

:CAMPO CRÍTICO

The Lesser of Two Genocides

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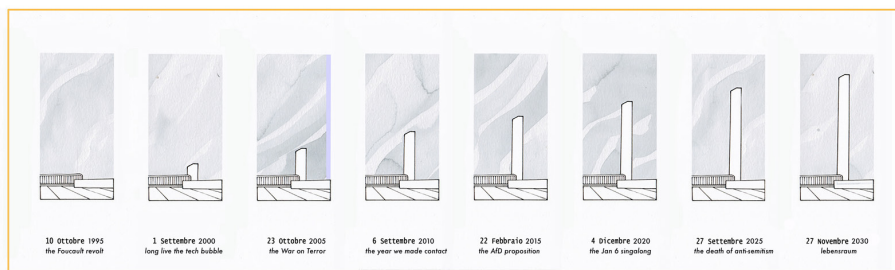
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The realization of the universality of history has made universal history impossible. Consequently, the idea that the course of history could be thought of as enlightenment, as the liberation of reason from the shadows of mythological knowledge, has lost its legitimacy. Demythologization has itself come to be seen as myth.

– Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*

The big Other's inexistence is ultimately equivalent to its being the symbolic order, the order of symbolic fictions which operate at a level different from direct material reality. In this sense, the only subject for whom the big Other does exist is the psychotic, the one who attributes to words direct material efficiency.

– Slavoj Žižek, "The Big Other Doesn't Exist"



Life Theft, drawing for *Monument to the Glory of Fascism*, inversion of the Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz *Monument Against Fascism* made for the city of Hamburg 1986-1992, 2024. Image based on a 2011 design by Marco Manini, with the permission of the artist. Concept by Janez Emil Janša.

There have been, throughout the history of modern and contemporary art, countless instances in which artists have represented the labour process or the broader means through which art is produced. In Western art, these were preceded by reflexive and allegorical meta-statements about art's production, usually implicating the artist and the viewer, whether in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in which the moralizing author addresses his readers directly, obliging them to intellectually complete the work, or in Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, where the artist makes a self-interested bid to have his craft profession elevated by the royals to the status of a liberal art. He did this by selflessly building the viewer, as loyal subject of the monarchy, into the work. Since the industrial era, such works have become ever more intriguing since they not only make moral statements, but take up the revolutionary goal, after the eradication of religious superstition and monarchical rule, of further transforming society. We thus find a nineteenth-century anarchist like Georges Seurat producing pointillist paintings in a methodical, plodding and workmanlike manner, using the latest scientific knowledge about optics and attacking the notion of romantic inspiration by roguishly displaying the work process itself, albeit in an ingenious manner that, after Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' publication of *The Communist Manifesto*, elaborates the hallucinatory enticements of commodity fetishism. We later find that radical ambitions have dampened somewhat in Roy Lichtenstein's mass cultural Ben-Day dot paintings or in Andy Warhol's "factory" silkscreens and reified superstars, which, to put things in terms of the labour-capital contradiction, represent labour and process from the side of consumer capitalism.

This socialist question of the distinction between workers as a class "in themselves" and as a class "for ourselves" addresses the issue of class conflict in the support-surface tensions of reflexive artworks, with Pop art sellouts pitched against more challenging predecessors, like for example Dziga Vertov's camera-eye experiments in *The Man with the Movie Camera*, which takes the illusionism of film out of the studio and into the streets, Giuseppe

Pinot-Gallizio's industrial paintings, performed mockeries of Abstract Expressionist drivel on rolls of canvas that are sold by the metre, or Marcel Broodthaers' fictional *Musée d'Art Moderne* interventions, which overtly display the mechanisms of art's dissemination, institutionalization and commercialization. Jump cut to more recent times and the conditions for creative resistance to global capital cannot be said to have improved very much, as the artist Andrea Fraser demonstrated in the project *2016 in Museums, Money and Politics*, which charts the role that American art museums and philanthropy play in reproducing the party politics that prop up the kleptocratic, mediocratic plutocracy. Similarly, the activists involved in the Gulf Labor Coalition documented the fact that the conditions of migrant workers building satellite extensions of the Guggenheim and Louvre museums in the Gulf emirates are not much better off than indentured servants.

The focus on creative labour as a key aspect of neoliberalism's offensive against organized labour through the entrepreneurialization of the self and the routinization of flex work has led to countless challenges to culture industry-wide problems, many of which were produced in the context of anti-globalization protest activism and later the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street affinity movements. In the latest round of struggles, and after climate activists have sought to stop big oil by gluing themselves to priceless museum art, the marches and encampments have focused on the Israeli onslaught in Gaza and the West Bank. This overt phase of what William I. Robinson refers to as global capitalist "accumulation through genocide" finds neoliberal regimes seeking to rid the world of "surplus humanity" through neocolonial practices of extermination, all the while enriching weapons manufacturers at the expense of taxpayers. When asked at the Democratic National Convention in September 2024 how American voters could be compelled to vote for Kamala Harris rather than Donald Trump, representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez suggested that the Democratic Party's version of genocide in Gaza would not be as bad as the Republican Party's version, adding to this the concerns of trans people and women seeking abortions. This use of victim

politics to blackmail people into accepting the terms of the “rules-based” international order that now threatens US/EU/NATO war with Russia and China is not unrelated to intellectual trends in neoliberal academia and the cultural sector, including privilege theory, intersectionality and decoloniality, which are seemingly as congenial to neoconservatives in the CIA and U.S. Army as they are to affinity groups on the new social movement left.

A 2023 study found that among the presentations at the 2022 annual conference of the Universities Art Association of Canada, 3.7 percent were concerned with class and labour issues and 62 percent with identity topics. An additional 16.3 percent addressed body politics, 8 percent community topics and 6.4 percent ecology. The traditional macro-political approaches that at one time informed and complemented the analysis of culture are being systematically redefined by this sector of society in the terms of Indigeneity, intersectionality, queer theory, privilege and whiteness. In the last decade, the Association has begun to recommend to its members the topics that its administrative board believes should be encouraged. For the 2024 conference, for example, the Association recommended:

Sessions that discuss the politics of care, sustainability and ecological arts, deconstructing colonial knowledge systems through intervention and creative production, art and activism, research-creation, transformative artistic pedagogies, queer/trans love, resistance and grieving, crip aesthetics and materialities, absurdity and the subversion of academia through play, intersectional digital practices and virtual place-making, curatorial praxis and art crime.

This non-Marxist petty-bourgeois agenda that readily finds institutional and state accommodation is marked by the tendency at conference for virtue-signalling non-Indigenous presenters to make land claim acknowledgements. In recent years, the UAAC conference has showcased Indigenous keynote speakers and performances, as well as the use of Indigenous languages in its

marketing. This follows similar curatorial trends in the country's major museums, where settler-colonial histories of art are combined with contemporary and contemporaneous Indigenous works. This "unsettling" of Canadian culture does not, on the whole, combine with an anti-imperialist socialist agenda that is focused on labour and class politics. Rather, it tends to prop up the careers of a politically comfortable middle class that specializes in the humanization of class conflict. For instance, in 2024, the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court confirmed that what is happening in Gaza is a genocide designed to ethnically cleanse the occupied territories of Palestinians. When pressed in the summer of 2024 to take a stand against the genocide, the UAAC Board of Directors stated its solidarity with the right of students to free speech and to demonstrate on campus, which are basic rights that are already protected by law, even if in the current circumstances measures are being taken to restrict those rights and to censor Palestine solidarity as hate speech. The board did not directly denounce the genocide and did not condemn the state of Israel or Zionism. In other words, the decolonial agenda that has been so strenuously asserted in the case of Canadian settler colonialism was not extended to the current conflict that has produced neo-McCarthyite witch hunts, the conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, and the curtailment of the civil rights of those who express solidarity with Palestinians and condemnations of Israel's genocidal occupation. The implication is that these postmodern topics that supposedly challenge dominant paradigms are only advanced when and in ways that do not compromise the interests of this sector of the professional-managerial class, including those of the broader capitalist society.

The de-differentiating impulse of postmodern anti-humanism, which since the advent of Eurocommunism and the New Left has sought to liberate capital from labour and class struggle, replacing the Marxist focus on relations of production with Foucauldian relations of power, universalism with relativism, epistemology with ontology, and politics with the democratic materialism of bodies and languages, has in fact complemented rather than challenged

the order of global capital. In the realm of public art, the removal and recontextualization of statues representing historical figures associated with colonial slavery does not extend to questioning the pluralist interest group politics and “black capitalism” that was developed in the United States in the 1960s and 70s, and that since then has legitimized neoliberalization. The so-called “great awakening” that coincided with the emergence of decolonial theory assails revolutionary bourgeois figures and ideologies, whose universalism was the basis of world-transforming struggles against feudalism. Through the transhistorical prism of race metaphysics and gender essentialism, Western idealism has been conflated with the prevailing tendencies of the societies that produced it, including but not limited to slavery and patriarchy. People like Voltaire, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, as well as Abraham Lincoln and Karl Marx, are now deemed by postmodernists to be of the same ilk as Royalists and Confederate generals. For obvious reasons, the same standards are not applied to figures like Toussaint Louverture, Frederick Douglass or Frantz Fanon. The thoughts of Sojourner Truth are confused with those of bell hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw. Michael Eric Dyson has sardonically referred to such “fourth wave” confusion as COVID-1619. Yet, as scholars like Adolph Reed and Walter Benn Michaels have demonstrated, sorting out all the specific interests that divide the social field does not get one any closer to doing something to advance the universal interest that subtends the solidarity of struggles.

In 2014, the Canadian Ministry of Heritage launched a call for proposals for a *Memorial to the Victims of Communism*, to be funded through the Tribute to Liberty charity organization and situated near the Supreme Court on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Funded in part by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, which is known for its ties to Ukrainian nationalists and fascists, this monument is designed to honour the eight million people who fled to Canada to escape communist regimes. Many of these, as it happens, were uniting with previous waves of emigrants that had been solicited by Canadian immigration agents. This post-1989 monument reflects

legislation passed in the 2000s in Europe and North America which, ironically enough, seeks to conflate communism with fascism. In 2015, the Quebec-based collective *Les Entrepreneurs du commun* (Entrepreneurs of the Common) responded to this monument with a proposed series of counter-*Monuments to the Victims of Liberty*, which sought instead to acknowledge colonialism on Canadian soil and Canadian imperialism abroad. The demonization of communism is criticized by this group of postmodern leftists for occulting the potential for thinking “in common,” an anarchist version of the neoliberal engineering of knowledge synergy.

In 2023, the unveiling of *The Arc of Memory*, as the memorial is now known, was delayed after the Yaroslav Hunka scandal, which found every member of the Canadian Parliament, at the behest of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and in the midst of the NATO proxy war in Ukraine, giving a standing ovation to a former member of the Galicia Division of the Nazi Waffen-SS for the part he played fighting against the Russians during the Second World War. Although the Soviet liberators of Europe lost some 27 million soldiers in the war against fascism – not to mention the sacrifice of some 20 million Chinese on the Pacific front – the UCC has defended Hunka as well as the role played by the Melnyk and Bandera wings of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in both the Holocaust and the “war of annihilation” against the Soviet Union. Construction of the monument was also delayed after it was discovered that 330 of the 553 names to be inscribed on the “Wall of Remembrance” section of the memorial were “potentially” associated with Nazi and fascist groups.

How did the elected officials of a supposedly liberal democracy sink to such complacency? In the 1970s, Canada had a reputation, however dubious, as a leading participant in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Since the 1990s, the post-Cold War peace dividend shifted to an aggressive “peacemaking” policy in which Canada would play a role as junior partner to American foreign policy. Throughout its history, Canada has participated in missions in Siberia, Ghana, Nepal, the Balkans, Honduras, Haiti, Afghanistan, Iraq and Israel, suppressing popular uprisings against aggressor nations. After the defeat of fascism, Canada provided a

haven for tens of thousands of members of the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, Ukrainian Insurgent Army and Waffen-SS Galicia Division. Since that time, the government has helped fascist emigres whitewash the crimes of their forebears. This now includes the family history of Canada's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Chrystia Freeland. As for bringing this shameful history to light, the UCC has made every effort to cancel and interfere with Canadian activists who are promoting peace in Ukraine. Just as pro-Palestinian activists have been beat back through countless measures, the small number of Canadian intellectuals, activists and artists who promote peace and genuine security are put on the defensive by conservative and reactionary forces. Through Operation Unifier, the Canadian military has trained some 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers, remaking Soviet fighters into NATO fighters. In 2014, Canada helped the U.S. and Germany make use of the fascist Right Sector as shock troops in the removal of Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich. In 2020 and 2021, Canada trained members of the neo-Nazi Azov Regiment, who celebrate the slaughter of Jews and Poles during World War II. Canada's contribution to this proxy war has helped Ukraine evade its commitments to the Minsk II peace accords. This is not surprising since the Maidan coup contributed to the Ukrainian offensive in the Donbas region, which killed 14,000 ethnic Russians and led to the Russian invasion.



Everybody, digital concept sketch for *Monument to the Victims of Capitalism*, cost-effective and sustainable knock-off of the Unisphere, 2024.

To what extent Canada's connection to the current conflict in Ukraine reflects the liberal democratic imaginings of this country's citizens is difficult to discern based on the neoliberal political class, from the social democratic left to neo-fascist conservatives. Against this blob of political regression, the anti-universalist petty bourgeoisie in the contemporary cultural sector fails to advance anything resembling a genuine programme of socialist struggle. If one examines the development since the 1980s of the stretch of land along Ottawa's Sussex Drive between Nepean Point and Wellington, one gets a sense of the nation's cultural and political trajectory. After the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau repatriated the Canadian Constitution from the commonwealth in 1982, a series of legacy projects was enacted, including the construction of a new National Gallery of Canada in 1985-88. Adjacent to the Byward Market, the stretch of park land known as Major's Hill Park is demarcated by the Rideau Canal and ends at the Chateau Laurier Canadian Pacific hotel as well as the former home of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, which was completed in 1992. That same year, a Washington, D.C.-style aberration, the *Canadian Peacekeeping Monument*, was built across the traffic circle that abuts the wide terrace that leads to the NGC's main entrance. This monument that marks the end of U.N. peacekeeping and the advent of Canada's misadventures in the War on Terror has three bronze soldiers at its prow, one of them crouching with a radio backpack device and the other standing and holding binoculars. These echo the figures that used to be situated on Nepean Point behind the gallery: atop a tall plinth, the statue of the explorer Samuel de Champlain, with his astrolabe, and at the foot of the plinth, an anonymous native Anishinaabe scout (now named Zibi Annini), with his quiver of arrows on his back. In 2024, a redevelopment plan was implemented to rename Nepean Point Kiweki Point. The statue of Champlain has been removed from its previous "dominant" location, taken off its plinth, and located along a walking path. The reason given by the National Capital Commission is that the statue was not "inclusive and representational of all Canadians." The focus will now be on the landscape rather than the explorer, and the scout will now

oversee the river, according to the NCC, “to look for potential threats.” One wonders what these threats might be. Although the Champlain monument was disarticulated along decolonial lines, the *Peacekeeping Monument* remains intact.

In 1999, a new Embassy of the United States was plunked in Major’s Hill Park, much like the military compound of an invading army. For many years after 9/11, this homunculus was surrounded by barriers that reduced the speed of traffic on Sussex Drive, turning a chic cultural district into something that felt like a war zone. In 2024, after the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau had named two of the most diverse cabinets in Canadian history, and with Great Power Conflict unfolding, a collective of anti-postmodern leftists, Everybody, proposed plans for a *Monument to the Victims of Capitalism*, a steel globe sculpture based on the 1964 World’s Fair Unisphere located at Flushing Meadows in Queens, New York. The work was produced in response to U.S. legislation that conflates communism with totalitarianism, as well as proposed legislation in Canada to include anti-communist pedagogy in high-school curriculum. Since more people were killed by British imperialists in India than all the crimes that can be attributed to communism, and since far more people have been killed by capitalism than any other political system, which continues to organize labour exploitation and privatization as a matter of course, it was suggested that the monument could be situated behind the U.S. Embassy or on the esplanade of the *Peacekeeping Monument*, renamed the *Warmaking Is Peacemaking Monument*.



Everybody, mockup for placement of the *Monument to the Victims of Capitalism* on the lawn behind the *United States Embassy*, 2024.



Everybody, mockup for placement of the *Monument to the Victims of Capitalism* on the esplanade of the *Warming Is Peacekeeping Monument*, 2024.

Just as the proposals for the *Monument to the Victims of Capitalism* were drawn, conservatives, liberals, social democrats, populists, anarchists and postmodernists objected. Here again, the NCC woke-washed Canadian history by “retaining” the project but “transforming” it to be more inclusive through consultations with representatives of different constituency groups, renaming the project *The Monument to the Victims of Victim Politics*. In this instance, a diverse and inclusive array of raised fist sculptures was added to the original globe: red for Indigenous peoples, white for colonial settlers, brown for people of colour, yellow for Asians, and a double set of purple fists for LGBTQIA+ communities, which caused some complaints by the trans community, among others. A feminine version of the bronze fist, which is slightly taller than the others, is coloured pink. Despite the protestations of Everybody, who argued that class cannot be understood in terms of intersectionality, which reduces class to an atemporal identity group and exploitation to discrimination – the goal of socialism is the destruction of class society, not better work conditions and more respect for workers in a system of class domination – a blue (collar) bronze was also added. Since the new landscaping at Kiwekì Point made space for this proposal possible, it was decided to place the monument on this site. Over the course of deliberations that were monopolized by the cultural establishment, who pandered to gullible citizens and micro-aggressed Everybody during meetings, decolonial activists determined that most of the art at the National Gallery was Eurocentric. Eventually, and as a result of the groupthink at the renamed House of the Commons, the National Gallery was dismantled and its collections placed in storage until further notice. After the *Monument to the Victims of Victim Politics* was constructed, the anonymous leader of the “land back” guerrilla group, None of Your Indian Affairs, stated to the media: “You wanted Kiwekì Point, you got Kìwekì Point.” Given the privilege awarded the landscape, the fist sculptures were moored in the Ottawa River, renamed the River of Diversity, with these abstract sculptures celebrating the mysteries of ontology rather than anything anyone in particular has ever achieved, which discriminates against most people, as well as fish, birds, animals, trees, rivers, mountains and rocks that never achieved or even sought to achieve anything quote-unquote “historical.”



Everybody, digital concept sketch for *Monument to the Victims of Victim Politics*, cost-effective and sustainable knock-off of the Unisphere, 43 metres in hight, with bronze fist sculptures, 20, 25 and 30 metres in height, 2024.

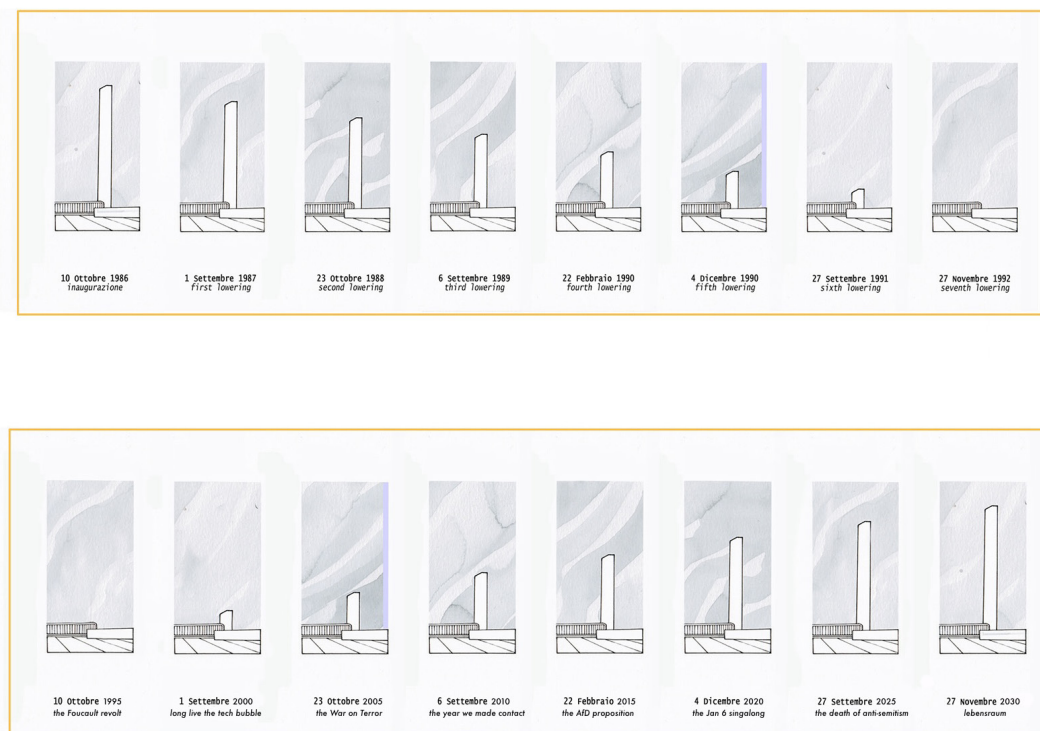


Everybody, mockup for placement of the *Monument to the Victims of Victim Politics* on Kiwekî Point and in the River of Diversity, 2024.

Meanwhile, in Germany, efforts to rehabilitate fascism and to blur the lines between truth and fiction has allowed war hawks in the military and xenophobes on the far right to “speak their truth” and demand that monuments “look like me.” Responsive to the need to recontextualize history according to the demands of the present, the city of Hamburg decided to revisit the controversial Harburg *Monument Against Fascism*, a legendary counter-monument designed by Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz. Due to the rise of neo-Fascism, the city awarded a design competition to these artists, who in 1986 built a 12-metre-high square column covered in lead, a soft surface that allowed people to use a steel stylus with which they could incise anti-fascist statements on its surface. As the scribbled area became illegible, the monument was lowered a few feet into the ground until it disappeared completely in 1992. Since many postmodern leftists have been influenced by the same conservative anti-universalist traditions as capitalist racialists and nihilistic identitarians, and since the alt-right has pioneered its own versions of postmodern transgression, the city of Hamburg authorized the artist collective Life Theft to reverse the counter-monument process, encouraging people to “let their fingers do the goose-stepping” and complete the re-emergence of the renamed *Monument to the Glory of Fascism*, to be completed with a crowning “lebensraum” ceremony hosted by the German chancellor and leader of the Social Democratic Party, Olaf Scholz, the co-leaders of the Alternative for Germany, Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel, as well as Sahra Wagenknecht, the leader of the new Reason and Justice red-brown alliance.

Since collective memory is a metaphor and not real, monuments that justify and hasten the forgetting of attacks against communism act as a necessary protection against politics that are INCOMPATIBLE with capitalism. Demographically speaking, since post-Enlightenment schizo-cynicism, pretence misrecognition and pathological narcissism are now closer to the needs of the petty-bourgeois establishment, drunk once again on the “killer cool” culture of the 1990s, as well as vice-signalling opportunism, the zero-sum and means-tested approach to figure-ground and labour-capital relations has been

brought closer to the needs of neoliberal governance, billionaire wealth, endless militarism and the wreckage of the planet. Hooray, socialism is gone!



Marc James Léger is a Marxist cultural theorist living in Montreal. He is the author of several books, including *Brave New Avant Garde* (2012), *Don't Network: The Avant Garde after Networks* (2018), *Vanguardia: Socially Engaged Art and Theory* (2019), *Bernie Bros Gone Woke: Class, Identity, Neoliberalism* (2021) *Too Black To Fail: The Obama Portraits and the Politics of Post-Representation* (2022), and *Class Struggle and Identity Politics: A Guide* (2024). He is the editor of the two volumes of *The Idea of the Avant Garde – And What It Means Today* (2014, 2022), which bring together the writings of 100 of the world's leading artists and theorists in different art fields, including music, film, architecture, literature, theatre, dance and visual arts. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6312-7370> | leger.mj@gmail.com

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