

Medium Theory; or, “The War of the Worlds” at Regular Intervals

by Maria José A. de Abreu

This article rethinks media and mediation in light of medium theory. It does so through the analysis of the alarming potential brought by the reenactment of Orson Welles’s “The War of the Worlds” radio broadcast in Portugal in 1958. Locally branded as “A Invasão dos Marcianos” (“The Invasion of the Martians”), the article associates the alarming nature of the broadcast with the structure of fear of an attack from communist Russia in the context of Cold War paranoia under the right-wing regime of Salazar as well as in light of the impending revelation of the third secret of Fátima. Conceiving medium theory as a methodology with which to see through into the elements that constitute the medium as such, this article proposes to reconceptualize media as a distinctive space-time zone, a rhythmic middle, through which to call up associated temporalities of governance in Portugal (and elsewhere) over the course of the twentieth century.

If not . . . , the lady spoke . . . (Sister Lúcia dos Santos, *Memórias da Irmã Lúcia*)

On the evening of June 25, 1958, the popular Portuguese radio program *Orquestras Ligeiras* (*Light Orchestras*) broadcast by Rádio Renascença: Emissora Católica Portuguesa was suddenly interrupted for a breaking news announcement. The reason for the interruption was related to incoming reports of an attack on Earth from the sky. The fast-flowing tune of “China Boogie” by composer Helmut Zacharias was stopped by radio broadcaster Matos da Maia, whose tone of voice expressed the gravity of the situation:

We now interrupt our program of *Light Orchestras* to report special news sent by the International Press Agency. According to the agency, at the hour of 7:45 p.m., Dr. Jorge da Fonseca of the Meteorological Observatory Center in Braga reported to the agency that he had observed various explosions of incandescent gas coming from the planet Mars at regular intervals. The spectroscopy machine indicated that the nature of the gas was hydrogen and that it was moving toward Earth at a tremendous velocity. Professor Dr. Manuel Franco of the Observatory at Cascais has confirmed the observations provided by Dr. Jorge da Fonseca. He described the phenomenon as a flash of blue light shot by a gun. . . . To continue in the genre of light orchestras we now present the Orchestra of Dick Jakobs playing “Petticoats of Portugal.”¹

Maria José A. de Abreu is Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University (452 Schermerhorn Extension, 1220 Amsterdam Avenue, New York 10027, USA [md3605@columbia.edu]). This paper was submitted 25 VII 17, accepted 22 III 18, and electronically published 28 VIII 19.

You will hear in such words echoes of the “War of the Worlds” radio drama, which was narrated by Orson Welles at New York’s Mercury Theater as a Halloween episode of *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* on October 30, 1938. As in the United States, the staging of the play 20 years later in Portugal is reported to have caused a wave of panic to sweep across the country. Like the original, the Portuguese adaptation, “A Invasão dos Marcianos” (“The Invasion of the Martians”), was broadcast by interspersing happy-go-lucky music with emerging news bulletins about the unfolding attack. Reports from the press and oral testimonies narrated the impact of the news, telling of people screaming and hurrying to find shelter at the sound of explosions, of police sirens, and above all, of hearing an intensifying humming noise, which, according to a reporter at the site of the attack, came out of a dark black cylinder. The mysterious cylinder was shrouded in smoke, said playwright and broadcaster Matos da Maia, and it felt as though someone—or something—was about to emerge from it. It was, however, after a series of anomalous intermissions, when the studios of Rádio Renascença completely lost contact with the live correspondent reporting from Praia das Conchas of Carcavelos—the site close to Lisbon where “the thing” (*a coisa*) had landed—with the voice of Matos da Maia shouting “alô! alô!” that terror engulfed the country. The broadcast unleashed a frantic search for safe spaces inside private homes but mostly in public spaces such as town halls, churches, football clubs, and local cafés. Lights were turned off and curtains closed; men gathered around the radio; women prayed in murmurs to the Virgin Mary, repeating ad infinitum, “Hail Mary, Hail Mary!”

1. For a fragment of the original broadcast and a radio interview with Matos da Maia, see https://www.rtp.pt/antena1/memorias/jose-matos-maia-1931-2005_9601.

In her analysis of how the broadcasting of Welles's "The War of the Worlds" became an object of study in the United States, sociologist Jackie Orr emphasizes that, depending on whether one looks at the contents of the plot line or at its formal properties, one develops a different account of the power of suggestion to elicit panic. As she notes in *Panic Diaries* (Orr 2006), what is frequently at stake in scientific assessments of mass panic is the problem of credibility provided by either the verisimilitude of the play or the susceptibility of the audiences in question to accept what they are hearing as true. Orr casts the "War of the Worlds" broadcast against the backdrop of the outbreak of World War II but also as the beginning of a longer project of panic, emotional management, and the militarization of American society. Following leads opened up by Orr and recently taken up in the work of Joseph Masco (2014) on the militarization of thought, in what follows I set out to analyze the "Invasão dos Marcianos" broadcast in Portugal 1958 as a way to render explicit a particular structure of governance characteristic of the Salazar years. As in Masco's (2005, 2012, 2014) work, this structure of governance maintains itself through the temporal medium of threat, an "if" horizon trained to regulate power and events (see also Caduff 2015; Collier and Lakoff 2008; Cooper 2006; de Abreu 2013*b*; Faubion 2001; Lutz 2001).

Much like in the rest of the world, in Portugal the 1950s were marked by the communist threat, Cold War espionage, rivalry between nations over nuclear power, and the conquest of outer space. At that time, Salazar's dictatorial rules were tightening, due to emerging diplomatic conflicts connected to the wars for independence in India and Africa and the amplification of spying paranoia and political resistance at home. Apart from these circumstances, there was one other factor that was hovering in Portugal's atmosphere in 1958: the impending third secret of Fátima. Occurring in 1917, the year of the Bolshevik Revolution, the revelations of the Virgin Mary in the town of Fátima to three shepherd children concerning the future of the world remained in a state of suspension due to the yet-to-be-announced third secret. The suspension of knowledge about the third secret—and thus of the future of the world—had its originating structure in the first two secrets. The first two secrets reveal just enough to potentialize the very "if" conditions they lay out and on which the third secret depends: there are wars and chastisements awaiting the world. If Russia converts to the Holy Heart of Mary, there will be peace. If not. . . . The prophecies laid the groundwork for Salazar's future regime, with its cult of the Virgin of Fátima, to explore imminence as an operational mode of governance. It introduced a particular kind of sovereignty, particular in that the locus of exception in relation to which the sovereign was defined (Schmitt 1988) refers not to a position exteriority—a transcendental locus—but to a threshold formed by the regularity of a rhythm. As I show, this threshold is the space of the "if" that emerges out of that rhythm. As prime minister of Portugal for 36 years (1932–1968), Salazar's prophetic "if" drew its power to govern not from commanding but rather, as Agamben (1995) notes, because "it presuppose[d] the

conditions of its reference and ma[de] that reference regular" (26).

While there is no doubt that the alarming potential of the "Invasão" radio program drew efficacy from the historical conditions at the time of its broadcasting, in this essay I show how its affective power derived from its revival of the "if" rule as the very condition of its reference. In other words, in addition to looking at the historical conditions that determined the broadcast's impact, I explore how the broadcast allowed for the rehearsing of the conditions themselves.² Such emphasis on the broadcast's reenactment of the conditions—rather than on their contextual nature—involves a certain theatricality not of the medium but *as* medium. This is the core idea in Samuel Weber's (2004) definition of the medium *as* theatrical. As Weber (2004) notes, "When an event or series of events *takes place* without reducing the place it [has] 'taken' to a purely neutral site, then that place reveals itself to be a 'stage,' and those events become theatrical *happenings* [my emphasis]" (7). What is distinctive about this theatricality of the medium/*as* medium, moreover, is the temporal logic of a gerundive as made apparent by the cited word "happenings," an ongoing rhythm, that is at once repetitive—a refrain one returns to at regular intervals—and open-ended.

From another end, W. J. T. Mitchell (2004, 2012) has suggested that we theorize medium not as a tool with which to see through and capture but rather as a seeing through that defines the medium as such. Medium, as Mitchell conceived it, is not an object but a filtering space, a self-referential system that does not so much capture an atmosphere as perform it, and in doing so renders visible the economy of its operations. Such a call on "medium theory" does not lack momentum. Given the proliferation of media studies across the humanities and the social sciences, to talk of the medium is oftentimes to partake in a vast cohort of descriptive analytics and contexts. And yet, as Mitchell (2004) puts it, "media theory is not medium theory" (332–333). Medium as "seeing through" disavows any sense of instrumentalism. To be sure, Marshall McLuhan's (1994 [1964]) dictum "the medium is the message" also constitutes a critique to instrumental uses of media. By proposing that we not reduce messages to their referential contents but rather attend in equal

2. The "if" structure in question is, in turn, itself historically and culturally conditioned. My thanks to Jim Siegel for highlighting how this is the question. Portuguese representations of historiography tend to separate history from literature on the basis that whereas the former tells about "what happened," the latter thrives on the question, "what could have happened if?" The question of the "if" is deeply embedded in the logics of the empire. While Portuguese historiography would push the rise of the "if" well up to 1974, the point in time when the Portuguese exit colonial Africa, modernist poet Fernando Pessoa, as the great articulator of the Portuguese "if," traces it to the British Ultimatum of 1890 and, even earlier, to the battle of Ksar-El-Kebir in 1578 that ended in the loss of the Portuguese King Sebastian and autonomy to the Spanish ruling of Philip II until restoration in 1640. There is a wealth of Portuguese written bibliography on this topic. For an assessment of how these historical events link to the rise of the "if" in Pessoa, see de Abreu (2013*a*).

part to the material qualities of mediation, McLuhan allows for the medium itself to be made explicit in the act of communication. Explicit as it may become, however, the medium *as* message in McLuhan's sense still occupies a position of anteriority in mediation that does not quite overcome the instrumentalism it prides itself as having overcome. It is still about the technological apparatus that is prior to an event of communication, regardless of whether the latter includes referential meaning. My aim with this essay, then, is to highlight a form of medium theory—including media theory—that renders what in the middle of things produces time and space: a concept of history. As much as we speak of mediation in regard to media, I suggest, media is not enough in the medium, a fact that, McLuhan notwithstanding, undermines the desire to move beyond representational readings of mediation.

My aim in this essay is to highlight the stakes of medium theory by overcoming the disjuncture between media and medium. At issue is how to bring media more into the political space of the medium.³ As I demonstrate, doing so implies exposing the operational solidarities between media, the middle, and the midst or environment with which it is associated (Simondon 1958). Focusing on the “Invasão” broadcast, I proceed by highlighting two key aspects of it. The first concerns the rhythm of the broadcast. Much like explosions of incandescent gas falling from the sky, the broadcast, too, moves at “regular intervals”: it sways between song and breaking news, between ordinary and extraordinary, between “light orchestras” and shock, and finally, between news of an attack and disclaimers that it is all fake. By virtue of the play's rhythmic sway, a middle space or threshold is generated. Second, and thanks to the rhythmic oscillation between poles, the intervallic space carved out from the pendulum motion between flow and interruption, true and false, norm and exception exposes a temporal mode that finds its hallmark in the subjunctive: the “if.” This “if” voice, as we will see, expresses and attaches the broadcast event of 1958 to a larger atmosphere of expectation that has long shaped future scenarios in Portugal. Thus, through one media event medium, the middle and the midst enter a relational continuum without one being able to precede the other (de Abreu 2018). Medium theory is the politics that ensue from questioning how such a relational continuum is constituted.

My aim with this essay is thus to contribute to devolving medium theory to the study of media. What is characteristic of this middle-medium-midst, ultimately, is a certain indis-

3. I owe many of my thoughts on the medium to the work of Samuel Weber and his simultaneously rigorous and creative readings of Walter Benjamin's work in general and his writings on mediality in particular, what Benjamin called *Mittelbarkeit* (communicability) to designate “im-partability,” or the power of a medium to divide and distribute, to impart. As Weber writes, in Benjamin's sense “the communicability of the medium, its ability to communicate is predicated on its ability to ‘come-going,’ to arrive-leaving, to withdraw.” (See Weber 2001:51, 2004, 2008.) In this article, the structure of “come-going” will reappear later as founding the rhythmic nature of the “Invasão” broadcast.

tinctiveness. This relates to the problematic of whether what is being transmitted is true or false, if a decision between these is at all possible, or whether the “if” possibility—possibility as “if”—is all there is to keep us tuned into its frequency at regular intervals.

The Revelations

Picture a green pasture named Cova da Íria in the region of Fátima, situated 120 km outside Lisbon. This is the spot where, in 1917, three children between 7 and 10 years of age spend long hours guarding their sheep. Pressured to divide their time between prayer and play, the children devise a shorter, streamlined version of praying the rosary by simply saying “Hail Mary” 10 times. One day, while in prayer, an angel appears to them announcing the imminent appearance of the Virgin Mary. On May 13, while the children are again reciting the rosary, the Virgin Mary reappears and announces a series of future appearances to happen on the 13th of every month, at the same hour, in the same tree, throughout the year, during which she will communicate visions and messages about the future of the world. On July 13, on a branch of a tree, the Virgin of Fátima tells the children the three-part secret and describes the punishments mankind will endure. The first part of the secret was a vision of hell (dos Santos 2007). The second part consisted of instructions for how to prevent the fires of hell from taking over the world. The condition for the hell described in the first secret not to be visited upon Earth was that Russia convert to the Holy Heart of Mary. According to Sister Lúcia, the Virgin Mary communicated the second secret as follows:

*If the world responds to my requests, Russia will convert and have peace. If not, it will spread its errors throughout the world, promoting wars and the persecution of the Church. The good will be martyred, the Holy Father will endure much suffering. Several nations will be annihilated, but finally my immaculate heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate to me Russia and Russia will be converted, and the world will be granted a time of peace.*⁴ (dos Santos 2007:127)

As Lúcia prescribed, the third part of the secret was to remain untold until the moment when the world would be ready for its contents. She had said in her communications that the three parts would form an integrated whole concerning the destiny of the world and that everything would depend on the fulfillment of the contents of the second part of the secret, which centered on the conversion of Russia to the “Holy Immaculate Heart of Mary.” Occurring at regular intervals, the apparitions brought devotees, priests, scientists, and journalists from all parts of Portugal and the world to the site. Disbelieved by others in the village, including the priest and the mayor, during

4. My emphasis and translation. The contents of the secrets has been cited time and again in multiple formats, from pamphlets to film, from personal memoirs to academic works.

the apparitions the children asked the Virgin to perform a miracle that everybody could see. She agreed and informed them that on October 13, 1917, they would be able to witness a miracle from the skies on the spot where she had first appeared to them. That day around noon, a crowd of 70,000 people witnessed the “dance of the sun.” One account among the hundreds collected by Vatican authorities and archived in the Santuário de Fátima describes it thusly:

The crowd knelt, past the rain, looked at the sun and saw that it turned different colors, approaching and turning like a fire wheel. Three times the crowd saw this phenomenon. The whole crowd bathed in tears cried out for Our Lady.⁵ (Santuário de Fátima 2013:107–108)

The miracle of the dance of the sun had the power to effect, on a mass scale, what the mystics referred to as “persuasion through light.” Priests, politicians, scientists, spirit mediums, poets, journalists, and lay people all explored the miracle as projects of self-extension, channeling light and shadow according to their own pacts with the heavens.⁶ Yet precisely due to the pouring out of opinions, reports, and versions around the “miracle of the sun,” the entire event became shaded by uncertainty and vagueness, aptly tying it to the subjunctive mood—the “if”—of the second secret. As spoken by the Virgin, the destiny of the world was filed in the qualified folds of the second secret as it targeted the heart of humans on Earth. While pointing to an absolute referent—Russia—and the command that it convert, the conditional intrinsic to the “if” of the second secret left the future dangling in the radical, potential space of a future-to-come. Pivoting on an “if,” the second secret both revealed and postponed its contents. It both included and excluded, disclosed and suspended. Indeed, it suspended in disclosing. Professed in the grammatical enfolding of a will-have-been, the first two secrets structured the grounds for speculative scenarios for what might otherwise happen with regard to the third secret. A regime of possibility was thus introduced.

By the 1950s, not only had Russia not converted to Christianity but the horrific outcomes of the antireligious campaigns during the Great Terror cluttered Portuguese media as part of Salazar’s own anticommunist campaign. Fearful himself of the threat he saw in communism, Salazar co-opted the powers discharged by the subjunctive underscoring of Fátima’s second secret—the “if,” as in, “if Russia converts” or “if the world responds”—thus marking how temporality would be experienced and organized throughout his long authoritarian regime (1928–1974). Salazar’s dictatorial regime, in other words, persisted and developed on the precarious foundations

5. My translation. Testimony by Vieira de Rosa (interviewed by the vicar of Mor).

6. See Lepselter (2016) for an ethnographic account on how the heavens as sites of apparitions and the extraterrestrial connects to earthly experiences and the logics of empire, as well as with the powers of the fantastic and the imaginary.

of the “if” sanctioned by Marian prophecy. He took advantage of the refractory powers that this “if” had on the nature of time itself.⁷ Time became regimented around the logic of possibility. Hinging on suspension—on the “if” time—the present was robbed of its *presentness*. The present was neither this nor that but *both* this *and* that: a disjunction that brought the present to an edge and made it tremble; a potentialized present, therefore, and for Salazar, a productive contradiction for legitimating governance.

Meanwhile, Portugal’s neutrality during World War II attracted spies and refugees from both sides of the conflict. Its geographical position as Europe’s last frontier turned it into a harbor, a limbo zone of endless waiting, for those fleeing Nazi Europe, embarking to farther lands such as the United States or Palestine. During the war years, Lisbon became the hub through which the wires of espionage and counterespionage ran, the place where lines of communication between Allied and Axis powers were intercepted, filtered, and relayed. The capital’s unassuming cosmopolitanism turned it into an inspiring site for plots and science-fiction tales drenched in conspiracy and conjectural theories. It was in the Lisbon of the war period that Ian Fleming wrote his first 007 book, *Casino Royale*, a reference to the carmine-decorated Casino do Estoril. Himself a commander, like his creation James Bond, Fleming had been sent to Lisbon to track down a Yugoslav spy named Popov, also known as “Tricycle” because of the running suspicions that he was a triple agent (but also because he often appeared in the company of three women). Behind thick curtains of rumor, smoke, and wit lurked untamed and melancholic fears that Portugal was to be invaded at any moment. In his *Lettre à un otage*, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, who was himself a refugee in Lisbon, wrote:

When in December 1940 I went through Portugal to go to the United States, Lisbon appeared to me as a kind of clear and sad paradise. There was a lot of imminent invasion conversation, and Portugal was clinging to the illusion of happiness. Lisbon, which had organized the most beautiful exhibition in the world, smiled wanly pale, like mothers who have no news of a son absent in the war and effect to save him by having confidence, “My son is still alive because I smile. . . . Look how happy I am, calm and well lit. . . .” Lisbon in celebration defied Europe. “Is there anyone who can target me, if I do not even try to hide? I’m so vulnerable!”⁸ (Saint-Exupéry 1943:5–6)

In a climate saturated with imminence, the best way of hiding was to expose one’s vulnerability. It was a way of curbing fear by internalizing its structure, of neutralizing it from within. This involved the cultivation of an attitude of indifference, an enthusiastic resignation, if you will, to whatever fate might be lurking around the corner—a “who can target me, if I do

7. On the relation between Marian cults and spatiotemporal articulations of the sacred, see the work of Heo (2012, 2013); see also de la Cruz (2009).

8. My translation from the French.

not even try to hide?”—that paradoxically had the power to objectify imminence. Perhaps by objectifying that which in itself lacked firm contours, imminence could be targeted? Living memory tells today how the threat of invasion was so dominant and pervasive that some preferred the invasion to happen at once, so that they could actually deal with it. But the invasion never came. Through artful diplomacy with both Allied and Axis powers, Salazar kept blurring the border between friend and foe, securing in this way Portugal’s neutrality throughout the conflict. Salazar simultaneously provided the Lajes air bases in the Azores for American planes and invited Hitler to spend holidays in the idyllic region of Sintra. He shared his anti-Russian feelings with the United States, not because of support for the latter’s capitalist principles but because of his fascism that he nonetheless—as with Franco in Spain—liked to distinguish from that of Hitler and Mussolini.

All the time, like a subterranean switchboard, the “if” of Fátima and the impending concretization of its capability persisted. Neutrality had been attained at the costs of bringing that “if” into focus. Bringing the “if” into focus meant, paradoxically, highlighting its intrinsic vagueness, its not yet fully formed threshold of threat. The vaguer the threat, the higher its capacity to produce derivatives of threat, to morph and transit to other domains of the political.

And so when the war ended, thousands of women and men came from across the country to Fátima, many on foot, many having taken vows of silence, to offer prayers and gemstones to the Virgin Mary, whose mantle, as Salazar liked to put it, had shielded Portugal from the conflict that had decimated the rest of the world. A golden crown carved with diamonds, sapphires, rubies, amethysts, and other precious and semiprecious stones was made. This crown was then placed on the head of the Virgin Mary statue in the chapel built in her name in Fátima in 1923 at the site of the apparitions. But behind the rays and gleam of the precious stones, the empty slot in the center of the crown would decades later reveal its sinister link to the much-awaited third secret, in the form of an erring but murdering pellet: the bullet that on May 13, the anniversary of the apparitions in 1917, targeted the body of Pope John Paul II.

The Day After

Here in Portugal, in a report directly transmitted from the place of operations, one spoke of infernal devices, one could hear the terrible creaking and jingling of the metals, the blast of deflagrations. . . . The quiet Portuguese, still stuffed from dinner and willing to spend a no less quiet evening, turned on the telephony. What was that? Radio Renascença was transmitting the Apocalypse, with scenes of terror and monstrous visions? No, it was much worse. The Portuguese Catholic broadcaster conveyed a terrible misfortune that was happening here among us, with strange and thunderous sounds and the voices of men seized by emotion. . . . “The revolution broke up!” said one voice. “No, it is a most terrible thing, the end of the World, the end of everything and everyone.” (*Diário de Lisboa* 1958)

The day after, as this excerpt shows, newspapers reported the furor, human pain, and material damage as a result of the “news” of a Martian attack. The impact of the broadcast, both material and emotional, toured the four cardinal winds of the country, and people were busy retelling what they had heard and seen to persuade themselves that life was back to normal. When, during the radio play, Matos da Maia had lost contact with the reporter on the ground, “the thing” could be any place, consuming in flames whatever it met in its path. The sounds of bells tolling in the distance was the only worldly sign—but that too was ambiguously worldly. Even so, when it came to actual witnessing, there were no traces of actual fires on the site about which people were speaking. Fire and destruction had happened only in someone else’s village or city. Those in the north would say that fainting, death by choking on a fish bone, and heart attacks had happened in the south (*lá p’ra baixo*) of the country; many even specified the misfortunes that unfolded around the region of Carcavelos, where “the thing” had reportedly landed. In turn, those in the south relayed rumors of catastrophic outcomes in the north (*lá p’ra cima*), where an asteroid had reportedly fallen, causing tremendous panic among the *nortenhos*. Everything proceeded as though the rumors about the landing of the Martians in Portugal allowed old divisions between the aristocratic Catholic north and more liberal south to reemerge and absorb new colors, even new deliriums. Enlightened journalism invested in demystifying the panic, pointing to the artifices of the radio play. It emphasized that panic ensued because of how “ingenious fiction” (“let’s admit it!” one newspaper put it), in form as well as in content, made it look like “a real attack” was taking place: the on-site live testimonies, the careful montage of the voices of scientists and real governors, of policemen and supplicant mothers, footsteps running down the stairs, disturbed digestions, the sounds of explosions and sirens, *ai!* the bells and the prayers (*Diário Popular* 1958). Other analysts referred to the susceptibility of the common folk, the *vulgata*, the kind who listen to an entertaining program such as *Orquestras Ligeiras*, to falling prey to illogical fear, in great part due to the illiteracy and poor education that beset the nation (*O Primeiro de Janeiro* 1958). In turn, those in the north derided the chosen sight for the landing of “the thing,” surely a response by either the aliens or the Virgin Mary (it doesn’t matter which) to those godless Jacobins and republicans concentrated in the southern region.

The daily *Diário de Lisboa* published a fragment of a conversation among listeners:

- It’s the end of the world!
- It is not! The announcer is saying it’s fiction!
- It is not so. It cannot be fantasy. It is the end of the world!

People panicked, even as the microphone announced:

- This is all fake! (*Diário de Lisboa* 1958)

The *possibility* that it was true that an attack was unfolding blurred the lines between thought, feeling, and action. What mattered was that that possibility was true; indeed, being possible made it true. The skeptical were among the first to

call the authorities, affected by the credulity of the commoner they were so invested in disqualifying. But when the authorities called the studios to ask whether the news of an attack on Earth were true, Maia would renounce the game by disclosing that it was “all fictional,” and to illustrate that life went on as usual, he proceeded to play a new tune from his veteran corpus of light orchestras. As a result, throughout the broadcast, Maia not only interrupted the music that he played for “breaking news,” as he would have done before, but also interrupted the interruptions several times throughout the program to make disclaimers that this is all “just a joke.” The renowned newspaper *Diário Popular*, for example, states that Maia, “in order to calm down the listeners of RR [Radio Renascença], started every 10 minutes, to announce that it was all only [*se tratava apenas*] an imagined story without a foundation in truth [*sem fundo de verdade*]” (*Diário Popular* 1958). Yet this playful redoubling of interruptions at regular intervals in which Maia—some say indulged, others say demonstrated a genuine concern—brought a rhythm to the scene that eluded or exceeded all the content entering people’s ears. This had to do with how swaying between true and false caused the present to split and sway. This rhythmic swaying between poles itself became generative to the extent that what came to matter was no longer whether the message was true or false but how it carried the possibility of being rendered in terms of that which was not—how, in short, each thing became simultaneously its opposite.

Oscillation thus became the message, a radiophonic “if” the medium’s own refrain. By intercalating news bulletins with light orchestras, maximum alert with life-as-usual musical tunes, Maia created a smudge between true and false. The wavering between worlds that he induced at regular intervals between now “it is true” and then “it is not” swelled outward into the question, “What *if* it’s true?” The stroboscopic relations between ordinary hour and extraordinary event, between real-time transmission and confessions of fabrication, between claims to journalism and disclaimers as entertainment attuned the broadcast to the vague but (because it was vague) potential of imagining that *it is possible that it is true*.

It follows that “A Invasão dos Marcianos” did not trigger panic simply because people were already afraid. The background environment was more than simply a cause—just as the radio play was more than simply a trigger—propelling an event. To say that it was a cause or a trigger would result in separating cause from outcomes and cast the radio play as the mediating link between the two. What happened was a much more complex operation, which unsettled the logic of anteriority associated with causal thinking. Causes for panic, endemic fear, and the verisimilitude of the play all codetermined and intensified the ongoing process of transmission. The adjacency between origin and process affected the linear logic of cause and effect via the event itself such that—much like the mother who smiles, and in smiling affirms and in affirming confirms that her son is alive—one listens to the play to secure a future, *if* subjunctively (!). One acts on the effect to have it as a cause of being so. Put differently, thanks to a recursivity that tilts the chronology

between cause and effect, no linear relation between before and after is possible, only the rhythmic frenzy of an effect running *after* its cause. Far from simply communicating an event, therefore, radio itself was an event, in proximate immediacy with the content that it transmitted (de la Cruz 2009). Becoming one with its background atmosphere, the broadcast both obliterated and confounded what was *in* and what was *on* the air.

Michel Foucault (2008) has examined the political implications involved in the operational annexation of an event to its background. As the emerging field of anthropology of security has shown, the environmentalization of governance as an extension of biopolitics involves the migration of techniques from one area of governmental intervention to another (Caduff 2014; Lakoff 2007, 2008; Massumi 2009; Samimian-Darash 2013). In *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (published in 1958, the same year “Invasão” was broadcast in Portugal), Gilbert Simondon closely investigates the processes by which synthetic groupings of two or more fields of intervention enter a relation of annexation to produce what he calls a form of “individuation.” Simondon (1958) writes about the strategic annexation by a technical object of a particularly charged atmosphere or milieu (4–5). He describes this process by highlighting the operative solidarity given by a technical object’s openness to an environment. For Simondon, a technical ensemble is not something constituted from the interaction of discrete technological units. Rather, what makes it “technical” is the object’s own programmatic sensitivity to outside information, what he describes as “the technical object’s associated milieu” (1958).⁹ Rather than conceiving of “environment” as an external background dimension within which messages operate, Simondon is interested in how a certain environment partakes in the qualitative transformation of messages.¹⁰

9. As Simondon (1958) writes: “The real perfecting of machines, which we can say raises the level of technicality, has nothing to do with an increase in automatism but, on the contrary, relates to the fact that the functioning of the machine conceals a certain margin of indetermination. It is such a margin that allows for the machine’s sensitivity to outside information. . . . A purely automatic machine completely closed in on itself in a predetermined operation could only give summary results. The machine with superior technicality is an open machine, and the ensemble of open machines assumes man as permanent organizer and as a living interpreter of the inter-relationships of machines” (4).

10. The emphasis on the continuity between medium and background has its analytical tradition in media ecology thinking, in which authors such as Gilbert Simondon, Neil Postman, and especially Marshall McLuhan were pivotal. “What happens,” media ecologist Neil Postman (1998) asks, “if we place a drop of red dye into a beaker of clear water? Do we have clear water plus a spot of red dye? Obviously not. We have a new coloration to every molecule of water” (4). My concern here lies less in “understanding media” than in comprehending a mode of governance that manages to regulate, and thereby produce, a relational continuum between the properties of anxiously charged atmosphere and a radio transmission.

Following Simondon's relational topology, the "Invasão" broadcast was not only about tuning one's ear or the receiver's antenna to a radio transmission. The experience of hearing, the structure of the play, and the background environment were not independent elements. Rather, saying that a relation between play and milieu was established is to highlight the continuum across difference, the structural relay, which produced not just a circuit of transmission but the transmission of a circuit: a circulation between worlds. The operational attachment of a message to an environment, for Simondon, reduces content to a structure of pattern and rhythm. The systematic interruptions of the "Invasão," the back and forth between news reporting and entertainment, between sound and noise, between persuasive special effects and disclaimers of veracity not only downplayed referential content for the benefit of rhythm but also allowed for the annexation of the medium to an environment characterized by deferred expectation. Tuning into the play was therefore tantamount to reconnecting with the medium of subjunctive time itself. It was to enter the rift opened up by the second secret, to dwell in the enigmatic (in)determination of an "if."

Three Fs, Perhaps Four

Rádio Renascença was—and continues to be—the official channel of the Portuguese Catholic Church. Together with Emissora Nacional, it was the chief conduit used by Portugal's dictator in his official pronouncements to the country and its colonies. Founded in 1937 by Monsignor Manuel Lopez da Cruz, during the time that the philosophy of the Estado Novo (New State),¹¹ the state philosophy of Salazar's dictatorial regime, was being implemented and financially supported by Catholics, Renascença was closely surveyed by the regime's censors. For a long time, there were suspicions of infiltrations by communist espionage into the developing radio sector, of forged alliances between journalism and resistance groups operating against Salazar's military and imperialist regime in places such as Algeria and Russia. Such suspicions were founded on rifting rumors about the existence of clandestine radio stations operating from such "extraterritorial places" as the colonies. António Ferro, Salazar's right arm, personal counselor, and minister of communication, was of the conviction that subversive cryptic messages were to be found in the places one would least suspect, even (or especially) those under the regime's own muzzle, that resistance would be hidden in plain sight, skillfully encrypted within the very structures on which it relied. With that in mind, Salazar's proverbial three Fs—Fátima, fado, and football—as the regime's prime pillars came under close scrutiny as alleys for machinations. There was talk of communist priests passing information to the KGB, of subterranean alleys to fado taverns, of the great fado diva Amália Rodrigues's in-

11. Estado Novo, or the Second Republic, was the corporatist, authoritarian regime with a strong Catholic orientation installed in and developed by António de Oliveira Salazar in 1933, which envisioned Portugal's territories, the African and Asian possessions, as extensions of the nation.

volvement in acts of espionage, of umpires who communicated intelligence with their whistle from the grass field. There was suspicion of double talk, and of double hearing too, which introduced a fourth F—notably, the F for false (*falso*).

Official implementation of the censorship of public programs and the press had been introduced in 1927, practically a year after the military coup that brought Salazar to power as finance minister. In the 1950s, however, censorship became tighter through close surveillance of fado lyrics, the assessment of voices and venues for performances under the Inspeção Geral de Teatros (General Inspection of Theaters) organ, appointed by the Ministry of Public Instruction. Poets, composers, and singers began to explore the subterfuges of song and lyrics toward revolutionary ends.¹² The lightest of orchestras, such as those whose tunes Maia played on an ordinary day, sparked off suspicion. *Casas de fado* (fado houses), as they were called by the regime, were created and supervised in strategic neighborhoods across the country. They were subject to licensing, attaining authorship rights, mandatory previews of shows and repertoires, and regulation of professional titles, contracts, and even tours. Once a musical genre of improvisation, the discography and radio recordings as well as live rehearsals in designated venues became formulaically regimented and thematically restricted to such themes as nostalgia, jealousy, and *saudades*,¹³ the very themes that backed the regime and for that very reason became all the more hospitable to encryption and exploitation toward revolutionary ends.

Carlos Aurélio, a veteran radio announcer who assisted Matos da Maia in the montage of "A Invasão dos Marcianos" and who, though now retired, still works for Radio Renascença, conveyed to me how in the 1950s, artists explored the very means by which Salazar secured power, notably, his skillful ability to exert power from within the ordinary.¹⁴ It was this skill, Aurélio underscored, that allowed Salazar to stay in power so long. Since Salazar was able to embed sovereignty into the ordinary, he became suspicious that others might do the same; this is how the themes that best sanctioned the regime became potentially suspect, how the fado houses or the radio waves worked as potential passageways for conspiracy, how a song such as "Petticoats of Portugal," the theme that opened the program of *Orquestras Ligeiras* on the evening of the broadcast, might also

12. Such is the case with composers and singers such as Zeca Afonso, the legendary author of the revolutionary "Grândola, Vila Morena," the song that best encapsulates the spirit of the Carnation Revolution of April 25, 1974, and other songwriters such as Adriano Correia de Oliveira.

13. On May 13, 2017, with the visit of Pope Francis to Fátima to commemorate the centenary of the apparitions in 1917, there was a lot of talk in Portugal about the reconsumption of the three Fs: Fátima, the European football championships, and Portugal's victory in the Eurovision Song Contest, which, though won with a fado, has been praised for how it captured the Portuguese soul in song.

14. I met with Carlos Aurélio at the current studios of Radio Renascença in Lisbon on March 20, 2017.

possibly contain, in its gleeful melodic folds, a master plot for an attack on the world. That is, the very means that ought to conserve and perpetuate the regime were also haunted by the possibility of their contradiction/opposite. Conjecture, suspicion, and uncertainty became one with the air itself, and this gave Portugal a constant sense of existing on the edge, not only geographically, as was obviously the case, but temporally as well.

During World War II, the sense of existing at the cusp (that threshold where things at once are and are not) was operative, as the country lived through the constant hazard of an invasion. The fact that the war never swept into Portugal was a source of reprieve. Soon enough, however, it also deepened the anguish that if the war had not come, it was only because something even more terrible was imminent. So people were asked to stay tuned, to turn the “perhaps” into the great legislator of events, to relate to the possible as the wholly other. As signs of resistance to the regime became more defined, minister Ferro applied tougher censorship measures to the press, the cinema industry, and television, the latter launched in Portugal in 1957. At home, the regime felt anathematized by an internationally coordinated communist front with underground ties to the colonies in Africa and by the advances of the freedom fighters seeking to free India from Portuguese rule. Like Welles in the 1930s regarding the United States, Maia was aware of the metaphor of invasion by “superior intelligence” as a common trope explored by the regime to refer to the colonial wars unfolding in India and Africa. There were rumors about the existence of clandestine radio stations outside the territorial domain of Portuguese rule being operated by Portuguese antiregime militants. Those rumors materialized when clandestine radio stations such as Radio Voz da Liberdade (and the Frente Patriota de Libertação Nacional movement), created in 1962 and based in Algiers, or Radio Portugal Livre, created in 1963 and based in Romania, played key roles in coordinating the armed forces in Portugal toward independence as an outcome of the Revolution of 1974. Adding to the ambience of distrust in the country were such factors (real or imagined) as the increase in Cold War tensions between the world powers, the launching of Sputnik 1 by the Soviet Union, the creation of the hydrogen bomb, and the revival of apocalyptic literature, itself inspired by a nineteenth-century fascination with “news from Mars” and visions of the future.

In the late 1950s, times were propitious for panic-ridden reactions much like those that Welles induced before World War II. Yet, as indicated already, more was at stake than historical context as causative of panic. As the next section elucidates, the affective value of the broadcast hinged on it reenacting the “if” environment that structured relations in Portugal between experience and expectation.

Shot by a Gun

When Maia interrupted his popular radio program on the evening of 1958 to report that “a flash of blue light shot by a

gun” was “moving toward Earth at a tremendous velocity,” many Portuguese associated such imagery with the impending consummation of the third secret of Fátima. At a high pitch, though adhering to the protocols of live reporting, the voice described how “something was crawling out of the shadow,” how “the eyes were green and black like a serpent,” and how “the V-shaped mouth was covered in saliva dripping from rimless lips that seemed to quiver and pulsate.” According to the widow of a former Radio Renascença reporter, the question many asked her deceased husband on the night of the broadcast was whether the creatures coming out of the metal cylinder spoke Russian. Were they red and incandescent, like souls in hell? Intentionally or not, the reporter’s description of the sight matched Lúcia’s descriptions of the vision of hell and the devil relating in the first secret. Yet, far from having converted to Christianity, Russia’s ideology of communism was at its peak in the 1950s and 1960s. The two descriptions absorbed each other’s fabulating and frightful aspects, conjuring up an atmosphere where Marian and Martian were en route as in a dream, as variations of the same phenomenon.

Later in the program, to calm down listeners, as requested by the Guarda Nacional Republicana, which telephoned the studios, Maia started interrupting the “news” about the invasion every 10 minutes to say that “people should go back home,” that “it was all a joke.” But panic, or so the story goes, was rampant by that time. Radio Renascença was no longer the prime disseminator of facts. The source was all over the place, blustering its way and changing along course. As Aurélio explained, “Each person heard what he or she wanted to hear!” (*Cada um ouvia o que queria!*). He was in the studios with Maia, wondering what to do next. Some would call the Polícia de Segurança Pública, others the hospital and local pharmacies. Others called relatives. Others contacted the heads of the dioceses of Leiria to ask if what was happening had anything to do with the secret only Lúcia knew. Others contacted *Redação do Diário de Notícias*. “*Tam, tam, tam,*” sounded Aurélio to denote the movement of the spreading of the news, while using his hands to conduct the pace. “The alarm was everywhere [*em todo o lado*],” he emphasized. “Radio Renascença would tell the afflicted who telephoned that it was just a play, that it was all fake—but people did not seem to believe our statements. Imagination was on fire. . . . Had listeners [*os ouvintes*] attended to the play at all,” he said, “they would have understood that nothing of that [*nada daquilo*] could be true.” Many facts recounted in the play were simply falsehoods. “One, Portugal had no Ministry of Interior Relations; two, there were no astronomical observatories in Braga or Cascais; three, facts that were being announced at 9 p.m. were actually taking place much later in time. Besides [*e tem mais!*]” he added, “the play by Orson Welles had been broadcast in the past, and many had heard what happened in America. But people were blinded by imagination or the expectation that something evil was going to happen. But it was not evil. It was just a prank [*uma brincadeira*]. So much was it a prank,” he added, “that the play written by Maia had passed the blue

pencil of censorship.¹⁵ It was only when it went on the air that the problems began.” Yet Aurélio knows, as Maia did, that there was a way to take advantage of the fog to turn the most conforming of gestures into signs of insurrection. It was the lingering sense that subversion could rise from the places one would least suspect that made the Catholic-financed Radio Renascença the best undercover hidden in hyperaudability.

To complicate matters, while most spatiotemporal references mentioned in the broadcast were made up, others did reflect or closely resonate with facts with which people were familiar. And that was confusing. For example, the region of Carcavelos, where “the thing” had landed, in actual reality formed a strategic location for purposes of defending the Tagus River from enemy ships. That is where the Portuguese minister of defense has his residence, as well as many diplomats and men in politics. Not to mention that from the nineteenth century onward, Carcavelos was an important location in the international telegraph network, providing crucial cable and wireless communication links with the British Empire and with the colonies. It was the outer edge of Portugal with technological contact to and from the outside world. But for the creative broadcaster, these bits and pieces of factual knowledge, when combined with fictional elements, are what could set ablaze an incandescent “if.” Confounding the border between fact and fiction not only became the mediatic event but also contributed to constituting the medium as such—and not just as an instrument through which to communicate but likewise as a staging through which to see an ongoing structure of expectation, itself torn by alternations between truth and fable. The medium mirrored its midst, its surroundings.

João Oliveira, a now-retired firefighter from Bombeiros Vila Nova de Gaia (from which location artillery had been heavily mobilized on the night of the broadcast) who was on call on that summer evening, contended in conversation with me that “what scared people was not that they were convinced that it was true, but that they could not be sure whether it was true or not. Only that it was maybe true!”¹⁶

Carolina Lopes, who in 1958 was working as a switchboard operator at the Hospital of Santo Antonio in Porto, described to me how someone called to ask about those wounded by the invasion. She continued, “I asked, ‘What invasion?’ I had just arrived to do the night shift, so I knew nothing about it. So I also started to call around to gather news about what was happening.” As she put it to me, “each new round of questions through my switchboard confirmed the thought that people were not saying something because it was true, but was truthful because people were saying it.”¹⁷

One-quarter of the way through the broadcast, agents of the Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado, the secret police

of the Portuguese state, stormed into the studios and arrested Matos da Maia. In the following days, this episode featured prominently in the tightly state-censored press and radio broadcasting networks. Minister of Communication Ferro condemned the episode as “pathetic insolence toward a nation that bears great pride in its ‘stability’ and ‘sobriety.’” Others rejoiced at his denunciation. But like a song that lingers in the air, even after it has been shut off, people went on asking, “What if it’s true?” The question constituted a questioning of the medium itself, of the conditions of possibility of radio as such (Hansen 2004; Hirschkind et al. 2017; Kittler 1999). Having reduced the message to the material affordances of the medium proper to produce fiction, to fictionalize “live broadcast,” to stage emergency and spontaneity, the panic that unfolded was not a reaction to an emerging unknown. Rather, it was the revival of an old “structure of feeling,” as Raymond Williams (1977) famously terms it, delivered (quite literally) on a new frequency. It showed how alertness and emergency rely on a structure of habituation that, if properly modulated, can speak to encoded predispositions.

Divine Satellite

Reports of Marian apparitions after World War II were frequent across Europe. Testimonies from the autumn of 1949 speak of a series of visions by young girls in the forest on the edge of West Germany. As the Soviet Union showed signs of nuclear capability, people felt urged to ask the visionaries whether there would be an attack by the communists. Would the world come to an end? Would “the mantle of Mary” shelter them from nuclear apocalypse? Were the Russians coming?¹⁸ As several historians have pointed out, these postwar visions were inspired by the apparition of Fátima, which received papal recognition on May 13, 1946. Given the anti-Russian contents of the first two secrets—and Salazar’s own struggle against communism—Lúcia’s deposition that the third secret would be revealed only later in the century led to a proliferation of end-of-the-world scenarios where hell and communism were mirror images of each other. In June 1958, the time of the broadcast, the citizens of Portugal were still waiting to learn the contents of the third secret. Anti-Russian feeling throughout the Western world in the context of Cold War hype, Russia’s militant atheism, and the explicit prophetic targeting of the message from Fátima helped accommodate, however unconsciously, an imagined attack by Russia from the air. Devotees of Our Lady of Fátima prayed to the Virgin that she might spread her blue “mantle,” like a satellite, to shield them from an impending attack. The mass liturgy on Sundays had Fátima as a key protagonist in patrolling the nation.

15. The blue pencil, or *lápiz azul*, was the name given to the censors of the state during the Salazar era.

16. Conversation on April 15, 2017, in Estarreja, Portugal.

17. Conversation on April 22, 2017, in Aveiro, Portugal.

18. For an extensive exploration of the links between the apparitions of Fátima, the Cold War, and UFO phenomena, see Fernandes and d’Armada (2005, 2007).

Perhaps because the air was where people looked to ward off danger, radio worked as an extension of Fátima in shielding the nation from an imminent assault.

In Portugal, radio remained a popular medium among the populace, even as television was introduced in 1957. Salazar, too, used it as a favored medium in his announcements. Unlike Hitler and Mussolini, who enjoyed appearing in public and addressing the masses from pulpits of power, Salazar made very few public appearances. As Portuguese historian José Rebelo (1998) documents, Salazar explored the mediatic means that allowed him to cultivate a sense of ubiquity. Had he chosen to appear in public like his fellow totalitarians, he would have circumscribed his persona to a time and a place. By contrast, the exploration of voice through radio allowed Salazar to anchor power in the nonvisible and therefore be everywhere at once. Reproductions of his countenance, often in the company of an image of the Lady of Fátima or a crucifix, could be seen in public institutions across the country (Rebelo 1998:92). Salazar's discretion, bachelorhood, and frugally austere lifestyle added to his self-enhanced, godlike powers. Fátima and her three-part secret were often invoked in his proauthoritarian and anticommunist declarations. They allowed him to underscore his devotion to both Catholicism and totalitarianism, to refer to communists as "rationalist atheists" while associating atheism with the occult and the supernatural.

After the war, devotion to Our Lady of Fátima grew exponentially. As requested by the Lady of Fátima during one of her apparitions in 1917, Salazar ordered the construction of a sanctuary on the spot where she had appeared. Consecrated in 1953, the shrine was in Salazar's judgment a "divine satellite" that would defend the Christian world from external attack. The sanctuary would be an extension of Our Lady's "protecting mantle," which would block the many horrors to come. The pilgrimage to Fátima from all corners of Portugal, with the pilgrims often approaching the shrine kneeling and crawling, became an institutionalized practice of endurance through the idiom of sacrifice in honor of the regime's own enduring longevity.¹⁹ As the Lady of Fátima would offer protection to her people, so Salazar with his ascetic leanings would serve as the extension of his role as the guardian of the Portuguese on the nation and overseas.

19. Pilgrimages to Fátima still occur today, and the shrine is visited by millions throughout the year, but especially on the dates of May 13 and October 13, which are when the Virgin first appeared and when the miracle of the sun took place, respectively. While the cult of Fátima is inseparable from the Salazar regime, it does not mean that all devotees of the cult were supporters of Salazar, and moreover, the cult of Fátima nowadays cannot be associated with past expressions of loyalty to a ruler. For example, many soldiers who fought in the colonial wars and who supported the end of the regime came regularly to Fátima on pilgrimages in gratitude for having survived. Thanks to Jim Faubion for pressing me to clarify, by complicating, the historical motives of pilgrimages in the past and in the present.

Lúcia, the only of the children who survived, had long been under the scrutiny of the Holy See and the special protection of the bishop of Leiria. Despite her predictions that the third part of the secret would become known toward the end of the 1950s, its actual contents were revealed only in June 2000. Despite great skepticism within the Catholic Church, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger officially interpreted the failed assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II by Turkish Grey Wolves member Mehmet Ali Ağca on May 13, 1981, as the occluded contents of the third secret. To establish this fact, John Paul II bestowed upon Fátima's crown not a jewel but one of the four bullets that had entered his body, shot at regular intervals from Ağca's gun—the bullet extracted from his abdomen. The gifted bullet was then inserted in the central cavity of the Virgin's crown. It turns out that the space in the inner halo of the crown had exactly the same diameter as the fateful bullet. On the day of disclosure, thousands across the country turned on their televisions and radios seeking validity as to whether the consummation of the third secret was true. "Is it true?" asked a reporter from Radio Renascença of the cardinal of Fátima. "It's the truth we all have been waiting for," he responded.

Conclusion

In *The Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode (2000) suggests with regard to prophetic speech that one imagines the pendulum of truth and falsehood moving like the hands of a clock. In the oscillating movement between tick and tock, he explains, the first a "humble genesis," the latter "a feeble apocalypse," one must purge the interval of simple chronicity so as to allow a new sense of indeterminate potential to mark the experience of time. This sense of the indeterminate, Kermode explains, plays a structuring role in prophetic speech; it allows for the constant deferral of its referent. As the Fátima phenomenon (along with other millenarian sensibilities) shows, the calendrical nature of prophecy allows for, and even relies on, a complicit relation between error and errancy, failure and success.²⁰ Continuity thus happens through discontinuity. In doing so, however, it alters the nature of time itself (Koselleck 1985).

"When speech becomes prophetic," Blanchot (2002) writes, "it is not the future that is given but the present that is taken away" (79). This idea of an interruption that exiles one from the present is counterintuitive to the idea according to which interruption more intensively situates one in the present, as in

20. Modern liberal governance, we learn from Michel Foucault, aspires to share with apocalyptic thinking the possibility of having its predictions disconfirmed without them being discredited. From William Miller, in whose name the nineteenth-century American Christian Millerite movement was founded, apocalypticists learned from the Great Disappointment of 1843 that revelation, not mathematics or even interpretation, must be the engine behind the dictating of ends. (See Faubion 2001; Stewart and Harding 1999; Weber 1979.)

the shock of breaking news explored by contemporary media regimes. More often than not, though, interruption puts one on hold. Rather than given, as Blanchot puts it, the present becomes grounds for the rehearsal of speculative scenarios.

One would think that news reports and prophetic speech are diametrically opposed registers, that the former refers to what is happening now, the latter to what will happen in the future, the former to the realm of fact, the latter to utopia, the former to the mediation of immediacy, the latter to the immediacy of command. The former strikes a tick, the latter a tock. But news reporting and prophetic speech meet in the interval between those ends, again, not an interval in the sense of a time-space interregnum between two points—or two frequencies—but as the threshold where the notion of medium itself is constituted. In such an arrangement, one no longer addresses phenomena in time but instead analyzes what time itself does to phenomena (Rabinow 2008). Accordingly, the prophetic speech of breaking news tells not what is happening but how happening is haunted by that which we do not yet know. Breaking news is a waiting room.

The expanded middle generated out of the oscillations from tick to tock, as I have suggested, affects the border between worlds, between true and false. That, too, is the case today in the context of posttruth. Tales in the Trump era have encouraged a mode of thinking that fuels the fast traffic of our present-day politics and media. In such a war between worlds of real and worlds of fake, fact alone is not the clue. What is important is to have fact redefined in such a way as to include in its perception the possibility of becoming that which it is not, that which strives to distinguish itself from: the alternative facts. The challenge in the posttruth era might be one of recuperating the tools of validation to redefine anew what we mean by true or false as clear extremes between possibilities, rather than juxtaposed as an expression of possibility itself. But maybe before that happens we may linger a bit more with what Balibar (2003) calls “the middle of the political space” and find there the headless sovereign whom we would deprive of his tweeting “now-this-tomorrow-that” rhythmic dance. The era of reproduction of Trump’s tale might have made radio an obsolete technology in favor of more recent inventions, but by no means has it displaced—if anything, it has intensified—what I have tried to articulate here as medium. A medium that plays itself out in the process of doing so. Extremely in the middle, such a medium-sovereign might well be the latest reincarnation of the outlandish besetting Earth from the skies.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Cori Hayden, Charles Hirschkind, Joseph Masco, Emilio Spadola, James Siegel, Sam Weber, the audiences in Possibility Matters at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICI)–Berlin, and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions. Research was conducted while a fellow at the ICI-Berlin (2013–2016) and while at re:work (Humboldt University; 2015–2016). Special thanks to Brinkley Messick for

inciting me to write this piece and to Jim Faubion for his careful readings of an earlier draft and for his many wonderful suggestions. All shortcomings are mine.

Comments

Thomas J. Csordas

Department of Anthropology, University of California San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, California 92130, USA (tcsordas@ucsd.edu). 12 XI 18

It would already have been interesting to compare the difference between the 1958 Portuguese version of the radio play “The War of the Worlds” with the 1938 American version based on the different contexts: pre-War versus Cold War, democratic US government versus authoritarian Portuguese government, Catholic versus secular radio station, and so on. Only a few pages into the article, the “maybe not, but what if?” and the destabilizing temporal rhythm that characterized Salazar’s political ethos introduced intimations of the Trumpish rhetorical regime that currently holds sway over public life in the United States. False flags, the appropriation and semantic inversion of the term “fake news,” the artificial impartiality of “good people on both sides,” the idea that “I might tone it down, but I could tone it up,” the idea that “there’s no blame, there’s no anything,” and so on. As I read, I became preoccupied with whether de Abreu was going to acknowledge this elephant, and the tension was broken only in the final paragraph where the floodgates opened on the haunting repetition-become-truth, posttruth, alternative fact moment of the Trump presidency. In other words, I applaud the dramatic structure of this piece, enhancing it as food for critical thought even if addressed to a niche audience and not constituting a political act as concrete as voting. In the spirit of acknowledging the consequentiality of positionality, I must acknowledge that the article’s impact on me was in part due to thinking about it and writing this comment in the days leading up to and immediately following the US midterm elections of 2018. The Trumpish use of “imminence as an operational mode of governance” was vividly in evidence in his campaign-stumping invocation of a dangerous caravan of immigrants on the verge of breaching the nation’s borders.

On a conceptual or theoretical level, three themes are particularly worthy of highlighting in this piece: temporality, indeterminacy, and mediacy/immediacy. Temporality is folded through the text in the varying forms of imminence in the form of attack or epiphany, possibility (the “if”) and its danger, rhythm that is not soothing but destabilizing, prophecy and its elision of the present, and the inversion of cause and effect relations. I will make no comment other than to suggest a reading that follows the thread of temporality across the larger argument. Indeterminacy appears not only in the form of temporal ambiguity but consequentially in the way it can

be distinguished from indistinctness. The latter keeps things murky and keeps people wondering and is an essential element of authoritarian rhetoric, in this case as deployed by the dictator Salazar. Indeterminacy is a phenomenological feature of embodiment and perceptual being and is always open to a horizon and in that sense is inherently creative and liberating. Both terms appear in de Abreu's argument and constitute a significant theoretical polarity. Finally, the argument throws light on the problematic of mediacy/immediacy in problematizing a constellation of terms including medium, media, mediated. Whereas some discussions of media theory elide even the possibility of immediacy, de Abreu at least implicitly problematizes the relation. Her mention of W. J. T. Mitchell's idea of "seeing through" allows us the ability to bracket the medium *per se* rather than celebrating only McLuhan's insight that "the medium is the message." Her own earlier work on Catholic Charismatic television broadcasts in Brazil is a case in point of both the immediacy and the materiality of spiritual power emanating from a bounded broadcast medium. In sum, this paper is rich enough so that a variety of themes can fruitfully be teased out in ways that can contribute to our contemporary anthropological discourse.

Angie Heo

Divinity School, University of Chicago, Swift Hall, 1025 East 58th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637, USA (heo@uchicago.edu). 5 IX 18

In this article, Maria José A. de Abreu submits a breathtaking reflection on the temporality of the in-between, that is, on the wavering between worlds at war. The ethnographic setting is Portugal in 1958, when a radio broadcast reenacting Orson Welles's "The War of the Worlds" set off the nation's mad dash for survival, and to the telltale rhythm of happy-go-lucky orchestral music interspersed with apocalyptic news bulletins. It is from within this panic-inducing structure of rhythm, relay, and recursivity that de Abreu pierces past formal distinctions between fact and fake, martian and Marian, ecology and espionage. Allowing us to "see through" the medium, she identifies various zones of bipolarity to see how all these elements work in concert as oscillating variations on the same theme. De Abreu lingers on the indeterminacy of cause and effect in the chord of suspense, showing how the broadcast stages a problem of unknown origin and uncertain revolution. To my mind, the greatest contribution of her essay lies in its potential to unsettle the technical horizons of history and therefore of political critique.

The totalitarian atmosphere of Cold War Portugal, under António Salazar and the Catholic Church, quietly looms large throughout de Abreu's analysis. Here we see her essay's resonances with a classic question in postwar political thought: from what location can one levy a critique of totalitarian authority and millenarian catholicity? Rather than searching for an *a priori* outside of mediation, de Abreu persists from within, remaining inside the disquieting thick of middleness and un-

resolved anxieties. From her analytic vantage point, Portugal itself was a Cold War-specific medium, a nation of third-way Cold War "neutrality": as a result of not having chosen a side in "the war of the worlds," Portugal instead swings back and forth between them while accruing suspicion and suspense. This special media ecology provides a particular condition for the critique, not only of media theory but also of those political formations associated with dictatorship, colonialism, and Cold War hegemony. To be more precise, I ask here whether it provides a possibility for critique that cannot otherwise be generated from without the mediating structure of interruption, pendular motion, and alarm.

It is for this possibility toward an opening that I would like to invite de Abreu's thoughts on medium theory and its relationship to political critique. In its form and content, critique is widely conceived to be the exercise of reason, and following Enlightenment ideals of autonomy, as transcendental reason in particular. Historical time and temporal rhythm, as Reinhardt Koselleck famously argued, are the means for aligning crises of the present with an imagined future. Offering an alternative reading of Carl Schmitt (1988) on sovereignty, de Abreu decidedly departs from the locus of transcendental exteriority, rather turning to the threshold formed by the "regularity of a rhythm." Like Koselleck and Schmitt, de Abreu too explores how temporality mediates in times of absolutism, with the forces of terror, revolution, and emergency straining just beneath the surface. What critical work does her account of temporal mediation, its targets, and its effects achieve? What does mediumship enable us to see about Portuguese and world politics that we would otherwise not see (and thereby raise for critique)? How does the split and sway between poles matter for a nation that managed to keep out of the world's biggest wars, all the while raging to keep its colonies in Africa and Asia? To consider these questions, there are a couple directions in de Abreu's article that may provide a helpful beginning.

First, there is the relationship between the medium and politics. At one point in her essay, de Abreu explicitly distinguishes her approach from Marshall McLuhan's: "my concern here lies less in 'understanding media' than in comprehending a mode of governance that manages to regulate, and thereby produce, a relational continuum between the properties of anxiously charged atmosphere and a radio transmission." The outstanding question, it seems to me, is what this mode of governance has to do, less with mediumship, and more with the historical specificities of dictatorship and empire. Some tantalizing clues in the footnotes reach out to be tapped: "the question of the 'if' is deeply embedded in the logics of the empire"; *Estado Novo* was a regime with a "strong Catholic orientation" that envisioned its colonies as "extensions of the nation." The allusions here to the Cold War subjunctive and to Catholic materiality (and not McLuhan's) appear to serve as conceptual openings for a critique of empire and authoritarianism on nonliberal grounds. I am curious about what the form and content of de Abreu's critique is and what they say about the nature of political critique writ large.

Second, there is the relationship between the medium and history. On this note related to the first, de Abreu is clear that the mode of governance in her analysis is that of a *structure*: an “if” structure,” a “structure of pattern,” a “structure of fear,” a “structure of play,” a “structure of governance,” and an “old structure of feeling.” The medium under investigation is a structure, and for this reason, one may tune in to its frequency. And yet, as the polemical mantra goes, structures (and structuralism) are notoriously ahistorical. In what context and from what historical location can one tune in to the structures? Borrowing partially from the language of Pierre Bourdieu, de Abreu argues that alertness relies on a “structure of habituation” that can speak to “encoded predispositions” and then suggestively transitions from “The War of the Worlds” in Portugal in 1958 (or . . . was it New York in 1938?) to Our Lady of Fátima in 1917. In her essay’s conclusion, de Abreu also indicates broader implications for medium theory and zones of indistinction, transitioning to more current contexts of posttruth worlds beyond Portugal and Catholicism. Yes, indeed—which American reader cannot help but tune in to Rádio Renascença’s resonances with the latest theatrical rounds of “fake news,” Trump’s tweets, and Pence’s plans for a space force? These are structural analogs that ring relevance in apparently timeless ways. At the same time, they also strike up a need for other modes of analysis. What are the roles of history and historical experience in these repetitive structures of mediation? What is the difference between historicity and temporality here, and what does this difference advance toward a critique of facts, feeling, and fear?

Susan Lepselter

Department of Anthropology, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47405, USA (slepselt@indiana.edu). 28 XI 18

Maria José A. de Abreu’s breathtaking essay retheorizes mediation not only through the elegance of her argument but also by pulsing us repeatedly through the rhythmic effects of a Portuguese radio broadcast from 1958. “A Invasão dos Marcianos” (“The Invasion of the Martians”) reenacted Orson Welles’s earlier, panic-inducing “The War of the Worlds.” In the “subjunctive” zone created by the Portuguese broadcast, there are reverberations—the dread of Cold War Russian invasions; the temporal logics of a dictator; the promised third coming of a Marian apparition, the Virgin of Fátima. And from its first pages, de Abreu’s essay flickers with a prophetic sense of events that will come in our own time. She performs the anticipatory poetics she immerses us in, by implicitly evoking the Trump era throughout her essay and finally, explicitly conjuring it at the end.

As I sit to write about her essay, a *Washington Post* headline seems to jump at me from nowhere. Oscillating, I click. Adjacent to the open window of de Abreu’s essay, the headline reads “Nothing on this Page is Real.” (Not even that headline?) Falling in with the rhythm of the world summoned by de Abreu, the

Post story tacks between two figures. First is a prankster, who writes and circulates over-the-top fake news vilifying Democrats, stories he intends to be so ludicrously full of error that they should rattle Trump supporters into disbelief. From the get-go, he issues a disclaimer: this is just a joke. The second figure in the *Post* article is an elderly woman who resists the ironic register; she is a reader who believes, and finds imagined conservative community, in the ironical fake stories that flood her screen. She sees the world invaded in chaos and ruin. She comments online and is bombarded by the hoaxer’s fans: *that was fake!* But she still thinks the stories are real—and also, now, that liberals are insulting and attacking her for believing them.

The *Post* wants to show how these parodic stories of invasion pipe in more of, and intensify, the plagued air the reader already breathes. As they say in improv: yes, and. De Abreu moves us far beyond that analysis. She shows that “the prophetic speech of breaking news tells not what is happening but how happening is haunted by that which we do not yet know.” Here, too, a reader rides the oscillations—between fake and real, urgency and slackness, solidarity and insult, prophecy and disappointment, invasions and hesitations—that create what de Abreu calls the endless “if” to perform impending doom. Like the 2018 *Post* hoaxer, the 1958 Portuguese radio broadcaster professes that his show is just a joke and then a moment later continues the alarm. But “being possible made it true,” de Abreu observes. Crisis forms a regular beat with business as usual. “Oscillation,” she argues, “thus became the message, a radiophonic ‘if,’ the medium’s own refrain.”

The question here is not why some people believe “fake news.” Nor do we start with the idea of social panic set off by a medium (whether internet or radio). Nor do we pile all the weight of a gathering real onto the referents of a mediated message. Rather, de Abreu’s essay asks us to move beyond the referential into the poetic and performative, to enter a theatrical opening of reverberations and resonances from multiple sources. Shifting our ordinary sense of figure and ground, she argues that this threshold determines the very idea of a medium itself. Here the voice of a dictator (or of a leader with dictatorial ambition?) might use the pending weight of imminent military invasion to create a heavier atmosphere. Here is the secret from the Virgin who promised to return protecting an endangered Cold War world “like a satellite.” Portugal under Salazar was “a limbo zone of endless waiting,” and time itself in this zone “became regimented around the logic of possibility.” The Martian invasion allowed old conflicts to “absorb new colors.”

De Abreu repeatedly shifts us from referential meaning to the “rhythmic sway” of “regular intervals” between song and news, light opera and shock, warnings and disclaimers. The focus on rhythm calls to mind structures of anticipation and delayed fulfilment of harmonic resolutions in Western classical music (Meyer 1956)—and the rhythms of other, performative, embodied musical traditions that do not necessarily venerate deferred gratification as the goal of Weberian, Freudian subjectivities (Keil 1966). How might rhythm have worked

in the original American “War of the Worlds” radio drama? I went back to listen. Orson Welles intones H. G. Wells: “With infinite complacency, men went to and fro over this globe about their little affairs, serene in their assurance of their empire over matter.” The show then shifts to popular 1930s orchestral dance music. Here, as de Abreu observes in the Portuguese show, oscillating intervals create a sense of the medium itself. And more: the Welles/Wells warning about “infinite complacency” hangs suspended after the shift, staining the ordinary beat of the dance music that follows it, making that banal lightness sound both sinister and oblivious to the terrible change that is coming from the sky.

A rhythm emerges, too, in the performative and anticipatory quality of de Abreu’s text. “Lights were turned off and curtains closed; men gathered around the radio; women prayed in murmurs to the Virgin Mary, repeating ad infinitum, “Hail Mary, Hail Mary!” The Marian prayer for safety from Martians resonates with the secret of Fátima, the promise of return. I think of “the modernity of Marian apparitions” in the Philippines as explored by Deirdre de la Cruz (2015:8)—there too, in a remembered atmosphere of oscillations between what is said to be real or hoaxed miracles, endlessly repeating Marian images flash on Philippine television, creating another “if” in the sacred mass mediated copy.

For de Abreu, this is the theatrical space of the subjunctive, the drama of the threshold—the radical potential of the “if.” Victor Turner haunts her argument, in his own elaboration of the liminal threshold as a “subjunctive mood” versus the “indicative mood” of the ordinary. Turner’s (1979) liminal threshold is also “full of potency and potential” (466). For Turner, liminality is the deconstructed play of dominant formations, and “play’s the thing” (466). Turner did not ultimately regard liminality as simply a phase to be resolved in a rite of passage; in “metasocial” domains, he thought the “subjunctive mood” of the “threshold” could counter the quotidian in many realms. But rereading Turner, one feels the difference of how the liminal (and liminoid) revealed itself in a more optimistic time. De Abreu rivets me to the rhythms of emergency that have come to dominate the environment now. Look out the window: has there been another shooting? Who knows? The flag flies again at half-staff; yesterday it was full-staff, and we wait for it to rise again, then again, in anxious expectation, for the next lowering.

Stuart McLean

Department of Anthropology/Institute for Global Studies, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455, USA
(mclea070@umn.edu). 16 X 18

Once Upon a Time in the Middle . . .

Explosions issue from the surface of Mars, like a flash of blue light from a gun. A mysterious cylinder, shrouded in smoke, lands on the beach at Carcavelos, near Lisbon. The cylinder

opens and something begins to crawl out: green and black eyes like a serpent; a lipless, quivering mouth. . . .

But of course no one actually sees it. Matos da Maia’s 1958 radio play “A Invasão dos Marcianos” is not only a spoof but one transmitted via the sightless medium of radio, spoken words evoking for audiences an imaginative picture of things unseen. Similarly important is the temporal rhythm of intermittency and oscillation established by the broadcast: a series of what claim to be news bulletins describing the progress of a Martian invasion, interspersed with light orchestral tunes. Rather than a seamless narrative, the purported invasion is experienced by listeners as a succession of fragments and interruptions, conveying not least a sense of profound uncertainty as to the reality or otherwise of the events recounted.

Marshall McLuhan famously wrote that the medium is the message. Here the medium is also the middle, the in-between of differential spacing, not least between apparent truth and apparent falsehood, which is also the temporal interval of the subjunctive “if,” of a future that has been announced but has yet to arrive (McLuhan 1994 [1964]). This middle is an elusive thing, much harder to conceive of or articulate than what is imagined as traversing or lying to either side of it. Yet this middle is arguably to be found everywhere. The fabricated report of a Martian invasion took place in an environment already saturated by “if.” The subjunctive mode had previously been announced by events near the central Portuguese town of Fátima in the spring and summer of 1917, when three shepherd children reported witnessing a series of apparitions of the Virgin Mary, during which she imparted three prophecies concerning, first, impending wars and sufferings, second, the possibility of averting further suffering through the Soviet Union’s conversion to Marian devotion (a very big “if”), and finally, a third “secret,” the contents of which had yet to be disclosed. The third secret, the revelation of which was still pending in 1958, was not so much a foretelling of the future as a deferred foretelling, dissolving the present into a time of waiting. The years of the Second World War in Portugal were similarly defined by waiting. A small country on Europe’s western seaboard found itself caught paradoxically and precariously in the middle as it sought to maintain its neutrality in the face of a conflict that had engulfed much of the rest of the continent. At the same time, its capital, Lisbon, became a place of refuge for those fleeing from the war (many of them seeking embarkation across the Atlantic to a new life) and a focal point for spies working for both the Allied and the Axis powers (or in some cases both): a city of intrigues and rumors, overshadowed by the constant threat of invasion. As it turned out, the invasion never materialized, thanks in part to the deft diplomacy of António de Oliveira Salazar, prime minister of Portugal from 1932 to 1968. Salazar self-consciously sought to appropriate the mediatic middle as an instrument of authoritarian rule: endorsing the Virgin of Fátima as part of his signature ethos of conservative nationalism, Catholicism, and anticommunism; eschewing public appearances to cultivate the impression of invisible omnipresence through radio broadcasts; and exercising ever-tighter

control over the public sphere through increasingly stringent censorship. Yet these efforts to regulate the media environment were themselves productive of an excess that threatened to escape regulation, as paranoid suspicions flourished about communist priests and subversive messages encoded in fado lyrics and sports bulletins. Then (almost) in the middle of the century, in the midst of the Cold War polarization of Europe and the “if” of an ever-present nuclear threat, came Matos da Maia’s broadcast and the countrywide panic and uncertainty that it unleashed. What was happening? A Martian invasion? A Russian attack? The long-deferred third secret of Fátima? Even the presenter’s efforts to tell audiences that it was all make-believe proved to be of no avail, not least because the disavowals recapitulated the oscillatory rhythms of the initial broadcast: an announcement, followed by a musical interlude, followed by an announcement . . . the medium had usurped the message!

The events of June 25, 1958, can be understood, among other things, as an instance of the powers and perils of what Bergson, and later Deleuze, called *fabulation*: the making of fictions sufficiently powerful and intense as to intervene in and reshape reality (Bergson 1977 [1932]; Deleuze 1989 [1985]). The very possibility of such an undertaking suggests that fiction and reality are not as starkly counterposed as some of us sometimes like to believe and that the distinction between reality and fiction may itself be the greatest fiction of all. Perhaps mediatic between spaces such as that of the “Invasão dos Marcianos” broadcast have a privileged role in reminding us of this by unleashing a torrent of world-making (and unmaking) potentialities that are only ever partially amenable to political capture. What lessons then might be learned from the war of the worlds in our self-described contemporary moment of “posttruth” politics? I would suggest that daring rather than caution is called for. It is worth noting that many of today’s champions of “alternative facts” remain themselves indebted to the conventional outward forms of truth, the self-proclaimed alternative being no less dogmatically asserted—and indeed often considerably more so—than what it seeks to displace. Perhaps our times demand—as perhaps do all times—a politics that is prepared to embrace experimentation and invention as a broadening rather than a narrowing of horizons, through the collaborative making of more capacious worlds. As events in mid-twentieth-century Portugal remind us, such a process must inevitably begin in the middle.

Kathleen Stewart

Department of Anthropology, University of Texas, 1 University Station C3200, Austin, Texas 78712, USA (kstewart@austin.utexas.edu). 12 IX 18

Medium as Milieu

I learned in this article to think of potential, or the “if,” as unsettling in a sometimes unwanted way, not a simple utopia. The excess of the undead object of anthropological analysis

or everyday attention can be too much. Hence all the anxiety of the analytically or lived mess or directionality of things.

Here to say that present is an unfolding or the self is a becoming spurred by the noise of its mixed-ontological atmosphere and environs means subject-object-world relations are already heightened even without the drama of event. An oscillation generates uncontrollably, maybe without warning it swells into something awful. Becoming is too much even, or especially, if it’s yours. The world as such motivates the dream of happy endings where nothing ever happens again, the master-planned new house that’s move-in ready and won’t, if all goes well, have any historicity at all, at least for the foreseeable future, or, say, maybe 10 years. The specter of “me time” arises as a figure of quiet reprieve devoid of all pressure. Stillness beckons from the beyond of the moving medium of ongoing life. Law and order or sheer escape promise to stop the wavering between worlds welling up in an atmosphere. Life itself, we learn, is not just a circuit of transmission but a transmission of a circuit. Forces come back around—an old structure of feeling delivered on a new frequency, or something sedimented or accrued gets underscored.

The present, as we see it here, is a living medium of being and thought, in the same way that color or a sound wave is a medium for art—both its means of expression and its point of pragmatic-material-noumenal interest, or even obsession. The present, we learn, becomes grounds for the rehearsal of speculative scenarios. Happening is haunted by not knowing what could happen. We learn that the very effort to keep up with what’s happening suspends us, that breaking news is a waiting room, that media don’t just reflect conditions but rehearse them, carry them out theatrically.

This piece thickens and darkens the view of the animate world.

To think of the medium itself is not to underscore the tired mantra that “everything is mediated” but rather to replace that distant gesture with the worldly thinking of a rough, mixed-use, not necessarily positive, vivid pragmatics (Stengers, Massumi, and Manning 2009). Life in media is a social-aesthetic-material-affective suspension that animates and initiates. This is medium as a milieu, an atmosphere with qualities, an imperative demanding a response, an objective, a pooling up that can overflow its bounds, a track on which to somehow venture out.

Thinking about the medium in this way is what Isabelle Stengers calls thinking from the middle (Stengers, Massumi, and Manning 2009) and Graham Harman (2008, 2011, 2012) calls the robust or weird realism of a life deobjectified, deliteralized, decomposed into a play of energetic surfaces and force fields, qualities, and remainders. Donna Haraway (2016) goads us to stay here, to stay with the trouble.

A medium is the kind of anthropological object capable of loosening the heavy presumptions of a proper and automatic relationship between thinking subject, concept, and world. A birdsong triggers a sense of being. A mood is a world-producing presence beyond the subjective. Trump is the outlandish swelling grotesquely out of a medium oscillating unsteadily between true and false, horror and promise.

Reply

Phasmid Tactics

In an influential essay on mimicry written in the 1930s, Roger Callois (2003) writes about the phasmid—a tropical insect that resembles the environment it inhabits by taking on the form of leaves or twigs—as emblematic of a kind of subject. What is distinctive about the phasmid, according to Callois, is its functional intermediate state. As an insect that stands on the very twigs that grant it its invisibility and feeds on these same leaves, the phasmid exists between being itself and its environment: it eats its own milieu and becomes it. This mimicry-acquired, intermediate state is reflected in the very anatomical constitution of the phasmid, an insect with no head or tail; what is more, within its ecosystem, animal and plant become coextensive with one another, rendering indistinct the relation between figure and ground, between animal and milieu. It is this lack of distinction that Callois sets out to explore, writing about a particular form of dissolution of the subject in reaction to his own political time, that of prewar Europe.

A similar concern with the political powers of nondistinction is at the core of what I am getting at in “Medium Theory.” Much like the phasmid eats its own environment to acquire the state of a structural intermediateness, so Matos da Maia’s 1958 radio play “A Invasão dos Marcianos” attunes its indefinite being to a larger background, one that is animated and potentialized (as I write about in my essay) by the subjunctive “if.” This “if,” as the phasmidic space where Marian prophecy and Martian invasion meet and confound, is what in turn allows me to, as Angie Heo rightly puts it in her comment, “[remain] inside the disquieting thick of middleness and unresolved anxieties” that saturate the atmosphere of the Cold War period in Portugal. And just as the phasmid is the copy that eats its model to render itself as medium in its corporeal entirety, so Matos da Maia secrets onto his mimicked radio broadcast the affective, ecological, and eschatological legacies of the Orson Welles radio play “The War of the Worlds,” first broadcast in America in 1938. What Maia does, as Welles did before him, is explore the indeterminacy of imminence, the sense that something is about to happen, as a way of intensifying the back-and-forth rhythm of an oscillating pendulum between opposite poles (true/fake; ordinary/interruption; Martian/Marian)—this, in turn, exciting fear, panic, expectation. Importantly, fear and panic are not simply affective modalities that get to be transmitted through a medium. Rather, affect partakes in the conception of medium. That is, the medium of radio is neither simply an instrumental channel nor simply medium as message *pace* Marshall McLuhan but the very space (or threshold) wherein a particular form of temporality—that of the “if”—lodges itself. Connecting, thereby, in its relational immediacy with the play of—or better, playing to—an atmosphere.

In what remains of my response to the set of comments, I want to do two things. One is to highlight a striking conver-

gence brought by some of the comments—namely, in how the essay had the effect of making its readers oscillate between its contents on the one hand and the news punctuating their own background on the other. This aspect is itself part of the dramatic structure of the piece, which, as Thomas Csordas notes, takes the reader through a rising tension and tense that is “broken only in the final paragraph . . . on the haunting repetition-become-truth, posttruth, alternative fact moment of the Trump presidency.” For it is precisely this tension that stroboscopes the piece and strings the possible resonances into a myriad of directions, both synchronically and diachronically. Thus, in his comment, Csordas notes how his own response to the article was shaped by having written it in the period of the 2018 US midterm elections. Susan Lepselter, sitting down to write her essay, responds in turn to “a *Washington Post* headline [that] seems to jump.” Oscillating, she “clicks.” A new window pops up. More news already old. Later she will look out the window. More news already old. Kathleen Stewart posits Trump as the headline that jumps, “outlandish swelling grotesquely out of [the] medium,” while Heo reflects on how, as an American reader, she cannot help but tune in to view the “latest theatrical rounds of ‘fake news,’ Trump’s tweets, and Pence’s plans for a space force.” Pointing to a few similar, pulp news pieces out of her *Post*, Lepselter gestures to one of the chief goals of this essay—namely, to rethink our own position as writers and readers who are ourselves ever more intensely situated among the animated middle of things. It is precisely this awareness that seems to drive Stuart McLean’s “Once Upon a Time in the Middle. . .,” speaking to how, in our current political moment, all beginnings must necessarily start in that middle, all ends eventually become part of it. Medium theory, McLean suggests, is middle theory.

But if (much like the phasmid), extremities meet in the middle—beginning and ends becoming indefinite middle—then (and this is my second point) how will we be able to advance what Heo describes as “the technical horizons of history” relevant to our current moment? At stake in Heo’s question is a preoccupation central to my work on Brazil as well: “From what location,” she asks, “can one levy a critique,” when middleness is always becoming everywhere (and thus nowhere)? How might one withstand, retain the capacity for judgment, on such all-middle grounds (especially if we try to hold on to the position of transcendental exteriority conventionally occupied in Western epistemes)? Where, then, lies critique? Or is the spatial that is implied here what is changing? Is critique becoming a temporal problem, or is it more like a rhythm, attuned to the oscillations of the very object it targets?

Modern liberal critique is the consummation of abstraction, dwelling as it does under the figurehead of the Leviathan sovereign. Just as the principle that secures the sovereign hinges on the relation it—the figurehead—entertains with its members or constituents to whom it affords protection (to in turn protect itself), so critique posits a suspension of the object it gazes upon, in the hope of reintegrating the proper place of the liberal subject. But what if the sovereign starts to resemble

the structure of the phasmid? Here lies, I think, an important intellectual challenge for social theorists today.

In their contributions to a special edition on *acritical reading*, both Michael Warner (2004) and Amy Hollywood (2004) emphasize “the need today to ask anew what counts as critical” (Warner 2004:32). For example, how do different ethical traditions entail different forms of commentary regarding text-related practices? At stake in this project is an attempt—one partly inspired by Sedgwick’s (1997) work on paranoid reading—to marry modern critique to transcendental dialectics, those that sustain and reproduce the frameworks of liberal tradition. Accordingly, a proper critique of critique will necessarily involve questioning the transcendental subject—the head—through which such critical reading operates.

In view of that assertion, others have recently been pursuing fruitful leads toward exposing traditions and regimes of critique that do not necessarily fall under the purview of a posited, exterior transcendental (Asad et al. 2009). Working in this vein, the anthropologist Irfan Ahmad (2011) has reflected on how a form of immanent critique (as opposed to transcendental) could benefit a reading of Islam wherein the exercising of critique is understood to be produced and contested from a distinctive locus. Bruno Reinhardt (2016), in his work on the Pentecostal flow of charisma in Ghana, calls for us to follow the movement of the material, rather than exclude the transcendent as so often happens in studies that take materiality seriously. In my own research on Charismatic Catholicism in Brazil, I address a similar question aimed at positioning critique as a geopolitical problem (de Abreu, forthcoming). Relying on the Greek term *pneuma* to designate breath, air, or spirit, Catholic Charismatics explore forms by which to emphasize the circulation of spirit through disparate domains: the breathing body, airwave technologies, within the tents where celebrations are held, the Amazon rainforest. A Catholic (and therefore hierarchy-oriented) movement, Charismatics invest in suppressing appearances of ranking, highlighting instead spirit as a plane of circulation across sites and eras. But spirit (*pneuma*) as air is not just a form of figuring the Holy Spirit; it is the very material flow Charismatics yield in their articulations of an idea of indefinite middle across time and space. Drawing on the oscillatory mechanisms of breath—the polar functions of inspiration and expiration—Charismatics generate a sense of the medium qua spirit that, in the context of contemporary Brazil, also works as (indeed, becomes) the very environment for a spiritualized version of neoliberalism (de Abreu 2018). It is this kind of operational transduction by which living body, spirit, and environment enter a relational continuum that allows Charismatics to produce what Walter Benjamin once referred to as “a mediality without end” or what I would call a theopolitics of the phasmid.²¹

21. My use of the notion of theopolitics is inspired by the project curated by Valentina Napolitano and Carlota McAllister, to which I am also a contributor. For an outline of this project, see <https://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/anthrocybib/tag/theopolitics>.

Similarly, it is this logic of an endless middle that is currently being operationalized by the Bolsonaro regime in Brazil or in the US context by Trump. At stake in these forms of populism is the kind of mimetic dissemblance Callois described as intrinsic to the production of nondistinction between foreground and background. Both Trump and Bolsonaro seem to aim at instituting a regime of “headless” sovereignty, one that rules not from an outside position but rather from within the middle-medium-milieu nexus. Orchestrating this confluence of middle as milieu, to use Stewart and McLean’s suggestions, are the rhythmic punctuations of tweeting and daily breaking news, the pendular nature on the basis of which—and in tune with which—sovereign (in)decisions are pronounced. Much of the power of the new populisms lies, I think, in the disorienting forces of this confluence between medium and milieu: how it enables the rise of an oddly paradoxical form of flexible authoritarianism, a dissimilar sovereign whose motions one cannot predict. To give a sense of what this phasmid thinking looks like, I quote a telling passage from Didi-Hubermann’s *The Paradox of the Phasmid*:

As I looked at the scenery, the “ground” void of any animal, I understood in a moment—a moment in which all doubt, but with it all certainty, collapsed—that the life of this animal, the phasmid, was the scenery and the ground themselves. It’s hard to explain. Usually when you are told there is something to see and you see nothing, you move closer, thinking what you should be seeing is an unperceived detail of your own visual landscape. To see phasmids appear requires the very opposite, de-focusing or moving back a bit . . . the two steps suddenly placed me before the terrifying evidence that the vivarium’s little forest was itself the animal it was supposed to be hiding. (Didi-Hubermann 1989:3)

It is this coinciding between sovereign and territory that may lead us to “defocus” things a bit so as to better attune to the powers of the middle, its capacity to thrive on the paradoxical line between life and extinction. In our political moment, characterized as it is by phasmid tactics and extreme mimeticism, perhaps we need to ask no longer *where* is critique but *when* is critique: to attune our ears to the subtle vibrations of the phasmid as it eats up the very middle it inhabits.

—Maria José A. de Abreu

References Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *Homo sacer: sovereign power and bare life*. Daniel Heller-Roazen, trans. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Ahmad, Irfan. 2011. Immanent critique and Islam: anthropological reflections. *Anthropological Theory* 11(1):107–132.
- Asad, Talal, Wendy Brown, Judith P. Butler, and Saba Mahmood. 2009. *Is critique secular? blasphemy, injury and free speech*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Balibar, Etienne. 2003. *We, the people of Europe? reflections on transnational citizenship*. James Swenson, trans. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bergson, Henri. 1977 (1932). *The two sources of morality and religion*. R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton, trans. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. [SM]
- Blanchot, Maurice. 2002. *The book to come*. Charlotte Mandell, trans. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

- Caduff, Carlo. 2014. Pandemic prophecy, or how to have faith in reason. *Current Anthropology* 55(3):296–315.
- . 2015. *The pandemic perhaps: dramatic events in a public culture of danger*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Callois, Roger. 2003. Mimicry and legendary psychasthenia. In *The edge of surrealism: a Roger Callois reader*. Claudine Frank, ed. Pp. 89–103. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Collier, Stephen, and Andrew Lakoff. 2008. Distributed preparedness: the spatial logic of domestic security in the United States. *Environment and Planning D* 26(1):7–28.
- Cooper, Melinda. 2006. Pre-empting emergence: the biological turn in the war on terror. *Theory, Culture, and Society* 23(4):113–135.
- de Abreu, Maria José A. 2013a. Pessoaalidade ou a terra do não Lugar da performance. In *Terra do não lugar: diálogos entre antropologia e performance*. Paulo Raposo, Vânia Cardoso, John Dawsey, and Teresa Fradique, eds. Florianópolis, Brazil: Editora da UFSC.
- . 2013b. Technological indeterminacy: threat, medium, temporality. *Anthropological Theory* 13(3):267–284.
- . 2018. May Day supermarket: impasse, crisis, medium. *Critical Inquiry* 44(4):745–765.
- . Forthcoming. *The charismatic gymnasium: grace and extension in contemporary Brazil*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- de la Cruz, Deirdre. 2009. Coincidence and consequence: Marianism and the mass media in the global Philippines. *Cultural Anthropology* 24(3):455–488.
- . 2015. *Mother figured: Marian apparitions and the making of a Filipino universal*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [SL]
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1989 (1985). *Cinema 2: the time image*. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, trans. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. [SM]
- Diário de Lisboa*. 1958. Um programa que fez alarme. *Diário de Lisboa* (Lisbon), June 26.
- Diário Popular*. 1958. Marcianos em Portugal: milhares de pessoas aterrorizadas. *Diário Popular* (Lisbon), June 26.
- Didi-Huberman, Georges. 1989. *The paradox of the phasmid*. Alisa Hartz, trans. http://underconstruction.wdfiles.com/local-files/imprint-reading/huberman_paradox.pdf (accessed March 1).
- dos Santos, Lúcia. 2007. *Memórias da irmã Lúcia*. Fátima, Portugal: Secretariado dos Pastorinhos.
- Faubion, James. 2001. *The shadows and lights of Waco: millennialism today*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fernandes, Joaquim, and Fina d'Armada. 2005. *Heavenly lights: the apparitions of Fátima and the UFO phenomenon*. Alexander Bruce, trans. Andrew D. Basiago, ed. San Antonio: Anomalist.
- . 2007. *Celestial secrets: the hidden history of the Fátima incident*. Alexander Bruce, trans. Andrew D. Basiago, ed. San Antonio: Anomalist.
- Foucault, Michel. 2008. *The birth of biopolitics: lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hansen, Mark B. N. 2004. *New philosophy for new media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Haraway, Donna. 2016. *Staying with the trouble: making kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. [KS]
- Harman, Graham. 2008. DeLanda's ontology: assemblage and realism. *Continental Philosophical Review* 41(3):367–383. [KS]
- . 2011. Realism without materialism. *SubStance* 40(2):52–72. [KS]
- . 2012. *Weird realism: Lovecraft and philosophy*. Winchester, United Kingdom: Zero Books. [KS]
- Heo, Angie. 2012. The Virgin made visible: intercessory images of church territory in Egypt. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54(2):361–391.
- . 2013. The bodily threat of miracles: sanctity, sacramentality, and the Egyptian politics of public order. *American Ethnologist* 40(1):149–164.
- Hirschkind, Charles, Maria José A. de Abreu, and Carlo Caduff. 2017. New media, new publics? an introduction to supplement 15. *Current Anthropology* 58 (suppl. 15):S3–S12.
- Hollywood, Amy. 2004. Reading as self-annihilation. In *Polemic: critical and uncritical*. Jane Gallop, ed. Pp. 39–64. New York: Routledge.
- Keil, Charles M. H. 1966. Motion and feeling through music. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24(3):337–349. [SL]
- Kermode, Frank. 2000. *The sense of an ending: studies in the theory of fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kittler, Friederich A. 1999. *Gramophone, film, typewriter*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Koselleck, Reinhart. 1985. *Futures past: on the semantics of historical time*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Lakoff, Andrew. 2007. Preparing for the next emergency. *Public Culture* 19(2):247–271.
- . 2008. The generic biothreat, or how to become unprepared. *Cultural Anthropology* 23(3):399–428.
- Lepselter, Susan. 2016. *The resonance of unseen things: poetics, power, captivity, and UFOs in the American uncanny*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Lutz, Catherine. 2001. *Homefront: a military city and the American 20th century*. Boston: Beacon.
- Masco, Joseph. 2005. "Active measures"; or, how a KGB spymaster made good in post-9/11 America. *Radical History Review* 93:285–300.
- . 2012. The end of ends. *Anthropological Quarterly* 85(4):107–124.
- . 2014. *Theater of operations: national security affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Massumi, Brian. 2009. National enterprise emergency: toward an ecology of powers. *Theory, Culture, and Society* 26(6):153–185.
- McLuhan, Marshall. 1994 (1964). *Understanding media: the extensions of man*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Meyer, Leonard B. 1956. *Emotion and meaning in music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [SL]
- Mitchell, W. J. T. 2004. Medium as theory: preface to the 2003 *Critical Inquiry* Symposium. *Critical Inquiry* 30(2):324–335.
- . 2012. *Seeing through race*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- O Primeiro de Janeiro*. 1958. Um romance de ficção científica, transmitido por uma emissora, provocou o pânico. *O Primeiro de Janeiro* (Porto), June 26.
- Orr, Jackie. 2006. *Panic diaries: a genealogy of panic disorder*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Postman, Neil. 1998. Five things we need to know about technological change. Lecture delivered in Denver, Colorado, March 28. <http://web.cs.ucdavis.edu/~rogaway/classes/188/materials/postman.pdf> (accessed September 10, 2017).
- Rabinow, Paul. 2008. *Marking time: anthropology of the contemporary*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rebello, José. 1998. *Formas de legitimação do poder no salazarismo*. Lisbon, Portugal: Livros e Leituras.
- Reinhardt, Bruno. 2016. Don't make it a doctrine: material religion, transcendence, critique. *Anthropological Theory* 16(1):75–97.
- Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de. 1943. *Lettre à un otage*. Québec: Bibliothèque Électronique du Québec.
- Samimian-Darash, Limor. 2013. Governing future potential biothreats: toward an anthropology of uncertainty. *Current Anthropology* 54(1):1–2.
- Santuário de Fátima. 2013. *Documentação crítica de Fátima: seleção de documentos (1917–1930)*. Fátima, Portugal: Santuário de Fátima.
- Schmitt, Carl. 1988. *Political theology: four chapters on the concept of sovereignty*. George Schwab, trans. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 1997. Paranoid reading and reparative reading, or, you're so paranoid, you probably think this introduction is about you. In *Novel gazing: queer readings in fiction*. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ed. Pp. 1–37. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Simondon, Gilbert. 1958. *The mode of existence of technical objects*. Paris: Aubier Montaigne.
- Stengers, Isabella, Brian Massumi, and Erin Manning. 2009. History through the middle: between macro and mesopolitics—an interview with Isabella Stengers. *Inflexions* 3. http://www.inflexions.org/n3_stengershtml.html. [KS]
- Stewart, Kathleen, and Susan F. Harding. 1999. Bad endings: American apocalypse. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28:285–310.
- Turner, Victor. 1979. Frame, flow and reflection: ritual and drama as public liminality. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 6(4):465–499. [SL]
- Warner, Michael. 2004. Critical reading. In *Polemic: critical and uncritical*. New York: Routledge.
- Weber, Samuel. 2001. Religion, repetition, media. In *Religion and media*. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, eds. Pp. 43–55. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- . 2004. *Theatricality as medium*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- . 2008. *Benjamin's -abilities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Weber, Timothy. 1979. *Living in the shadow of the second coming: American premillennialism, 1875–1925*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.