forum.

[6]Marina Levina, 'Disrupt or die: Mobile health and disruptive innovation as body politics', *Television & New Media*, 18:6 (2017), p. 549; cited in Sharon Shahaf and Chiara Francesca Ferrari, 'Interrogating "disruption": Global television culture between continuity and change', *Critical Studies in Television*, 14:2 (2019), pp. 153–9.

[7]Joseph L. Bower and Clayton M. Christensen, 'Disruptive technologies: Catching the wave', *Harvard Business Review*, Jan–Feb (1995), pp. 43–53.

[8]Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovators Dilemma* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1997); Clayton M. Christensen and Michael E. Raynor, *The Innovator's Solution: Creating and Sustaining Successful Growth* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013).

[9]Christensen and Raynor, *The Innovator's Solution*; see also MaryAnne M. Gobble, 'Defining disruptive innovation', *Research-Technology Management*, 59:4 (2016), pp. 66–71.

[10]Alison Agnes Veith, '"Don't Be Evil": Google's Labor, Technology, and the Limits of Corporate Good (Dissertation, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California, 2015), pp. 70–1.

[11]Clayton M. Christensen, Rory McDonald, Elizabeth J. Altman, and Jonathan E. Palmer, 'Disruptive innovation: An intellectual history and directions for future research', *Journal of Management Studies*, 55:7 (2018), pp. 1043–78.

[12]Christensen Institute website, available at: {https://www.christenseninstitute.org} accessed 2 July 2022.

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international institutions, and aid programmes have adopted discourses of disruption to indicate a necessity to overhaul everything from new organisational structures for US Homeland Security and EU healthcare management, to the global distribution of 'water ATMs'.[13] In public-facing talks and documents for these various initiatives, the summoning of disruption connotes a need for the increasing penetration of 'emerging technologies' at all levels of scale and experience in terms of both practical urgency and moral imperative.[14] These technologies, usually understood in the context of certain attributes such as radical novelty, fast growth, drastic impact, and ambiguity of effect, include mobile Internet; the automation of knowledge and work; the Internet of Things (IoT); cloud technology; advanced robotics; autonomous vehicles; advanced genomics; biometrics; financial technology; energy storage; 3D printing; advanced oil and gas exploration and recovery; and renewable energy.[15] Such profoundly divergent multi-use technologies in application and effect are flattened through the language of disruption insofar as they are all said to produce 'revolutionary' paradigm shifts rather than incremental improvements to social, economic, and political relations, and where the experience of heightened discontinuity and uncertainty is moralised in its intent to inform capital and affective investments in elite strategies for managing growth amid crisis conditions.[16] Here, the continually unsettling effects of disruptive innovation are framed as an ends rather than a means, regardless of political or social outcome.

Scholars in critical market studies, business and cultural communication, and science and technologies studies have attempted to deconstruct the 'disruptor myth' from the cultural meanings that have sustained it since the 1990s.[17] Alison Agnes Veith has argued that the usefulness of disruption as a business strategy is always problematically contained within an economic rather than a social or political framework, where the consequences of so-called 'disruptive' interventions are only considered in profit-generating terms.[18] Others have attempted to locate Christensen's theory of disruptive innovation in 1960s libertarianism, and the relentless and often reckless pursuit of 'technological breakthroughs' against conventional business models.[19] Disruption in these critiques is described as a 'natural fit' with Silicon Valley – understood not as a geographical place but rather as 'an ethos that shapes our cultural understanding of the relationship between innovation, technology and capitalism.'[20] Boltanski and Chiapello use the language of disrupting systems of production to demonstrate the shift from hierarchical corporate styles that emerged in the 1970s, to decentralised innovation and project teams.[21] As a point

[13]Rodrigo Nieto-Gómez, '"The power of the few": A key strategic challenge for the permanently disrupted high-tech homeland security environment', *Homeland Security Affairs*, 7:1 (2011); Nabil Sultan and Ziyaad Sultan, 'The application of utility ICT in healthcare management and life science research: A new market for a disruptive innovation', *The European Academy of Management Conference EURAM* (2012), pp. 6–8; Christensen Institute profile of Drinkwell's 'water ATMs', available at: {https://www.christenseninstitute.org/blog/targeting-nonconsumption-the-most-viable-path-to-growth} accessed 2 July 2022.

[14]'Disruptive' technologies are commonly identified as those outlined in communications such as the 2013 McKinsey Global Institute report, available at: {https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/disruptive-technologies} accessed 2 July 2022. See also description of the United Nations Global Pulse Big Data for Development partnerships, available at: {https://www.unglobalpulse.org} accessed 2 July 2022.

[15]See Daniele Rotolo, Diana Hicks, and Ben Martin, 'What is an emerging technology?', *Research Policy* (2015).

[16]Levina, 'Disrupt or die', p. 556; see also Michael Latzer, 'Information and communication technology innovations: Radical and disruptive?', *New Media & Society*, 11:4 (2009), pp. 599–619.

[17]Susi Geiger, 'Silicon Valley, disruption, and the end of uncertainty', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 13:2 (2020), pp. 169–84; Christopher Groves, 'Horizons of care: From future imaginaries to responsible research and innovation', *Shaping Emerging Technologies: Governance, Innovation, Discourse* (2013), pp. 185–202; Levina, 'Disrupt or die'; Marina Levina and Amy Adele Hasinoff, 'The Silicon Valley ethos: Tech industry products, discourses, and practices', *Television & New Media*, 18:6 (2017), pp. 489–95.

[18]Alison Agnes Veith, '"Don't Be Evil"'.

[19]Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[20]Levina, 'Disrupt or die', cited in Geiger, 'Silicon Valley, disruption, and the end of uncertainty'.

[21]Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (New York, NY: Verso, 2018).

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of illustration, Lauren Anderson shows how online resources for 'collaborative consumption', curated by Silicon Valley tech elites, are framed as *disruptive* insofar as they advocate for a business model that does away with centralised power structures in favour of platforms that help us to 'connect and collaborate with each other'.[22] Yet corporations like Uber, AirBnB, and other core proponents of the 'sharing economy' have consistently demonstrated a commitment to exploitative contracts, algorithmic and racialised discrimination, and the dismantling of labour protections broadly.[23] Critiques of disruption in critical marketing and related fields do not suggest that these platforms aren't connective; rather they highlight how these connections are intrinsically inequitable and exploitative because of the business models and biases upon which they are built.

Perhaps the most well-known critique of Christensen's theory of disruptive innovation can be found in Jill Lepore's 2004 *New Yorker* essay, 'The Disruption Machine', in which Lepore demonstrates how disruption as a 'revolutionary ethos' treats technology as something meant to antagonise existing systems rather than sustain or change them:

> … the rhetoric of disruption – a language of panic, fear, asymmetry, and disorder – calls on the rhetoric of another kind of conflict, in which an upstart refuses to play by the established rules of engagement, and blows things up … Startups are ruthless and leaderless and unrestrained, and they seem so tiny and powerless, until you realize, but only after it's too late, that they're devastatingly dangerous … Disruptive innovation is a competitive strategy for an age seized by terror.[24]

Here, replacing 'progress' with 'innovation' allows not only for avoiding the question of whether or not excessive novelty is always an improvement on whatever current predicament being faced, but it also suggests a 'ruthlessness' to such an orientation. Lepore articulates disruption's appeal as a response to fear – of financial collapse, global catastrophe, and an implicitly understood but rarely acknowledged awareness that models of growth regularly thrust upon the world are based on unsupported evidence.

These ideas remain central to projects aimed at historicising and politicising Christiansen's innovation strategies, however it could be argued that their limits may lie in how their engagement with the term disruption itself remains bounded to the same theories and strategies that are given in trying to understand the concept's murmurations in the world. When we begin to consider the affective dimensions of the problem of disruption, fear is one bearing or orientation, but there are others at work. Given the disparate ways in which disruption is evoked, strategised, and felt today – from CRISPR technology to modular homes – we are confronted with a kind of immersive condition, one that gestures towards something that exists in excess of any one particular intervention or theory, but from which responses to political, economic, and social problems are consistently generated. What does it mean to live in a world of pre-emptive destabilisation? How do we identify where and how this is happening and to what effect? And what would an appropriate response look like?

These questions are given an added layer of complexity when we consider the appropriation of disruption as an organising theme for justice and equity-oriented initiatives, 'labs', and other forms of collaborative organising. These adaptations prompt us to consider whether or not disruption deserves a critical reappraisal, and if it can be rescued from its more problematic connotations to demonstrate that not all systems should survive, and that some forms of 'breaking' are good. In the following sections, I frame a parallel discussion to this engagement with disruption

[22]Lauren Anderson, 'Disruption: Catalyst for a collaborative future', *Collaborative Consumption* (13 August 2013).

[23]Safiya Umoja Noble, 'Algorithms of oppression', in *Algorithms of Oppression* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018); Juliet B. Schor and Steven P. Vallas, 'The sharing economy: Rhetoric and reality', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 47 (2021). See also Niels Van Doorn, 'Platform labor: On the gendered and racialized exploitation of low-income service work in the "on-demand" economy', *Information, Communication & Society*, 20:6 (2017), pp. 898–914.

[24]Jill Lepore, 'The disruption machine: What the gospel of innovation gets wrong', *The New Yorker*, 23 (2014), pp. 30–6.

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in an effort to understand its different adaptations more broadly as a planetary mood. However, ultimately I suggest that the desired result of disruption's critical productivity is the subject who no longer wishes for a sense of security and preparedness in the face of shocks, crises, and disasters, but one who welcomes and even seeks to perpetuate such crises. Consequently, I argue that disruption is limited in terms of its ability to capture a vision of an ethical and political response to the challenges of contemporary capitalism and global instability.

Disruption as a planetary mood

In exploring disruption as a flexible, active, and collective social *experience*, I turn to Raymond Williams's work on structures of feeling, which offers an important set of ideas and a language for understanding disruption as a relational encounter with a 'specific present' rather than a fixed or singular theory that can explain particular phenomena.[25] Williams's emphasis on social rather than personal or individual experience provides conceptual latitude for drawing together the ideological generalities and systematic beliefs underpinning something that could be called a disruptive mood, and the 'embryonic' character of this mood, which is both social and material though not fully articulated or defined in a formal or institutional sense.[26] Understanding disruption as a mood not-fully-formed and ambivalently demonstrated, yet *still* experienced collectively, unsettles attempts to categorically reduce disruption to a specific kind of coherent logic, a volitional strategy, or an epistemic rationale that can be 'applied' to particular cases and demonstrated empirically. Despite this inability to reduce what Williams calls the 'generative immediacy' of structures of feeling to something like a worldview, the choices and effects emanating from said experiences can still be observed in forms of governance, style, architecture and design, language, and discourse.

The theory of structures of feeling has become central to numerous multidisciplinary engagements with questions of affectivity, emotion, and politics.[27] However, as Lauren Berlant argues, Williams's model can be contrasted to other kinds of 'affect talk' in its emphasis on the 'maturing atmospheres' beneath the surface of collective life, rather than the exclusive expression of affective states in the body.[28] Instead, structures of feeling pose the historical present as having a shared 'affective residue' that may be experienced among different collectivities, and which profoundly shape the way we belong to a world. Berlant also highlights the stakes of Williams's analysis in how structures of feeling are prophetic of class organisation in the future.[29] Disruption names a similar 'change of presence' to structures of feeling, one that maintains an emergent character while still 'exerting palpable pressures and setting effective limits on experience and on action'.[30] This framing allows us to consider the *everywhere-ness* of disruption in its widely adaptive discursive purchase, and to better understand its historical and political effects as a series of aesthetic practices.

Sianne Ngai's consideration of the affective states of irritation, anxiety, and paranoia, and their translations into actions and behaviours that are beneficial to late capitalism such as flexibility, adaptability, and 'a readiness to reconfigure oneself' are also relevant to an examination of the ambient aesthetics of disruption.[31] These affective states can be read alongside those concerns

[25]Raymond Henry Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Vol. 392 (Oxford, UK: Oxford Paperbacks, 1977), pp. 128–9.

[26]Ibid., p. 131.

[27]Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup (eds), *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture*, Vol. 5 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2015); Rebecca Coleman, 'Theorizing the present: Digital media, pre-emergence and infra-structures of feeling', *Cultural Studies*, 32:4 (2018), pp. 600–22. See also Ahmed's reversal of William's paradigm in 'feelings of structure', in Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010) and Sigrid Schmitz and Sara Ahmed, 'Affect/emotion: Orientation matters. a conversation between Sigrid Schmitz and Sara Ahmed', *FZG–Freiburger Zeitschrift für GeschlechterStudien*, 20:2 (2014), pp. 13–14.

[28]Lauren Berlant, 'Structures of unfeeling: Mysterious skin', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 28:3 (2015), pp. 191–213.

[29]Ibid., p. 194.

[30]Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 132.

[31]Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, p. 4.

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articulated by Lepore insofar as articulations of disruption can function as what Ngai calls 'interpretations of predicaments' – that is, disruption can be a sign that not only marks a problem, but also reinterprets that problem in a way that frames all imaginable responses in terms of a moral imperative toward disarray.[32] Reflecting on disruption as a similar kind of ambiance allows us to differentiate what industry gurus say about disruption as a marketing strategy, and the kinds of dystopian affects at work when disruption functions as a political strategy and form of governance for which chaos is held up as a necessary form of life for billions of people on the planet.

In an effort to give more form to these ideas, I want to consider disruption as an 'ambivalently demonstrated' structure of feeling alongside the concepts of risk and resilience as a part of a critical lexicon, and also how disruption might be experienced differently against the backdrop of the socially mediated affects of uncertainty and insecurity. While the last two decades have been marked by the rhetorics of resilience and disruption, only one of these terms has been expansively elaborated on in critical approaches to international studies. Both disruption and resilience mark the world as a place of radical uncertainty. Each concept also references a particular relationship to futurity, where every 'thing' and every 'where' holds the potential for crisis to emerge, suggesting both terms are underwritten by a 'mood' of catastrophe. If risk and resilience require catastrophe and crises to be mitigated and managed, then disruption names the naturalisation of crisis-induced precarity.

Berlant reminds us of the importance of acknowledging for whom or what when we speak of crises,[33] however even in the term's uneven and inequitable applicability, when reflected through the language of risk and resilience, crisis is still understood as something to lament. The term 'risk societies' describes collective forms of living and governance that attempt to manage risk by minimising its effects, and predicting and preempting its emergence.[34] Precarity in risk societies is thus framed as something unpredictable and not entirely controllable. If the notion of risk frames precarity as a consequence that can be harnessed or leveraged in some cases, then one could argue it also gestures towards a mood that captures a context of critique, and a sense of something that perhaps is not quite grievability, but certainly a learning to cope. Relatedly, resilience commonly underscores adaptive modes of conserving, sustaining, and 'slowing down' the accelerated processes of modernisation and industrialisation, where problems are framed through capacity-building systems and communities that can either be developed or enhanced,[35] but also the adaptive capacities of 'far-from-equilibrium' systems.[36]

Disruption inverts this sentiment, where a moral and practical impetus emerges to pursue, embrace, and champion precarity and dislocation as a form of being in the world. To suggest we live in the time of risk societies and resilience politics is to assume a world where systems are designed to 'absorb disturbances', and in some cases return to some original state.[37] Disruption describes a different appeal, one that seeks the proliferation of disturbance as an ends rather than a means to some better outcome. Its emphasis is on differentiation as a process of accelerated change in order to create systems that are *unsustainable*, the purpose of which is

[32]Ibid., p. 3.

[33]Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

[34]Ulrich Beck, 'Modern society as a risk society', *The Culture and Power of Knowledge: Inquiries into Contemporary Societies* (1992), pp. 199–214; Richard Ericson and Aaron Doyle, 'Catastrophe risk, insurance and terrorism', *Economy and Society*, 33:2 (2004), pp. 135–73; cited in Claudia Aradau and Rens Van Munster, 'Governing terrorism through risk: Taking precautions, (un)knowing the future', *European Journal of International Relations*, 13:1 (2007), pp. 89–115.

[35]Peter Adey, Ben Anderson, and Stephen Graham, 'Introduction: Governing emergencies: Beyond exceptionality', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 32:2 (2015), pp. 3–17; See also Brassett, Croft, and Vaughan-Williams, 'Introduction', pp. 221–8 and David Chandler, 'Security through societal resilience: Contemporary challenges in the Anthropocene', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 41:2 (2020), pp. 195–214.

[36]Martin Coward, 'Recombinant resilience and the temptations of global interdiction', in Alex Houen (ed.), *States of War since 9/11: Terrorism, Sovereignty, and the War on Terror* (London, UK: Routledge, 2014), pp. 216–35.

[37]Crawford S. Holling, 'Resilience and stability of ecological systems', *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* (1973), pp. 1–23; cited in Chandler, Grove, and Wakefield (eds), *Resilience in the Anthropocene*.

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simply to make way for the next mutation. No matter the political or social problem posed, it is discursively framed through destabilising existing capacity-building communities and systems. Even if there were a critique of resilience that was not about accelerating disequilibrium, conventional readings of political economy may constrain both the rationalities and irrationalities of such experiments to the logic of capital. It remains to be seen whether capital constrains or merely provokes the horizon of what is pursued experimentally through an ethos of disruption.

In the sections that follow, I suggest there are at least three ways of reading disruption as a global concept of feeling. The first I call *instrumental disruption*. Here, disruption advances similar ideas and impressions found in articulations of resilience, including the cultivation of flexibility and a neoliberal sense of self for the purpose of maintaining the order of an existing system. While the invocation of disruption in these instances is meant to point to some form of radical novelty, the aim is still adaptation to a situation or system in the service of the status quo, and according to levels of productivity, resource extraction, exploitation, and human suffering considered acceptable by those for whom these existing systems benefit. Ultimately, this form of disruption is not about creating the conditions for breakdown in the social order, but rather is about creating the conditions for maintaining stability amid unpredictable shocks, or for taking advantage of those shocks as market opportunities.[38] The explanatory value of instrumental disruption is that it gives a name to the sentiment that we must lean into the very chaos that resilience seeks to manage, while still being in the service of managing that chaos.

The second disruptive mood considered here is *justificatory disruption* – that is, the taking up of the language of disruption, testing, and the experiment as a way of hedging against the possibility of failure. This is not to suggest that all forms of social and political experimentation are disruptive. What justificatory disruption speaks to is the process by which complex political problems are reduced to target outputs, and the means by which the shift from a problem to an output transforms governance failures into successes. Here, the fracturing effects of state violence and social breakdown are transformed into something that 'feeds' the model, rather than a failure of policy or an abdication of civic responsibility and accountability. This raises important questions about how one holds governments, institutions, and individuals accountable for dangerous and even deadly policies amid a distributive mood of testing and prototyping.

The third and final form of disruption I want to consider is what I call *annihilative disruption*. This form of disruption, to draw upon an impression from Gilles Deleuze, *surfs* the waves of chaos as a virtue under conditions of control that are undulatory and in orbit.[39] This mood may drift into ambulations of instrumentalism and justification, however the difference is that it has no investment in the management of order and infrastructure – in fact, quite the opposite. If *instrumental disruption* seeks to ensure that critical infrastructure and social order keep running, and if *justificatory disruption* seeks to erase the channels of accountability through an investment in a vision of the world as a test, *annihilative disruption* names a commitment to the total abandonment of a better world, where chaos becomes an unadulterated virtue.

Instrumental disruption, or chaos as a path to the status quo

I want to try to unpack a form of disruption that describes an unavailing commitment to overcoming the deadlock between unsustainable models of growth, and thriving life on the planet through technological means. Disrupting this deadlock might look like injecting clouds with silver iodide, or designing soldiers to better adapt to PTSD. Yet what these tweaks to geological, biological, and political life have in common is a form of technological determinism organised around coping with situations that are mired in alarm. Such disruptive strategies, while facilitating more and less catastrophic consequences, are not interested in breaking the world to make room

[38]Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York, NY: Picador, 2017).

[39]Gilles Deleuze, 'Postscript on the societies of control', *Surveillance, Crime and Social Control* (London, UK: Routledge, 2017), pp. 35–9.

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for another, despite what the language of disruption promises. If disruption is, as McKenzie Wark suggests, the anodyne label of creative destruction, and a disarrangement of contemporary life embraced by capital 'without [the] ambivalence and irony the term once possessed',[40] then withholding said ambivalence and irony, it suggests an instrumentalist disposition towards the constant creation of a measure of chaos that can better serve existing investments in profit, order, and control. To put another way, instrumental disruption names a kind of disruption whose ideas and practices portend that a bit of disorder is the best way to solidify order.

Some applications of disruptive innovation in this tune have been more faithful to Christensen's broadly adopted approach to business analysis, providing intellectual support for his ideas through the application of 'case studies' of technological change in order to demonstrate what is and is not truly disruptive for governments and militaries seeking to 'ride the wave'. US Vice Admiral Arthur Cebrowski, former head of the Pentagon's Office of Force Transformation, openly borrowed from Christensen's theories, recommending the military buy its equipment from new suppliers in the wake of information technology's 'revolution in military affairs'.[41] Peter Dombrowski and Eugene Gholz's *Identifying Disruptive Innovation* is an example of this orientation towards disruption, providing a 'improved' classificatory scheme for determining whether or not innovations are 'disruptive' or 'sustainable' by drawing on examples of investments in commercial IT products in the US defence industry.[42] Here, Christensen's model promises a way of differentiating between technological change promoted by transformation advocates attempting to steer military purchases towards particular private firms, and actual substantive changes in military capacity. This kind of disruptive instrumentalism resonates, for example, with the demand for advanced technologies in military applications for human enhancements driven by global instability and military competition, for instance recessed pain sensors, increased stamina and sensory abilities, and resistance to psychological trauma.[43] Called forth either in corporate management theories for the military, or interventions in the capacities of the human body, the point of these so-called disruptive incursions is never to subvert the organisational chain of command or decision-making structures within the military itself; it is only to enhance them. In other words, where disruption is said to be designed into systems such as these, we can understand its affective refrain more as a kind of instrumentalism than as a condition that seeks to significantly alter the conditions of those systems.

I am not suggesting that the introduction of new human-technical arrangements do not have real effects on social and political relations or on the contours of violence, nor that they do not have unpredictable effects. Instead, I am interested in how these relations are shaped when problems of infrastructure and logistics are conceived of within a milieu of impermanence, often under the guise of sustainable modelling practices. Chua interrogates this problematic through unearthing the structural relays between 'disruption from above' and 'disruption from the middle' – where corporate and elite-driven normative investments in disorder are actualised in technocratic interventions in the materiality of everyday life.[44] By way of another example, consider the focus on 'disruptive technologies' for achieving SDG goals by 'Project Breakthrough', one of the main initiatives of the United Nations Global Compact, a UN pact for encouraging corporate sustainability and socially-responsible business practices. Here, the broad adoption of technologies such as unmanned aviation systems (UAS), digital agriculture, gene editing, and additive manufacturing (3D printing) is positioned as integral to the future of growth and

[40]McKenzie Wark, *Sensoria: Thinkers for the Twentieth-First Century* (New York, NY: Verso Books, 2020), p. 47.

[41]Arthur K. Cebrowski and John W. Raymond, 'Operationally responsive space: A new defense business model', *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters*, 35:2 (2005), p. 3; see also Der Derian, Project Z.

[42]Peter Dombrowski and Eugene Gholz, 'Identifying disruptive innovation: Innovation theory and the defense industry', *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization*, 4:2 (2009).

[43]Christopher E. Sawin, 'Creating super soldiers for warfare: A look into the laws of war', *Journal of High Technology Law*, 17 (2016), p. 105.

[44]Charmaine Chua, 'Disruption from above, the middle and below', *Review of International Studies*, this forum.

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performance-enhancing business models 'for good'. Despite claims to introduce improved systems to deliver said goals, it is unclear how the digitalisation of cropping or the use of drones for aid delivery is in fact erasing and replacing an existing system where NGOs, researchers, funders, and commercial organisations continue to capitalise on what they see as 'perceived gaps in local capacity', nor are any structural solutions offered to narrow those gaps.[45]

The practice of 'Design for Disassembly' (DfD) provides another lens thorough which to explore instrumentalism as a planetary mood of disruption, where public infrastructure such as schools, homes and housing projects, and government buildings are conceived with their ending in mind, usually through demolition and repurposing, but still continue to function as ordering technologies.[46] Consider a recent 'disruptive' proposal by a group of MIT designers to address the long-standing catastrophe of the twice-monthly razing of the Al Araqib village in the Negev by Israeli forces.[47] Wrapped in the language of community engagement and cultural sensitivity, the proposal suggests the use of 3D printed tents as one 'solution', which can be broken down, hidden, and reassembled much quicker and easier than tarps and other found materials that villagers have had to disassemble and hide in the trunks of cars each time a scout alerts the community to the arrival of incoming soldiers and bulldozers. While introducing some level of technological novelty to the situation, the use 3D printed structures does not, nor does it seek to intervene in the political conditions that would allow Israeli soldiers to continuously raze the village of Al Araqib. Drawing on Herscher and Monk's work on the *global shelter imaginary*, we can see that 3D printed homes are offered as ostensibly 'helping' Palestinians who must endure this ceaseless policy of violence and wreckage, however the framing of a disruptive innovation in the problem of housing displaces the political question of occupation into a design and architecture question about shelter.[48]

We can also locate this instrumental core in the chaotic folds of just-in-time logistics, where, as Chua notes, we find 'the imperatives for capital to expand its circulatory capacities [producing] its own irrational rationalities'.[49] These experiments in geo-engineering to expand port capacity, the aggressive obsession with creating the next biggest container ship, and the violent circulations that drive such expansions exceed any rational calculation or durability with regard to climate, environment, and human suffering. Despite the spectacular interruptions that lay bare the instabilities generated by the disruptive drives of capital – the Ever Given blocking the Suez, or new record-breaking numbers of shipping containers lost at sea – the interventions that facilitate them are ultimately embedded in the global present of maritime commerce.[50] Such events are simply seen as the cost of introducing a little disturbance to facilitate the continued and unsustainable amplification of supply-chain living.

We might consider whether or not we are contending with two parallel orders here. In the first, societies increasingly understand themselves in terms of risk management and are organised around the unequal relations of contemporary forms of risk calculation and assessment that

[45]Michael Gallagher, 'Educational unsustainability in sub-Saharan Africa: In search of counter-narratives to policy pressures and exponential tech growth', *Visions for Sustainability*, 12 (2019), pp. 40–51.

[46]Robert Bogue, 'Design for disassembly: A critical twenty-first century discipline', *Assembly Automation* (2007); Philip Crowther, 'Design for disassembly–themes and principles', *Environment Design Guide* (2005), pp. 1–7; Fernanda Cruz Rios, Wai K. Chong, and David Grau, 'Design for disassembly and deconstruction-challenges and opportunities', *Procedia Engineering*, 118 (2015), pp. 1296–304.

[47]Nof Nathansohn, Molly Mason, David Allen White, Hugh Timothy Ebdy, Yaara Yacoby, Hila Sharabi, and Lawrence Sass, 'Design for disassembly: Using temporary fabrication for land politics in the Negev', *International Journal of Architectural Computing*, 18:2 (2020), pp. 155–73.

[48]Andrew Herscher and Daniel Bertrand Monk, *The Global Shelter Imaginary: Ikea Humanitarianism and Rightless Relief* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), p. 23.

[49]Charmaine Chua, 'Containing the Ship of State: Managing Mobility in an Age of Logistics' (Dissertation, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 2018), p. 217.

[50]Charmaine Chua, 'The monstrosity of maritime capitalism', *Boston Review* (4 May 2021), available at: {https://bostonreview.net/articles/the-ever-given-and-the-monstrosity-of-maritime-capitalism} accessed 7 June 2022.

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proliferate everyday life. The other might look like a form of engineered disruption, which tries to hold many different kinds of irrationalities, disintegrations, and derangements within systems, but continues to function alongside increasingly penetrating forms of technological control for the management of social and political risk. In response, does one assume critiques of resilience that position stability as conservative, and disruption as radical? I am still working through how this distribution tracks. There may be a fundamental conservatism to some critiques of resilience discourse insofar as they arrest revolutionary change by habituating us to a tolerance of existing systems. Critiques of resilience require thinking that change happens through crises and upheaval, but crises and upheaval are also what capitalism needs to perpetuate itself. If this indebtedness to a kind of Schumpeter-style disaster capitalism holds,[51] it is unclear which crises and contradictions of capitalism will be its gravediggers, and which will pan out to be essential to its maintenance in breaking with older forms of organisation.

Justificatory disruption and the erasure of failure

In this section, I consider a second mood of disruption, one that gestures toward investments in chaos, disorder, and breaking as part of a public discourse on change when many have given up on the social as a space of transformation for a deliberative society and the good life. There are two central problems proposed here that I suggest animate this particular mood. The first relates to a previously mentioned form of critical productivity identified with disruption, and how it holds up subjects who welcome and even seek out the unsettling effects of crises, shocks, and disasters, rather conditions associated with concepts like resilience, for example preparedness and insulation from said effects. This form of subjectification can be bracketed by what Elizabeth Povinelli has elsewhere described as the deflection of social and ethical responsibility as something morally desirable,[52] but combined with shifts in the rhythms and the pace between longer periods of stability in capitalism and shorter periods of upheaval, transition, and adaptation. I am interested in how a particular orientation towards testing, prototyping, and experimentation has become the nomos of capital, informing how relative periods of stability under capitalism have become increasingly compressed, while providing a justification for why existential precarity is a desirable state of things. Justificatory disruption names this interfacing of disruption, deflection, and testing as a materially-grounded collective mood, one that is produced through the reframing of violence, disorder, and democratic breakdown as inputs and outputs for models of governance, rather than as failures of governance itself.

This embracing of experimentation, testing, and prototyping as a means by which failures are reconstructed as inputs and opportunities for future experiments rather than as evidence of an error, a mistake or an event from which claims for answerability and accountability can be made has been explored in recent work. Here, algorithmic decision-making, machine learning and contemporary modes of warfare are framed as scene settings and conceptual touchstones for understanding how perpetual crises and their differentially distributed vulnerabilities have resulted in complex political problems being transformed into a problem of the model.[53] For instance, the erasure of ends and means in favour of a 'permanent beta phase' is a central

[51]Joseph Schumpeter, *The Theory of Economic Development: An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest, and the Business Cycle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Economic Studies, 1934); Joseph Schumpeter, *Business Cycles* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1939).

[52]Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 3–4, 31.

[53]Louise Amoore, 'Algorithmic war: Everyday geographies of the war on terror', *Antipode*, 41:1 (2009), pp. 49–69; Louise Amoore and Rita Raley, 'Securing with algorithms: Knowledge, decision, sovereignty', *Security Dialogue*, 48:1 (2017), pp. 3–10; Jairus Victor Grove, *Savage Ecology: War and Geopolitics at the End of the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019); Marijn Hoijtink, '"Prototype warfare": Innovation, optimisation, and the experimental way of warfare', *European Journal of International Security* (2022), pp. 1–15; Rocco Bellanova, Kristina Irion, Katja Lindskov Jacobsen, Francesco Ragazzi, Rune Saugmann, and Lucy Suchman, 'Toward a critique of algorithmic violence', *International Political Sociology*, 15:1 (2021), pp. 121–50.

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theme in Jairus Victor Grove's meditations on the Eurocene, and more specifically, a contemporary form of geopolitics curated in the United States, where the engineering of rather than governance of a polis replaces the social contract, and where 'neuro-torture, algorithmic warfare, drone strikes, and cybernetic nation-building' are just a few of the new terrains where violence is being modulated to make it legally and normatively invisible.[54] Building on theoretical interventions at the intersection of science, technology and warfare,[55] and experimentation as a mode of governance,[56] Marijn Hoijtink examines how the concept of 'prototype warfare' in military discourse reflects new modes of organising warfare today, where failure is transformed into a 'productive force' immune to critique and insulated from its effects, however destructive, insofar as failure is reconfigured as an opportunity to expand the infrastructures of future forms of experimentation.[57]

Acknowledging that their unpredictability can be instrumentalised for war and commercial interests, Louise Amoore argues that algorithms also generate their own arbitrariness in the organisation of space and control that is.[58] Here, algorithms contain disruptive elements that are an end unto themselves, where their particular pathos is rooted in their own forms of error and accident, but where unreason retains a 'moral dimension' even as algorithms hold a propensity for 'madness'.[59] This work gestures towards the broad diffusion and everyday granularity of experimentation and the erasure of failure where algorithms are deployed to account for the unanticipated actions of actors and things, while also generating their own disruptive and unreasonable effects. These insights suggest that reason and unreason are not the measure of success in terms of interpreting outcomes for the public good, but rather are indicative of the fact that algorithms have become their own form of political reason, existing in the interregnum between our normative conceptions of what is a desirable form of public life and the social good, and what is not. In this forum, Amoore elaborates on this mode of governance as 'indefinite trial[ing]', where algorithmic interventions and machine learning facilitate the abandonment of any preconception of what is and is not failure, what is and is not order, as well as what is and is not being engineering by and for algorithms.[60] If we think back to classical definitions of the political as a collective pursuit of the good, we see here that the collective and the good stray further and further from the polis into the informatic ecologies of programmers, designers, engineers, and the algorithms that exceed them in intent and capacity – often in inscrutable ways.

Staying momentarily with this meditation on an engineered polis, we can reflect on how machine learning intervenes in public space and public decision-making, and how these interventions are moralised through rhetorics of disruption, and thus justified. These interventions are presumed to be good because they are experimental, and they are experimental because they are good. Politics experiences an eclipse of contestation and participation by the engineered and the algorithmic, not as a new zenith of reason but as a terrain of reasons and unreasons, and of different forms of chaos and order that often operate beyond the spaces we can intervene in. These algorithmic reasons and unreasons intersect with racial capital, migrant and refugee surveillance, and imperial war-making, for example in the continued demand for so-called

[54]J. Grove, *Savage Ecology*, pp. 22–3.

[55]Amoore, 'Algorithmic war'; Lucy Suchman, 'Algorithmic warfare and the reinvention of accuracy', *Critical Studies on Security*, 8:2 (2020), pp. 175–82; Lauren Wilcox, 'Embodying algorithmic war: Gender, race and the posthuman in drone warfare', *Security Dialogue*, 48:1 (2017), pp. 11–28; Antoine Bousquet, Jairus Victor Grove, and Nisha Shah, 'Becoming war: Towards a martial empiricism', *Security Dialogue*, 51:2–2 (2020), pp. 99–118.

[56]Michelle Murphy, *The Economization of Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); Vinh-Kim Nguyen, 'Government-by-exception: Enrollment and experimentality in mass HIV treatment programmes in Africa', *Social Theory and Health*, 7:3 (2009), pp. 196–217.

[57]Hoijtink, '"Prototype warfare"', pp. 3–4.

[58]Louise Amoore, *Cloud Ethics: Algorithms and the Attributes of Ourselves and Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

[59]Ibid., p. 112.

[60]Louise Amoore, 'Machine learning political orders', *Review of International Studies* (2022).

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'smart' border technologies as safer and more humane despite evidence of increased border deaths in areas where they are implemented,[61] or in the deliberate design of AI systems that purposely exceed the capacity for human control in order to facilitate greater autonomy of advanced weapons systems.[62] Rather than suggest disruption names something novel, causal, or only explanatory with regard to these examples, we might consider disruption instead as a form of 'soft impressionism' and an 'affective comportment' that haunts efforts aimed at transparency and accountability around these issues.[63] Insofar as this is relevant to the shifting temporalities of capital, algorithmic infrastructures can allow for the experience of a world in a period of stability, but where the undercurrent is actually that of constant disarray because of the inhumane character of the processes of change and adaptation inherent to algorithmic life.[64] It remains a vital task to explain how this happens over time and in relation to technological change as disruptive instabilities increasingly become the norm. The erasure of means (how a structural problem is addressed vs achieving an 'output') is significant because it modulates state and racialised violence in such a way as to become legally invisible while remaining deadly.[65] A subterranean layer of information remains a feature of the model to be adjusted, regardless of the dangers of so-called errors.

Without undermining arguments about the length of history or suggesting that major upheavals of existing systems and ways of life haven't always been an integral part of capitalism, *justificatory disruption* names a structure of feeling and mode of interference that resonates with appeals to experimentation – including beta testing, prototyping, and trailing – as a mode of governance, as well as algorithmic and machine-learning political orders, which are profoundly reorganising our experiences of one another, our relations to natures, as well as the kinds of subjectivities that are created around commitments to disorganising social and political worlds. This is a different kind of inquiry from those that would interrogate the essence of capital, or the presence or absence of the attributes of disruption in particular case studies. Instead, it prompts us to look at how the rhythms of capital are changing for increasingly more people on the planet, where disequilibrium holds a disproportionate amount of time to the rest of the phases of capital that are more path dependent and organised, and how this has become not only normalised but also desirable.

Annihilative disruption, or chaos as virtue

The final mood of disruption I want to reflect on here is what I call *annihilative disruption*, or a form of feeling that organises the world around disaster's insatiable desire for itself. Certain individual 'disruptors' and their activities come to mind, whose chaotic orbits manifest relations of violent instability as a value unto itself. The economy of chaos wrought by annihilative disruption shares with far-right accelerationism a theoretical excess, one that 'attempts to absorb and

[61]E. Tendayi Achiume, 'Digital racial borders', *American Journal of International Law*, 115 (2021), pp. 333–8.

[62]David J. Gunkel, 'Other things: AI, robots and society', in Zizi Papacharissi (ed.), *A Networked Self and Human Augmentics, Artificial Intelligence, Sentience* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019); cited in Elke Schwarz, 'Delegating moral responsibility in war: Lethal autonomous weapons systems and the responsibility gap', in *The Routledge Handbook on Responsibility in International Relations* (London, UK: Routledge, 2021), p. 177. See also Joshua Zitser, 'A rogue killer drone "hunted down" a human target without being instructed to, UN report says', *Business Insider*, available at: {https://www.businessinsider.com/killer-drone-hunted-down-human-target-without-being-told-un-2021-5} accessed 2 June 2022.

[63]Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, pp. 42–3.

[64]Bernard Stiegler, *The Age of Disruption: Technology and Madness in Computational Capitalism* (New York, NY: Polity, 2019).

[65]Ruha Benjamin, *Race after Technology: Abolitionist tools for the New Jim Code* (New York, NY: Polity, 2019); See also Seb Franklin, *The Digitally Disposed: Racial Capitalism and the Informatics of Value* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2021) and Nabil Hassein, 'Against black inclusion in facial recognition', *Digital Talking Drum*, available at: {https://digitaltalkingdrum.com/2017/08/15/against-black-inclusion-in-facial-recognition} accessed 15 May 2022.

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recuperate any and all opposition'.[66] Consider how the circumgyrations of PAC contributions to Donald Trump and MAGA-brand armed pandemonium come together in a communal amplification of sadism and a shared cynicism around state and geopolitical control.[67] Writing about the broad, conceptual landscape of conspiracy and far-right extremism during the Trump administration, Elizabeth Sandifer captures the moody undercurrent of annihilative disruption in suggesting '[t]here is no center here … not even the ruined nameless thing within the Oval Office. There's just a void – a historical calamity emanating out from nothing save for a morbid but systemic lust for its occurrence.'[68] The problem with trying to explain this brand of chaos as belonging to a particular person or causal relationship, Sandifer argues, is that there is no smoking gun – no single argument or individual for whom such a project could be attributed. Instead, there is a hazy, ambient field of misogyny, ressentiment, and thrill-seeking accelerationism whose connective tissue organises, amplifies, and distributes its mood.[69] Unlike instrumental disruption, where the investment in disorder is framed as a means of sustaining order, or justificatory disruption, which seeks the replacement of failure with experimentation, annihilative disruption simply thrives on more chaos.

The fascination with 'splitting' or 'breaking' from existing models of social and political organisation, presumably only for the sake of splitting and breaking, produces a tension when adding something like *annihilative disruption* into an already existing nomenclature of 'neoliberal feeling rules'.[70] There is no shortage of interpretations of the violent actions of the far-right as an expression of class resentment. What explanations are available to us if an alternative understanding of these groups and individuals is that they simply want to watch the world burn? Following this, it seems important to differentiate between the adaptation of disruptive discourses to sustain another decade of profit in an unstable world, the drawing upon an experimental ethos of disruption as an erasure of accountability, and the resetting of chaos as a moral theory of how humanity should organise itself.

Daniel Deudney's description of Promethean technophilia sets up a useful comparison between the undercurrents of a kind of disruption that is driven more by the prospect of utopia and apotheosis, and an annihilative one that is truly disastrous and sadistic.[71] Drawing on representations of the mythological figure as an apocalyptic vision of the trajectory of modernism, Deudney theorises 'Promethian technophiles' as being committed to the idea of present humanity as transitional, and to transhumanist radical change; to the complete reconfiguration of nature and Earth as merely raw material; and to the replacement of politics with technocracy leading to 'unlimited progress', in particular with regard to space expansionism.[72] This vision of Prometheism frames techno-optimists as instrumentalists, still tied to the promise of perpetual growth and human advancement as probable. *Annihilative disruption* rejects this moderate version of an Earth-bound worldview for one that is far more despotic and extreme in that it advances a heroic notion of catastrophic change with the total absence of any investment in a collective image of progress. In other words, it names a condition where there is no version of a shared humanity, note even one on steroids, as this mode of disruption is meant to intimate

[66]Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism* (London, UK: John Hunt Publishing, 2014).

[67]J. Grove, *Savage Ecology*, pp. 203–04; See also Sara Ahmed on the way that hate is given coherence as something that crosses psychic, social, collective, and individual resonance, 'Affective economies', *Social Text*, 22:2 (2004), pp. 117–39 (p. 119).

[68]Elizabeth Sandifer, *Neoreaction a Basilisk* (Eruditorum Press, 2017), p. 337.

[69]Ibid.

[70]Akane Kanai, 'Girlfriendship and sameness: Affective belonging in a digital intimate public', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26:3 (2017), pp. 293–306.

[71]Daniel Deudney, *Dark Skies: Space Expansionism, Planetary Geopolitics, and the Ends of Humanity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 47–38. See also Olga Raggio, 'The myth of Prometheus: Its survival and metamorphoses up to the eighteenth century', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 21:1–2 (1958), pp. 44–62.

[72]Deudney, *Dark Skies*, p. 48

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the production of new values against which the measurement of progress would be nonsensical. Annihilative disruption is reflected in the tonal resonances of the neo-reactionism of individual disruptors who are perfectly fine with introducing new horrors and economies of death for the vast majority of life on the planet in the name of atomistic and violent fantasies, fetishes, and desires: 'What requires imagination on our part', Jairus Grove suggests, is understanding when we have reached a turning point 'where these crimes become themselves normative, that is, the "good" the state pursues' and also how to respond.[73] To put it slightly differently, this is a turning point where what is discussed as a tragic or necessary casualty of change becomes the very erotic source of enjoyment pursuing disruption.

Let me emphasise that there is nothing new about this kind of disruptive ethos, even as it thrives on the presumption of innovation and originality. It is symptomatic of the broader historical horrors inflicted upon planetary life as a result of a long-standing hostile relationship to natures premised on extraction, geopolitical expansionism, and violent fantasies of racial superiority.[74] Annihilative disruption shares a catastrophic energy with the ruthless laboratories of brutality and force that historians of genocide, colonial expansionism, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, government sanctioned torture, and settler violence have extensively documented. There are too many difficult examples to name, though we can note Mahmood Mamdani's mapping of the malignant resonance between 'race-mixing' experiments in southwest Africa and the infamous human experiments conducted at Auschwitz, as well as Neel Ahuja's accounting of the necessity of the racialisation of disease, animal vivisection, and the government of species for the functioning of empire.[75] In conversation with Grove's research on the history of cybernetics, CIA torture, and neurological plasticity, Ahuja's more recent work on the CIA's use of rape as a form of counterterrorist warfare shows how these so-called torture 'experiments' are based not only on racialised imaginings of culture, but also rely on torture to disrupt bodily systems and a sense of bodily agency and integrity with the aim of making prisoners more cooperative in interrogations and other forms of physical-psychological conditioning.[76] We now know from declassified documents that this experimental ethos of torment and plasticity exceeded the instrumentality of mere information gathering, as these torturers already knew they were being provided no 'actionable intelligence'.[77] The cataclysmic spirit of annihilative disruption aligns with these practices and disorganisations of the body in their demonstration of a volatile moment when logics of torture and bio-intervention exceed anything related to utility for counterterrorism, and become instead the frontier of a new corporeal adventurism.

In attending to these examples, I am trying to get at something that can be named beyond an explicit network of individual disruptors as bad actors – that *something* is more like a mood or feeling of libidinal enjoyment in torture for the sake of torture, and chaos for the sake of chaos. It seems important to identify these currents in intensified class conflicts, distributive warfare, the

[73]Jairus Victor Grove, 'From geopolitics to geotechnics: Global futures in the shadow of automation, cunning machines, and human speciation', *International Relations*, 34:3 (2020), p. 440.

[74]Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); Jairus Victor Grove, 'The new nature', *Boston Review*, available at: {http://bostonreview.net/forum/new-nature/jairus-grove-jairus-grove-response-jedediah-purdy} accessed 8 June 2022; See also J. Grove, *Savage Ecology* and Andreas Malm, *White Skin, Black Fuel: On the Danger of Fossil Fascism* (New York. NY: Verso Books, 2021).

[75]Mahmood Mamdani, 'Making sense of political violence in postcolonial Africa', *Socialist Register*, 39 (2013), pp. 132–51; Neel Ahuja, *Bioinsecurities: Disease Interventions, Empire, and the Government of Species* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

[76]Neel Ahuja, 'Reversible human: Rectal feeding, plasticity, and racial control in US carceral warfare', *Social Text*, 38:2 (2020), pp. 19–47; in conversation with Jairus Victor Grove, 'Weaponizing Phenomenology', unpublished lecture.

[77]Melanie Richter-Montpetit, 'Beyond the erotics of Orientalism: Lawfare, torture and the racial–sexual grammars of legitimate suffering', *Security Dialogue*, 45:1 (2014), pp. 43–62. See also Julian Borger, 'US report on "enhanced interrogation" concludes: Torture doesn't work', available at: {https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/dec/09/senate-committee-cia-torture-does-not-work} accessed 2 July 2022. See also Lisa Hajjar, 'American torture: The price paid, the lessons learned', *Middle East Report*, 251 (2009).

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rise of authoritarian sentiments, and the proliferation of carceral technologies that continue to push a more equitable information commons further out of reach. We might consider this concept of feeling as the underside of Berlant's *cruel optimism*, where cruelty has all together dispensed with its optimism to reveal its devouring teeth as creative enterprise.[78] Consequently, we should heed those leftist critiques that have attempted to explain the veritable economy of sadism that annihilative disruption gestures towards as a collective experience that resists volitional logic.[79] Where annihilative disruption becomes an organising force and global mood, it shapes the way that plans, ideas, and developments for addressing political challenges are pushed towards their outer limits with no real care for what it is replaced with. When disruption is instrumental or justificatory, it offers only capitalism as a permanent feature of life. There is no commitment to a cosmopolitan spirit or common conception of the good, with only disagreements on how to get there. In its annihilative form, disruption is the love language of the executioner and the abrogation of any shared humanity or responsibility to life on this planet.

A chaos horizon?

These three interventions in understanding the global mood of disruption can only coexist because of the slippages and ambient disaggregations inherent to the concept of disruption itself. If one were to consider the limits of this typology, it could be said that they offer an invitation to engage in a bit of a shell game. If disruption has become the consummate descriptor for everything from super soldiers to digital agriculture, then this arrangement names a multiplicity of affective forces that have attached themselves to said descriptor rather than any set of specific individuals, objects, paradigms, or programmes. There will be movement between the categories, the meanings and interpretations, and the kinds of processes that are attached to what I've framed as instrumental, justificatory, and annihilative, and there are many ways of reading all three into the examples offered. There is still more philosophical and empirical work to be done in honing said distinctions, and adding to the current repertoire of critique. What I hope the reader comes away with is an understanding that disruption cannot be thought of only in terms of a Silicon Valley buzzword, a managerial theory, a synonym for resilience, or that we take as gospel the origin stories it tells about itself. Within the vortex of practices, discourses, and worldviews, disruption does not follow a singular logic. There is a split discourse and a teleological divergence where different formations of disruption overlap but don't always chase the same futures. This schema is meant to be the beginning of a conversation to find the differing and even opposing political trajectories in the resonating, affective excitation of disruptive interventions.

While disruption proceeds experimentally here, it is not mere experimentation. Rather disruption in all three images presented is animated by a particular will to power that seeks subjugation and supremacy more than wonder. The planet, even our solar system, could be talked about as a laboratory, however the urges of disruption draw little if any satisfaction from accumulating knowledge in the pursuit of a better world. What underwrites this critique of disruption is a counter logic to that of experimentation for the sake of experimentation or destruction for the sake of destruction, which suggests that the issue of accountability is intimately tied up in the question of means. If one of the core problems posed here is how certain orientations towards experimentation directly compete with forms of democratic life that are distinctive from older techniques of governance and control, then an emphasis on means provides at least a partial response to what is new or different about disruption, and may also help us to better understand the present moment. If governments, militaries, aid organisations, policing units, border regimes, and other institutions are turning to chaos as a way of leveraging against the destruction of the

[78]Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.

[79]Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019); China Miéville, 'On social sadism', *Salvage*, 2 (2015); Rosie Warren, 'Some final words on pessimism', *Salvage*, available at: {https://salvage.zone/some-last-words-on-pessimism} accessed 2 July 2022.

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environment, or machine learning as a way of obviating their responsibilities while simultaneously justifying destabilising and violent actions in the name of testing and 'trialling' – and where opting out becomes less and less a viable option – then a process of reverse engineering the effects of these outcomes and their means seems an important part of demonstrating failure and refusing to celebrate these forms of precarity and dislocation as a virtue.

I want to conclude with some further reflections on an earlier provocation about the systems we no longer want, and where this leaves us in terms of cheering on their collapse. While there is no guarantee of what will fill the vacuum after collapse, there are other words and ideas beyond disruption that exist to describe the kinds of organisations that have emerged when those in power have given up on the social as a space of transformation. In seeking to create, find or nurture these movements, it can only help to become better adept at describing and locating the nuances and ambivalences between disorder and change. This seems wanting in both critiques of and arguments for resilience. There is a deep ambivalence and unpredictability at the heart of disruption and disorder, which I have tried to describe here. These shifts *can* be seized upon in more equitable ways (who doesn't want to watch a police station burn at this point?) but such interventions cannot be engineered or branded in advance lest we find ourselves aspiring to be the annihilative technophiles who fancy themselves wizards that can perfectly surf the waves of chaos. They cannot, but when they get lucky it is neither because of virtuosity nor genius, but rather their vast cushion of immiserating capital accumulation which leaves them ready to leverage the aftermath of catastrophe for personal gain.

Despite capital advantages and unjust distributions of power, the extremist right may indeed be destroyed by its own efforts to coax chaos in a particular reactionary direction. However, accelerating these strategies in hopes of some kind of systemic judo move whereby the left tweaks the contradictions of capital at the exact moment of vulnerability is no way to dream of freedom. In fact, those on the left who cheered on the election of George W. Bush or Donald Trump, or secretly hope Russia or China's actions may hold some opportunity for the end of US empire may also be betrayed by a commitment to upheaval and misanthropic investments in collapse. Disruption as a global structure of feeling draws on a libidinal economy that does not bend toward justice. Considering disruption not only as an outcome, but also as a mood may provide at least a partial framework for capturing the way these different ideas and warnings matter across the political spectrum, where there is no sovereign claim that can confidently monopolise disruption and havoc as a means of change because there is never a guarantee that chaos won't exceed its ability to be controlled. If we accept that an investment in disorder as an engine of change does not actually track this way, then we may need to consider the fact that an ethos of disruption may carry with it a disposition towards the world that is more than a means, and isn't, in fact, likely to inspire political action beyond the horizon of revenge.

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