

Chile's M_Machine

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The thin and long country by the Pacific in the South American continent, peripheral as it was, peripheral as it still is, has been more than once signaled as the point of departure of a new epoch, as the place that served as the first laboratory to unfold neoliberalism, and with that, to deploy *capitalist realism*¹. But the burden of time seems to show that every place that has been once used for radical experiments, will secretly harbor the forces that one day will operate to activate a proxy; an opposite. Thus, given the current circumstances, we argue that Chile can now and in the future become a laboratory for the emergence of post-capitalism – a possibility that implies, however, to understand that this topology is silently governed, from beneath, by a cyclical machine.

Last summit: October 2019

The social outbreak of 2019 was the last eventualization of tectonic forces accumulated – and dissipated – during the last decades. In October that year, a raise of 30 pesos in the subway's fare in Santiago (about 4% of the total price) triggered a broad evasion strike led by secondary students; acts of civil disobedience that were strongly repressed by the police. Then came the mockery of government politicians on TV: "If you don't want to pay the extra 30 pesos, wake up earlier and don't use the subway in the rush hour" – or – "Maybe the price of the subway rose a little, but flowers are cheaper than last month." They did not seem to know that an average minimum wage worker spends about 15% of her salary in public transportation, nor that the average worker in Santiago spends between three and four hours daily commuting to their jobs. On Friday night, October 18, the fires started. 20 out of the 136 subway stations were set on fire, and other 77 were severely damaged – Chile's capital was swamped with riots and social unrest. That night, while Santiago was burning and exploding everywhere, president Piñera left La Moneda Palace to eat pizza at a restaurant in a rich district to celebrate his grandchildren's birthday. A couple of hours later, however, he declared a national state of exception. The next day, riots broke out in practically every major city, and infrastructure was burned and vandalized all over the country. This was the beginning of the biggest social outbreak since the last days of the dictatorship in the 1980s.

One week later, on October 25, over a million people took over the streets of Santiago in a peaceful demonstration, demanding Piñera's resignation. Other cities followed, with historically massive protests all over the country. There were no political parties involved, nor an articulated movement behind the protest. Consciousness was rising and

¹ See Mark Fisher, "No Romance Without Finance," in *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004 - 2016)*. (London: Repeater, 2018), 424.

the general population made clear that the inequalities and abuses of the system were at this point transversal, and not just a problem of the working class. Different movements – students, feminist and environmentalist groups, retired people, among many others – came together demanding change in a clear example of how consciousness-raising groups can be reinvented in order to challenge the contemporary conditions of life's general precarization². On November 15, in an unprecedented and yet forced move, the Congress finally agreed to put in place a national referendum to decide on whether Pinochet's constitution should be replaced or not.

During thirty years – since the so-called transition to democracy – we have been submerged in the pervasive atmosphere of what Mark Fisher called *capitalist realism*: the idea that capitalism is “an inevitable part of reality,” and that we cannot imagine a world without it³. Thus, alternatives to capitalism were not seen as viable or desirable, but merely as “naive utopianism”⁴ – put in the terms of Margaret Thatcher's famous sentence, that “there is no alternative”. That was the dominant political and cultural atmosphere in Chile during the last decades; a capitalist realism materialized, in very concrete ways, as an aesthetic atmosphere which progressively imposed an *aesthetic poverty* in “physical, social and mediatic environments”⁵ – globally cloned corporative (non)spaces of mass consumption for the working class of the new Chile. Of course, while “the rich have the material and cultural resources to ‘unplug’ from the dreary banality of these cloned spaces, the poor are far more embedded in them.”⁶ But it was precisely this no alternative, this no future mantra, that in turn brought about the accumulation of discontent among the people.

The radical aestheticization that took over the streets of Santiago during the social outbreak disrupted this atmosphere generating a “reordering of images, thoughts, affects, desires, beliefs and languages,”⁷ capable of distorting the narcotic enchantment of capitalist realism. But aesthetics is not only about art and creativity, but also about destruction and violence. The materialization of the cultural and social critique that sustained the movement operated as an aesthetic atmosphere of dissent “generating new narratives, figures and conceptual frames.”⁸ A kind of associated-milieu⁹ that maintained a metastable relation with the collective individuation processes triggered

² Cf. Fisher, “Acid Communism (Unfinished Introduction)”, in *K-Punk*, 753-770.

³ See Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*. (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), 16.

⁴ Mark Fisher, “The Privatisation of Stress”, *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture* 48 (2011): 124.

⁵ Fisher, “Aesthetic Poverty”, in *K-Punk*, 503.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Fisher, “Abandon hope (summer is coming)”, in *K-Punk*, 580.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cf. Gilbert Simondonin, *On the Modes of Existence of Technical Objects* (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2017[1958]).

by the Chilean uprising – the aestheticization and counter aestheticization of everyday life seems thus to be the fundamental challenge to rise group consciousness, and to (re)imagine forms of collectivism which emerge from the convergence of new and old social movements¹⁰.

The protests lasted months, to stop only in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the beginning of the lockdowns. Exactly one year after the historically massive demonstration of October 25, 2019, the Chilean people voted in favor, by a landslide, of a new constitution, rising thus hopes of the possibility of a new post-capitalist future for the country. From this new summit, not only our future begins to be seen from a different angle, but also our past.

[Abstract Capsule 01]

Thus, from the obscurity of dirt and anger, the invisible height of a new summit emerged. Unexpected for those bathing themselves in the remaining flames of their old hollow, it was for the forgotten ones the inevitable result of a too long but still silent outcry. And however, the magnificence drawn by this topological sudden landmark – whose strength appeared to some as the spectral memory of an erased past – was not one derived from any energy; not from the naked energy of thousands bodies pushing against the enormity of a omnipresent block of cold granite; not from the multiplied energy of a gigantic lever machine which, propelled by the combustion of secret natural particles, were able to open a dark, deep crack through that block for those bodies. Atmospherically enough, this time – one which is not ours, nor theirs – its robustness lay in the dispersed yet underground multiplicity of small but persistent signals, in the invisible journey of tireless minute pulses that, from point to point, drew a relational living-network whose vastness outlined a different horizon. This new summit, therefore, did not emerge from a lonely forgotten force, but it was sculpted, if not weaved, as a disparate mesh of relations.

Accumulated flow of symbols that do not stop writing themselves, this elevated topology cannot be seen as an isolated, self-contained event; its borders are in effect non-existent. The ascendant curve that – although still hidden – traces the not so old murmurs announcing its emergence, must be understood as a previous flux which, within itself, contained the struggles that would set this horizon free. Hence, it is a crest born from the tides of opposing forces that learned to recognize their weaknesses and vigor themselves, that learned to find and execute their own exploits. A previous flux that, enmeshed in infrastructural landscapes, in

¹⁰ Cf. Fisher, “Acid Communism (Unfinished Introduction)”, in *K-Punk*, 753-770.

technological fields, taught itself – perhaps it rediscovered – to become while being flux; to become through becoming. In the invisible limits that point out the future of this last summit on the other hand, in the still unknown line describing its posterity, we only see the probabilities of uncertain intervals, since no summit exists without being flanked by roughed gorges, flat valleys, or rather deep canyons. No illusion should blur the understanding that reaching a peak implies a lessening; one which, however, can be – it must be – unfolded in the same manner the height that precedes it was conquered; by a flux of entangled, opposing forces that learned to absorb each other in order to remain stable. Moving forward, then, requires moving backwards – it means going with the cycle, learning to become with it to make it descend as the soft projection of the plateau, to remain away from any hollow.

After the hollow: 2000s Cynicism

How is it possible that the major laboratory of global neoliberalism could overcome this threshold of chaos and uncertainty? Around mid 2019, world leaders were confident that Santiago would be the right place to celebrate the agreement, in the context of the APEC¹¹ summit, that would put an end to the trade war between China and the US. It was also expected that Donald Trump would sign the accord against the emission of greenhouse gases at the COP25¹² to be held in the same city. Such confidence was based on the image of Chile projected by president Sebastián Piñera: a “true oasis” in the middle of a troubled continent. But the Chilean oasis was only a mirage.

Only a year earlier, film director Sebastián Lelio was celebrating the first Oscar awarded to a Chilean fiction feature film for his work *A Fantastic Woman*¹³. The film told the story of Marina, a young transgender woman whose romance with an older man would be interrupted by death, by impossibility. For the media, this award was the symbol of yet another triumph of the Chilean neoliberal model; one that film critics and scholars had years before called “the triumph of intimacy.”¹⁴ A neoliberal spectacle eclipsed by the audiovisual register of those fragments of Chilean reality that the media prefer to keep at the margins. Similarly, based on the trace of a button embedded in a rail that Pinochet's secret police agents used to keep the corpses of dissidents at the bottom of the sea, Patricio Guzmán's *The Pearl Button*¹⁵ revealed how the depths of the ocean are the repository of a non-human memory where the sins of the model are inscribed.

¹¹ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

¹² United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

¹³ Sebastian Lelio, *A Fantastic Woman*. 2017. Fabula. Chile. 82 min.

¹⁴ See Ascanio Cavallo and Gonzalo Maza, *El novísimo cine chileno* (Santiago: Uqbar Editores, 2010).

¹⁵ Patricio Guzmán, *Pearl Button*. 2015. Chile. Atacama Productions / Valdivia Film. Chile. 82 min.

During its premiere at the 2015 Berlinale, its director warned the audience of an uncomfortable truth: “Chile is a myth.”¹⁶ The systematic marginalization of suffering in the symbolic economy of the neoliberal model, made Chile an amnesiac oasis that consumed the lives of its people in a perpetual present. In Guzmán's opinion: “countries without memory have no energy.”¹⁷

Since Kracauer gave us his studies, we know that the images produced by cinema are an index of people's anxieties, and that they remain in a state of latency¹⁸. The long winter that preceded the Chilean spring is based on the cynical conscience of those who knew perfectly well the conditions of their situation, but prefer not to think about it. That is why those who dwell in the hollow of the neoliberal nightmare only invert Marx's formula, imagining that they do not “really believe” in the model, while they continue to act accordingly, from their own critical distance¹⁹. Perhaps the critical space of cinema has been the most recent territory in the conquest of the utopia instated by Friedman, but also the last. If the collapse of 2019 has a historical significance, it can only be read as the end of the symbolic efficacy of a critical apparatus submerged in a deep melancholy, but lacking in force. Like a hostage in love with his captor, the melancholy of cinema is the symptom of a psychological disposition governed by negation. Whoever insists on it must interrogate themselves on the coordinates of the object that causes their desire and assume the loss, for the only possible duel today is that of the cynicism that dwells in the hollow of history.

Marx once said that history occurs twice: “first as tragedy and then as farce”²⁰. The tragedy of the conditions that gave rise to the socialist realism of the mid-1960s could only become a realism promoted by capitalism insofar as it was farce, once it was understood what is that that is repeated as “novelty”. In such an aesthetic farce we can assume that which defines its “novelty” is actually a difference, rather than a repetition of the same. Ultimately, the fluctuations of history are only assumed as a defined object when the subject who perceives it reduces its variety, inhibits its contingency, and cools down the temperament of those who preceded them.

¹⁶ Benedict McKenna, “Pearl Button: An interview with director Patricio Guzmán,” last modified February 12, 2015, <https://www.theupcoming.co.uk/2015/02/12/pearl-button-an-interview-with-director-patricio-guzman>.

¹⁷ Eva Usi, “Un botón de nácar’ que condensa la historia de Chile,” last modified February 8, 2015, <https://www.dw.com/es/un-bot%C3%B3n-de-n%C3%A1car-que-condensa-la-historia-de-chile/a-18243955>.

¹⁸ See Sigfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

¹⁹ See Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London/New York: Verso, 2009).

²⁰ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in David Pernbach (ed) *Surveys From Exile* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 146.

[Abstract Capsule 02]

The ultimate profundity of this hollow, however, does not exist without the forces drawn by the descendent and ascendent lines that condition its finitude. Its being derives from decline, just as its decay obeys to emergence. It is, therefore, the product of a cycle of struggling forces that by grappling give way to a perpetual process of oscillation; a harmonic rhythm governed by the *mathesis* structuring the variables that condition its motion. Hence, its thin sinuous existence is only the illusion – if not the delusion – of a single trajectory, of an inevitable trajectory, because its true being is a conglomerate of forces, constants, variables, factors, products; its true being is the multitude.

Finitude. The filthy sewers of the hollow are always constrained by the insurmountable prevalence of finitude; one which operates through the inevitability of the multitude.

The multitude will always manifest itself, either as a negative figure, or as an imaginary one – $i = \sqrt{-1}$. Register of the negativity, it turns out that it is these figures that announce the end of any inner process, the imminent variation in the rhythm of motion. Imaginary space of negation, it thus constitutes the aesthetic space that through secret codes, in a cryptographic mode, anticipates against the grain what will perish, and what will emerge. Always a field of apparent cynicism, usually judged as the embodiment of resistance, it operates in effect as a capacitor; dam of transformation, it is consequently instrumental – if not pivotal – for the forces to find their way out of the hollow, to experience their own imaginary reality in the path towards the summit coronating the horizon.

An old too actual summit: 1971-1973

In June 1971 the government of the recently elected Chilean president, Salvador Allende, contacted the British consultant and founder of the so-called cybernetics of management, Stafford Beer, regarding the new phase the country's economy was initiating. Allende was the first socialist-marxist head of state ever elected in the country – perhaps anywhere – and his political program considered unfolding a series of radically progressive policies aiming to put an end to the deep social stratification and inequalities ruling Chile since colonial times. One of these policies consisted in nationalizing critical means of production – i.e., core industries – which until then were owned and managed by private capitals; either from the local oligarchy, or from international corporations such as those from Britain and the United States – the mining sector had been until the 1960s a symbol of this international capitalization. Moreover,

this process of nationalization was strongly related to the local workers movement which – at the center of Allende’s political basis, organized in socialist or communist unions – many times accelerated or expanded these actions by taking over and reorganizing the factories themselves. And even though the government would send professional *interventors* to the factories in order to assure their proper technical management, workers participation indeed reached unprecedented levels, with union representatives walking regularly from the factory-floors to the administration offices, taking part of the executive board’s planning and decisions²¹.

Thus, the government had to find ways to deal with the exponentially increased complexity of the local economy – that is, the incorporation of several new industries to the administration of the state, as well as of experimental modes of governance within them –, and the critical necessity of making the whole nationalized economy thoroughly productive. This was the only way, the government asserted, to make the Chilean democratic socialism sustainable²². It is in this context, and under these circumstances, that a small group of engineers at the State Agency of Development – who were already familiar with Beer’s work – asked the cybernetician for advice. But enthusiastically, the British consultant requested to actively participate in this endeavor, and thus, after some arrangements, he traveled to Santiago in November 1971 where, as its scientific director, he declared project Cybersyn active.

The project was designed to transform all the nationalized factories into a system of data transmission, for which Chile’s available telex network and teletype equipment was used. The data would be thus sent on a daily basis to a computational processing center, for which a statistical analysis software was programmed in order to forecast the behaviors of all the levels of economic recursion – i.e., factory, company, industrial branch, whole economy. Having this information available every day, Beer argued, was essential to understand in *real time*²³ the increasingly complex dynamism of modern industrial economies – economies that were in turn interconnected in a global scale²⁴. But this broad process of technological networking had also local instantiations at every factory-floor, where a modeling of the industrial operations aimed to encode every phase and every procedure of *the factory machine* – of which workers could be seen, from a Simondonian point of view, as a constitutive part²⁵. In other words, this whole

²¹ See Peter Winn, “Living the Chilean Revolution: Industrial Workers in Allende’s Chile,” *Radical History Review* 124 (January 2016): 55-66. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-3159960>

²² See Eden Medina, *Cybernetic Revolutionaries: Technology and Politics in Allende’s Chile* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 43-68.

²³ See Sebastian Vehlken, “Environment for Decision – Die Medialität einer kybernetischen Staatsregierung. Eine medienwissenschaftliche Untersuchung des Projekts Cybersyn in Chile 1971-73” (Master’s thesis, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2004), 40-43.

²⁴ See Stafford Beer, *Brain of the Firm*, 2nd edition (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1994[1981]), 248-249.

²⁵ See Simondon, “The regulative function of culture in the relation between man and the world of technical objects. Current problems,” in *On the Modes of Existence ...*, 135.

technological endeavor would have amounted, at least in theory, to a cybernetic *capillarity* of power/knowledge where the forces would have flowed not only top-down, but also bottom-up²⁶.

However, the actual implementation showed – as it seems to be the case with most cybernetic projects – that the original design would have had weak links: at the macro level no mechanisms to absorb external and artificially directed *perturbations* – against Allende’s government in general, and project Cybersyn in particular – were considered, and at the micro level the modeling of the factories’ procedures was not able to properly incorporate the incremental workers’ expectations for participation. Probably because of this – and again as cybernetics tends to do – the project sought modes of adaptation and survival: conceptually devised in March 1972 but only tested as a partial and local prototype by mid 1973, *The People Project*²⁷ – also known as project *Cyberfolk*²⁸ – was conceived as a complement to project Cybersyn that would grant the people, workers included, greater control in the aforementioned cybernetic *capillarity*. A device would be attached to every household’s TV set, allowing people to react to any broadcasted state message – i.e., presidential speeches, news reports on the executive or congress plans, etc. – by inputting positive or negative signals into the network through an electronic knob.

Dramatically enough, none of this was implemented. In September 1973, only a couple of months after the first experiments were conducted, a bloody coup d’état overthrew Allende’s government, murdered thousands, erased all apparent vestige of a cybernetic socialism, and implemented a neoliberal tyranny. Yet, the reverberations of this project were not entirely silenced – they could not have been entirely silenced. They speak to us today; they tell about a machinic potential that can be embraced – one that could multiply the collective.

[The M_Machine]

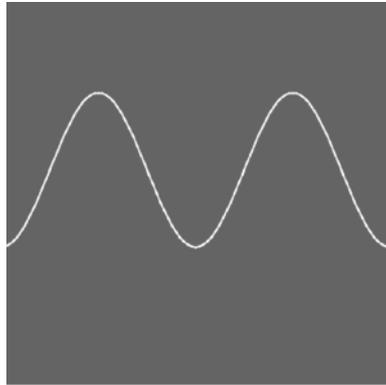
A summit, a hollow, a summit; from the present to its past, from the past to its present. These three historical events – insofar as they are eventualizations of an ongoing echo – outline the rhythm of a broader motion which, just as it can be discerned as always previous, it can also be recognized as permanently potential – as the reverberation of a still unknown, but yet predictable, future. Thus, beneath its always technological materializations, underneath its always aesthetic modes of materialization, we hear the secret

²⁶ Cf. Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh,” in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 201.

²⁷ See Beer, *Brain of the Firm*, 278-283.

²⁸ See Medina, *Cybernetic Revolutionaries*, 88-92.

murmur of a cyclical machine; of an abstract cyclical machine which hides in its logical structures the commandments of its operationality.



**** An Average M_Machine ****

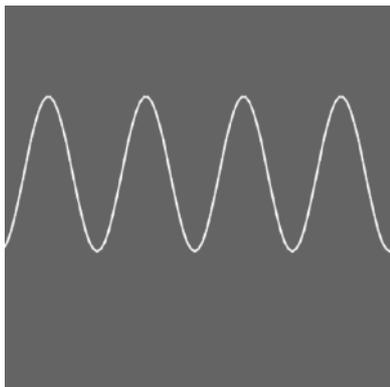
```
// Set of variables
float a = 0.0;
float durability = 50.0; // The length of cycles
float intensity = 80.0; // The strength of the cycles
float inc = TWO_PI/durability;
float initial_x = -5;
float initial_y = 175;
float x, y; // Ongoing struggling forces in time

// M_Machine Setup
void setup() {
  size(400, 400);
  background(100);
  for (int i=-5; i<400; i=i+4) { // The loop
    x = i;
    y = 175 + cos(a) * intensity;
    strokeWeight(2);
    stroke(255);
    line(initial_x, initial_y, x, y);
    initial_x = x;
    initial_y = y;
    a = a + inc;
  }
}
```

From the entrails of its abstractness, therefore, the machinic condition of these cycles can be modeled; it can be encoded²⁹, it can begin to be known. Its variables and constants emerge as visible,

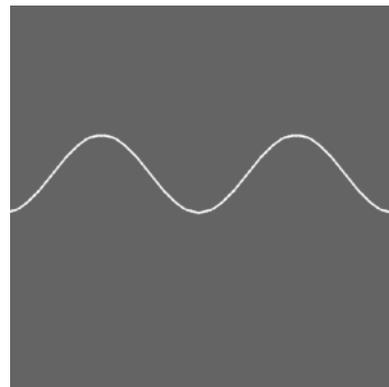
²⁹ The code above has been written in Processing; a Java dialect.

its configuration becomes apparent, the loop that commands the harmonies of its motion is finally intelligible - we can penetrate it, become with it. Thus, we learn that we can potentially act on the variability of this machine; that is, on the durability and intensity of its cycles - we could make it to become other, but only if we become others through it. Put differently, a journey to this abstract space is required; one that demands not only to embrace such abstractness, but to disembody in order to abstract ourselves in the process. Understanding ourselves as a multitude that pre-individuates in this technological abstractness will lead to recognize ourselves, consequently, as the collectivity shaping the durability and intensity that in turn outline the journey. The horizontality of the gray plane, insofar as a time t , can become schizophrenically duplicative (t_1) if we reduce the durability alone, or strangely mild (t_2) if we lessen the intensity only. And yet, hypothetical procedures will remain just nonsense if the strategies do not accept the also schizophrenic fact that after abstraction, a new, and renewed, phase of hard materialization must be confronted. There lies the true challenge of every contemporary machinic strategy; in recognizing that the symbolic abstractness of the cyclical machine underlying our time becomes real through infrastructural networks, through concrete technological operations. It is from there that all pre-individual states must be overcome in order to individuate as a collective multiplicity; as the plurality shaping the real - schizophrenically or mildly - by learning to become a symbolic abstractness in a real, always in-process, operation.



t_1

** A Schizophrenic M_Machine **



t_2

** A Mild M_Machine **

Chile's social uprising from October 2019, and project Cybersyn in the 1970s are two instantiations of this. Eventualizations that

allow us to see that these processes - in their abstraction, in their subsequent materialization - are tantamount to, or emerge as, economic networks of power/knowledge relations. On the one hand, one could speculate that the former, by unfolding a broad attack on the public transportation infrastructure of the country's capital, not only signaled the exploit - the weak link - of probably every overpopulated and fragilely cohesive Latin American society, but it crystallized an acceleration that immediately derived into a schizophrenic reaction of the underlying machine (t_1): subway stations and buses on fire, military troops on the streets, protesters occupying public spaces, clashes between the people and those wearing uniforms, unprecedented political reforms. On the other hand, the latter case may have attempted to unfold a more nuanced strategy which, by using technologies of telecommunication and data processing, would have catalyzed the multiple and many times struggling forces emerging from the workers' unions and professional groups within the recently nationalized factories, injecting them into a broad network - encoded as data - to potentially generate milder cycles of resistance (t_2) - a scenario that, as we know, did not take place because an external signal, in the form of an internationally backed coup d'état, destroyed such strategy.

In any case, however, we see these two cases as summits of an average M_Machine; as high spots of social self-consciousness that allows the collective to unfold strategies to conquer its own stability. Their differences, moreover, might be explained by paying attention to the profundity that separates them. There, the emergent aesthetic cynicism we have pointed out, in itself a technology of contention, may have constituted a capacitance; that is to say, a reservoir of power/knowledge relations that became so stressed, that would hence bring about equally stressed series of oscillations.

It is strange how the past speaks to us: it may be the dictums of cybernetics, and, more precisely, those unfolded through project Cybersyn in the 1970s, what could show us now the technological modes to regulate the oscillations we are currently living through; those we must overcome in order to conquer our stability as a collective - our stability as a collective machine.

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