

LIFE EXTEMPORE: Trials of Ruination in the Twilight Zone of Soviet Industry

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It was early afternoon on a crisp winter day in 2019, and the Chemist, the guard, and I sat together in front of a wood-burning stove in a small office of a former chemical factory in Yerevan. The guard had converted the office into his quarters so that, day and night, he could watch over the shuttered Soviet factory. I will call it Khimzavod, one of the many factories that lingers tenaciously in the post-Soviet “twilight zone” (González-Ruibal 2019, 132)—the liminal state between use and abandonment, between prosperity and demise, where optimism and despair jockey for position in the lives of those caught up in ruination. We were sharing a roasted chicken wrapped in *lavash* bread and a bottle of orange vodka when the Chemist’s phone rang. Hands greasy, he hit speakerphone:

“Can you help me fill an order for 600 meters of glass tubing, like the ones we got from the factory in Yeghvard?” asked the caller.

The Chemist hesitated, realizing that the quantity would require much foraging in other chemical factories, and negotiation with hard-nosed factory owners. The job would draw him into yet another *trial of ruination*, a struggle to discover value in old things, where the temporal and material logics of capital, and the waning life

course of objects and humans, test the limits of those efforts. The caller explained that the deal was good, because the buyers had originally thought they needed to use costly quartz tubing from China but were then convinced that old Soviet glass could work.

“It sounds worth it”, the Chemist replied, accepting the job in the spur of the moment.

No sooner had we returned to the chicken than there was a knock at the door. The guard became agitated. He had a debt to pay and the creditor had arrived. As his distress mounted, the Chemist reached into his wallet and placed a few hundred dollars on the stove, gesturing to the guard to take the cash and settle his debt. When the guard stepped out, I asked the Chemist if his friend was good for the money. It didn't really matter, he replied in so many words; if the guard didn't repay him, the Chemist could collect collateral from the abundant (but rusting) metal on the factory grounds, whose price on the scrap metal market he could estimate as though his eyes were scales.



Figure 1. The Chemist smokes a cigarette as we sit together in front of a wood-burning stove and share a meal. Photo by Lori Khatchadourian.

So it was that, in the span of minutes, two projects unfolded for the Chemist, both of which pivoted on the salvage value of Soviet industrial remnants. Salvage (or residual) value is an operation undertaken by firms to account for the highest exchange value of an old asset, after depreciation, generated by sale for future use or scrap. In business, salvage value is the stuff of accountancy and balance sheets. I am concerned less with corporate estimations than with the temporal and material relations at play when individuals like the Chemist attempt to *discover salvage value* in the exchange of undead assets or, as another ethnographic case in this essay will show, *to forgo salvage value* to retain for use capital goods in their senescence. Three decades after Soviet collapse, privatization, and market liberalization, the trials of ruination in Armenia arise in precisely these projects to unlock or reject the salvage value of Soviet debris. By *trials of ruination* I am referring to strenuous efforts to make a living with defunct things when time and temporality, matter and materiality rebuff with opposing force. My terminology may call to mind the so-called qualification trials that economic agents undertake in a functioning market economy, where products are subjected to testing in the constant adjustments of supply and demand (Callon, Méadel, and Rabeharisoa 2002). But in the deviant market of the ruins economy, where no production occurs, supply is finite and obsolescent, and where economic actors are irreducible to either producers or consumers, what is being tried is less the *product* than the *human agents* who attempt to discover salvage or use-value in decaying goods. As I will demonstrate, my aging interlocutors are up against time and the life course of both people and things; and they are tested by the temporal and material logics of capitalism, both disadvantageous to their efforts. The story of the Chemist and the guard suggests that relations to time and to things profoundly shape the trials of ruination. In this essay, I attend to the temporal and material relations through which the former Soviet proletariat attempt to pull the heavy, metallic, unyielding remnants of the socialist factory out from the twilight zone of postsocialist stasis and into relations of capital.

Time figures as both an experiential and existential force in these trials. In the struggles to discover value from things undergoing slow decay and irreversible obsolescence, as I argue below, the experience of time is marked by urgency and an attunement to the here and now. While much writing on temporality amid ruins and remnants emphasizes the contemplative, affective, and past-oriented motif of nostalgia, the Chemist and others like him alert us to an alternative temporal register in the post-Soviet twilight zone, one in which nostalgia recedes as future hopes require living “for the moment,” as Morten Pedersen (2012, 145; emphasis original) describes it, with “an *exalted* awareness of the virtual potentials in the

present.” Consider the brief time it took for the Chemist to accept the bids to enter into new trials involving glass tubes and rusting metal, spontaneous decisions made with little regard for socialist dreamworlds and the nostalgic affordances of industrial matter. The advancing age of my interlocutors, who reached adulthood in the period of late socialism, contributes to a sense that *now* is the time to realize goals. Existentially, this temporal disposition takes shape in a context of displacement from progressive socialist time and is necessitated by the rapid temporality of the market, which renders Soviet things anachronistic and on the brink of obsolescence. The primary tactic for either unlocking or forestalling salvage value under such unfavorable temporal conditions is extemporization, doing things in the moment, and doing things one never planned or was trained to do. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, *extempore* (in English), from the Latin *ex tempore*—literally meaning “out of time”—could refer to practices of everyday life; ‘life extempore’ in this obsolete sense meant a life in which decisions were made in the moment, in accordance with the needs of the present, with little preparation.¹ I want to dust off this anachronism and tinker with its semantic scope because I think that with a little work, it can condense the distinct temporal dispositions and improvisational practices of the former Soviet proletariat whose livelihoods depend on revaluing the persistent material world of decommissioned Soviet factories.

Relatedly, I argue that the trials either to strip and sell (unlock salvage value) or to retain and operate Soviet matter in a postsocialist milieu (forgo salvage value) involve relations toward *things* quite at odds with the materiality of capitalism. Critics have noted that the temporality of late industrial capitalism and just-in-time production is defined by the cult of the new (Dawdy 2010), acceleration (Harvey 1989, 284–307), and the annihilation of past worlds (González-Ruibal 2019). Profit is generated through planned obsolescence and an ideology of anachronism that renders old things as out of “proper” time. The Benjaminian tradition harnesses the ruins of capital toward a rebuke of the temporal-material order of capitalism (Gordillo 2014), figuring ruinous and patinated things and places as offering emancipation from its oppressive logics (Dawdy 2016; Edensor 2005). A life lived off of Soviet remnants stands at odds with fast capitalism’s commodity culture. As we shall see, it draws on practices of Soviet materiality that involved extending the life cycle of things “to the extreme” (Golubev and Smolyak 2013). But far from rebuking capitalism or offering emancipation from it, the persistent, machinic material culture of Soviet industry provides an opportunity to enter the market from the margins.

Existing concepts such as *precarity* offer limited analytical help here. Having once belonged to the proletariat, people like the Chemist may today be seen to live precariously in that their labor conditions entail self-reliance and their once utopian future has become unpredictable. In some respects, my portrayal in this essay of my interlocutors' struggle for a good life through their "freedom of self-conduct" submits to the anthropological motif that [Ivan Rajković \(2018\)](#) has called the "virtue of precarity." There are parallels, too, to [Kathleen Millar's \(2018\)](#) recognition that livelihoods dependent on recyclable garbage outside Rio de Janeiro are irreducible to a struggle for survival or resistance, but can enable fuller forms of life. But wagelessness, the instability of income, and the looming threat of joblessness (or something worse) are not what define insecurities and affective registers of the *life extempore*. My interlocutors do not give voice to a condition of mere coping, "stuckedness" ([Hage 2009](#)), or degradation ([Rakowski 2016](#)). Far from the state of "agentive impasse" that [Rajković \(2018, 52\)](#) discusses, they take pride in their genuine, nonperformative productivity. Such meaningful work is thought to have the real potential to restore them to a condition of stability (or something better). Precarity emphasizes structural conditions rather than individual actions. Where precarity indexes a *state* of being in the world, the *life extempore* attends to a *way* of being in the world.

This essay draws on more than three years of living in Armenia, cumulatively, since 1995—decades spent acquiring a slow, accretive understanding of the post-Soviet condition, first in the field of political development, then in archaeology, and finally as an archaeological ethnographer. It is also based on two months of "patchwork ethnography" ([Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020](#)) consisting of non-consecutive, short-term, intensive field visits in eleven factories in various states of decomposition located in the cities of Yerevan, Charentsavan, Gyumri, Ijevan, Yeghegnadzor, Vanadzor, and Aparan. Ethnographic fieldwork consisted of about twenty open-ended conversations with former factory workers and former factory directors (now private owners), who, despite their differing positionalities, shared a life lived off decommissioned, nearly abandoned industrial concerns. The study is further informed by unsystematic archaeological surveys at dozens of abandoned industrial sites, as well as archival work. It also relies, humbly and with gratitude, on relationships forged over the course of twenty-five years with Armenians of the last Soviet generation.

THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF INDUSTRIAL LIFE

In few republics of the Soviet Union did the process of industrialization prove more transformative than in Armenia. On the eve of the 1920 Bolshevik takeover, Armenia was overwhelmingly a peasant society (Suny 1993). Moscow in the 1920s focused on increasing agricultural production to feed destitute refugees of the Armenian genocide and win over a peasantry not particularly supportive of the Bolshevik Party (Matossian 1962). Here as elsewhere, the period of “dictatorial industrialization” (Derlugian 2005, 105) began under Stalin and continued through the Khrushchev era. Between 1928 and 1940, Armenia’s industrial output increased almost ninefold; an additional sixfold increase from 1940 to 1958 positioned Armenia as the fastest-growing industrial economy in the USSR. In subsequent decades, the republic continued to outpace most of the Soviet Union (Nove and Newth 1967). Heavy, toxic industries predominated, including chemicals, polymers, precision instruments, electronics, and construction materials, alongside the mining of non-ferrous metals such as copper, molybdenum, zinc, and gold. Light industries like textiles, processed food, and cognac trailed behind. Industry transformed the urban centers of Leninakan and Yerevan and was the *raison d’être* for new factory towns like Charentsavan and Kirovakan. In the countryside, factories popped up around collectivized farms. By the mid-1980s Yerevan reportedly set itself apart as the most polluted capital in the USSR after Moscow (Shakarian 2013). Such was the “gift of empire” that the Soviets bequeathed (Grant 2009).

From the late Stalin through Khrushchev years, Armenia experienced the fastest rate of proletarianization in the USSR. Party leaders relied on *things* at their point of production to reengineer society and personhood and create “docile subject dispositions” (Verdery 1996, 23). Setting aside the micropolitics of industrial life—the clientelism, bargaining, and sabotage that suffused the system—Soviet subjects were constituted principally through their making of things. Without discounting the role of socialist consumer culture in political subjectivization (Chernyshkova 2013; Fehérváry 2013; Kiaer 2005), in Armenia as elsewhere it was on the shop floor that the Communist Party produced “an enthusiastic and heroic working class that . . . became the mainstay of socialist construction” (Siegelbaum and Suny 1994, 21).

Industrial ruination in post-Soviet Armenia evades causal explanation by recourse to any singular grand narrative, be it empire, modernity, socialism, or capitalism. It has resulted from all these forces and more. It is tempting to place the weight of explanation on the inefficiencies of the planned economy, and on the dependencies Soviet planners created among the republics. Soviet collapse, the

disappearance of coordination from Moscow, and the redefinition of administrative borders into state borders severed ties between newly independent states and led to the “cataclysmic paralysis” (Platz 2000, 114) of industry across the former USSR. Industrial collapse decimated wage labor, but the material ruination of the factories in Armenia derived from other forces. Even before the Soviet collapse, seismicity had proved a singularly destructive agent. The 1988 Spitak earthquake not only reduced many factories to rubble but also led to the shuttering of the Metsamor nuclear power plant, a precautionary measure given its location near a tectonic fault. As a major source of domestic energy, its closure hampered Armenia’s energy-intensive economy, compounding the earthquake’s damage and creating levels of unemployment highly unusual for late Soviet society. Metsamor’s closure had ruinous knockoff effects. Cast into darkness for much of the 1990s, Armenians were left to scavenge for fuel.² They turned not only to Armenia’s scarce forest commons (Isaryan 1994) but also to the damaged factories. Earthquakes and the geological distribution of fossil fuels are not the work of Soviet design, but economic planning intended to preclude self-reliance, the relegation of energy-intensive industries to a fuel-starved republic, and the building of a nuclear plant near an active seismic fault line marked decisions inseparable from Soviet machinations. Thus, in every respect, Armenia’s “crisis of demodernization” (Platz 2000, 114) constituted a Soviet imperial aftermath.

And yet, the large-scale destruction of many factories is less easily explained in the contained frame of Soviet history. The proximal causes of rampant asset stripping included poorly regulated privatization and oligarchic corruption. In the scramble for Soviet spoils, the winners were Armenia’s *nomenklatura*—the Soviet elite, including upper management of industries—whose members were well positioned to purchase vouchers or coupons, kopeks on the ruble from employees desperate for cash, and then turn a profit on the wholesale gutting of durable assets. The inequities of the privatization process thus extended inequities that ran deep in late Soviet society (Derlugian 2005). But during the 1990s, these inequalities were exacerbated by steeper disparities of wealth formed through the accumulation of industrial assets and by the new owners’ unbridled pursuit of personal enrichment through the stripping of heavy machinery, building materials, and scrap metal. These highly visible practices of enrichment, which left urban outskirts dotted with monstrous industrial carcasses, only became possible under the chaotic conditions of sudden market liberalization. To this day, the ability of a privileged few to profit off the collective assets of Armenia’s former wage earners is perceived as a consummate betrayal of the nation at the very moment of its supposed

rebirth. This pursuit of wealth accumulation was made possible by an unregulated market, a weak legal structure, and complicity between the private sector and government officials mired in graft. Market demand for decommissioned machinery was transnational, and it emerged primarily from Iran.

In sum, large-scale industrial ruination resulted from systemic conditions that supported the extractive agency of the oligarchs; they percolated upward from historical structures just as they coalesced around new constellations of power and privilege. Unlike industrial ruins in the West, decommissioned Soviet factories are not places *abandoned* by the “systemic operation” of capital’s boom-and-bust cycles (González-Ruibal 2019, 32); rather, they constitute sites of destruction on which capitalism has been parasitically feeding. In this essay, the large-scale forces and heavy-handed oligarchic practices of the piratical 1990s, which left the Eurasian landmass littered with a colossal agglomeration of “imperial debris” (Stoler 2013), provide historical backdrop. Brought to the fore are the everyday trials of ruination that the 1990s left in their wake. I turn now to what two “extemporists” were doing in 2018–2019 with what they have been left *with*, to paraphrase Ann Laura Stoler (2016, 353), decades after the plunder of Soviet industry. First, I attend more closely to the trials of the Chemist and his business partners, who work to unlock salvage value through the exchange and creative repurposing of industrial remnants from Khimzavod. Next, the owner of a knitting factory in the town of Yeghegnadzor presents an alternative relation to the remains of Soviet industry, one premised on resisting exchange and deferring salvage value to put old machines back to use as intended, against formidable odds. These ethnographic accounts lead to a broader analysis of how relations to time and matter shape the trials of ruination, and in particular how the habitus of socialist materiality mediates the condition of both *running out of time* and *being out of socialist and capitalist time*.

UNLOCKING SALVAGE VALUE

In post-Soviet Armenia, factory ruins are almost always protected private property. An apparatus of locks, cameras, guards, dogs, and gates formidably assert enclosure. While the livelihood practices underway in the factories can be read alongside ethnographies of reuse (Isenhour and Reno 2019) and of precarious lives lived off waste (Millar 2018), the vigorous defense of property renders these trials of ruination distinct from other forms of post-Fordist peripheral work. The decaying factories are neither sites of waste nor abandonment, but represent a liminal property phase between use and discard that characterizes the twilight zone. Rarely do absentee owners relinquish ruins to the commons or tacitly per-

mit “gleaning” (Bize 2019). Supporting the apparatus of ownership is an emergent customary law of the ruins, which prohibits any free pass into the enclosure. Access is inextricably linked to expectations for exchange. This forecloses scavenging as a means for capturing salvage value (cf. Rakowski 2016), instead demanding structured transactions. Armenia’s industrial landscapes are not so much sites of disorder (cf. Edensor 2005) as of “an order of a different kind” (Doron 2000, 249).

I first learned these customary laws in 2018 from the Chemist, or *Khimik*, as his friends call him. While *Khimik* has taught himself a great deal about chemistry, he is not, in fact, a chemist. Nor is he a thief or a trash-picker. *Khimik* works as a trader, moneylender, and broker who has found sundry ways to extract salvage value from chemical factories, one of the largest sectors of Soviet Armenia’s economy. On several occasions in 2018 and 2019 I went to work with *Khimik*. One afternoon we met at the Factory metro stop at the southern outskirts of Yerevan and made our way through the industrial graveyard of the Shengavit district. *Khimik* pointed out the ruins along the roads, picked clean by oligarchs under past prime ministers. “They should all be in jail,” he said with cold rage.

We arrived at *Khimzavod*, where, for unspecified reasons, *Khimik* enjoys unusually unfettered access. The factory once employed more than 3,000 workers and produced chemicals for foods, perfumes, electronics, machines, and agriculture. Today, some buildings are stripped to their foundations. Some are partially destroyed, their interiors exposed to the elements. Some remain intact, protected under lock and key. The archaeological correlates of oligarchic asset-stripping show themselves not only in the magnitude of destruction but also in what appear to be staging areas where heavy machinery—reactors, autoclaves, hoppers—stood on



Figure 2. The ruins of *Khimzavod*. Photos by Lori Khatchadourian.

display for prospective buyers. We entered Khimzavod from a back entrance. Khimik, who was looking to procure a flask, invited me to take photographs before we reached the dog and guards. He knows these ruins well. For more than two decades, he has made a living trading in laboratory supplies from the twilight zone, taking advantage of the late Soviet “storage economy,” which emphasized stockpiling excessively large inventories (Oushakine 2014, 207). In the specialized world of the ruins economy, Khimik’s expertise is glass. As we sipped unsweetened coffee with the guards in a gutted factory cafeteria, one of the men asked Khimik if he could help him find a good motor. “If you want glass, I’ll give you glass,” Khimik replied. “But what business do I have with motors?”



Figure 3. Equipment from Khimzavod moved to exterior spaces. Photos by Lori Khatchadourian.

No one plans for a life lived off ruins. Once a well-heeled moneylender (and before that a worker in a hydroelectric plant), the Chemist fell into this line of work in the late 1990s after a borrower defaulted. The debtor forfeited his collateral only disingenuously, according to Khimik, in the form of ostensibly dead assets from his recently privatized, decommissioned chemical factory. The Chemist turned to improvisation, finding ways to reap salvage value from the remnants. Realizing this, the owner blocked access to the factory, leaving Khimik to swallow his losses and ply his newfound trade as a broker of Soviet laboratory supplies. “You have to support your family somehow, am I right?” he asked me rhetorically. What

began as petty trade “buying and selling small, unimportant things” developed into transactions worth thousands of dollars. In our first meeting, the Chemist handed me his business card, the phrase *Laboratory Supplies* displayed against a backdrop of flasks. Khimik appreciates the timelessness of scientific glass. “Here’s the deal,” he told me at his home, as we rummaged through dusty storerooms crammed from floor to ceiling with glassware: “If you wash glass, it turns completely new again.” Rather than engage through practices of reuse a moral imperative to deliberately resist the excesses of consumer culture and develop alternatives to capitalist markets (Isenhour and Reno 2019), Khimik alerts us to a countercurrent in which reuse provides the very means of entering and expanding the market.



Figure 4. A storeroom at Khimik’s home compound. Photo by Lori Khatchadourian.

The Chemist earned his nickname not merely because of his unique expertise in buying and selling chemical supplies but because he himself is an alchemist who puts Soviet things to new uses. His particular magic is to assemble distilleries that produce 100 proof vodka with nothing short of scientific precision using glass from the factories. Khimik’s storerooms contain instructional manuals that he also gathered, thinking they may come in handy. In time, he used them to teach himself distillation. Improvisational carework comes naturally to the former proletariat. Khimik is committed to realizing returns on the time and money invested in his contraptions, but he lacks the capital to move through the regulatory hoops

for becoming a registered alcohol manufacturer. It is difficult to find investors for a business dependent on such deviant machines; their and his market marginality are obstacles in the Chemist's trial to extract value from ruins. Yet his work as a broker in Soviet glass allows for a more stable livelihood. After all, the factory glass will one day run out.



Figure 5. The Chemist's distilleries. Photos by Lori Khatchadourian.

The Chemist also facilitates the transit of Soviet-made glass into capitalist chains of production and consumption. In so doing, Khimik and his associates normalize the abnormalities of privatization by enabling owners of defunct companies to profit from the sale of assets. His clients range from Armenia's leading enterprises, like the Proshyan Brandy Factory, to unknown end users working through intermediaries. In one case, a trial to extract salvage value was hampered by the material properties of glass. A client requested 20,000 test tubes, offering to pay ₴50 per tube (totaling about US\$2,100). Khimik called his contacts across Armenia to confirm that he could fill the order. Factory owners agreed to sell the tubes legally, for ₴30 each, if Khimik shouldered the 5 percent sales tax they would have to pay. The tubes were transferred to the buyer, who paid for them but deducted the cost of 2,000 tubes that, unbeknownst to Khimik, had broken in their packaging. Glass is less susceptible to obsolescence than machinery and, unlike metal, its salvage value is not diminished by the costs of corrosion, collection, and smelting. But it is not shock resistant. Having already paid the taxes on the full 20,000 test tubes, Khimik suffered a loss.

Sometimes, it is possible to follow the persistent remnants along their unlikely itineraries out of the factories and into new chains of production in order

to witness the encounter of socialist and capitalist materialities in the trials of ruination. One of Khimik's dealings was with a high-end company called Nairian, a producer of all-natural, non-toxic, cruelty-free beauty products. Selling US\$8 soap bars and related products in swanky Yerevan shops, an online store, and on Amazon, the company caters to Armenia's diaspora and the nouveaux riches. In 2018, I visited the Nairian eco-farm and laboratory facilities in the town of Aragyugh to follow the "biography" of Khimik's glass and understand how he discovers value in the folding of Soviet materiality into capitalist production. As we drove into the mountains of the Kotayk Province, Nairian's co-owner, Ara, explained that initially they considered locating their facility in a former chemical factory in Yerevan, but the plundered industrial zone appeared too abject for a beauty company. Ninety percent of Nairian's equipment is sourced from old chemical factories. While still a startup, the company's scientists distilled essential oils using flasks purchased from the Chemist. Those have since been replaced, but other equipment, such as autoclaves and vats from Khimzavod, remain in use, refitted to manufacture the company's serums, cleansers, and other products. A military-grade cauldron (пищеварочный котел, гост 11697-66) was modified for saponification. To estimate oil yields, plants are weighed on a heavy-duty scale of 1981 vintage (ГОСТ 9483-73). Here, toxic industry's remnants are upcycled to produce all-natural luxury goods.

In our last meeting, Khimik had a new plan for his vodka business. Instead of selling the spirit, he would invite customers to bring fruit from their gardens to distill their own vodka using his equipment, evidently a business model with an easier licensing process. It has to happen *this year* if it is going to happen at all, he told me in 2019. But the Chemist didn't want to close any doors. Before we parted ways he suggested that I partner with him in the vodka business, and bring his product to the American market for a 50 percent cut. Quintessential extemporization. The Chemist proposed a risky partnership with a new and unqualified acquaintance on the fly, lest any opportunity that presents itself in the moment be missed. The Chemist knows that I do not have the skills or experience of an importer or retail distributor, but when time is short, it cannot hurt to try.

RESISTING SALVAGE VALUE

Material carework takes many forms. It is fair to ask what is caring about disassembly, about taking things apart and pulling the pieces into new configurations, sacrificing the value of the whole for the value of the part, about foreclosing the prospect of new beginnings with old things. The care that humans show



Figure 6. Refitted and upcycled equipment from Khimzavod at the Nairian factory: distillery from old flasks (top left); distillery from old autoclave (top right); cauldron used for saponification (bottom left); Soviet vintage scale to weigh plants (bottom right). Photos by Lori Khatchadourian.

toward things with which they are locked in dependency can also be restorative, aimed at preserving things as they once were, and in turn producing new formations (Hodder 2012). I turn now to the extemporist activities of a former factory director, now private owner, whose trials of ruination consist not of extracting salvage value but of resisting the sale of his factory's assets to one day resume production with dormant and dying equipment.

In Yeghegnadzor, a city in Armenia's Vayots Dzor province, Hayk, the owner of a knitting factory, lives a life extempore dedicated to preserving his shuttered plant to one day liberate it from the twilight zone. Founded in 1978, the Yeghegnadzor Knitting Factory exemplifies the unbounded reach of the Soviet military-industrial complex. On the face of it, the factory specialized in children's knitwear

and undergarments, 80 percent of which were exported throughout the Soviet bloc. But, like so many Soviet concerns, it had a dual purpose. Alongside children's sweaters and underwear, the factory produced gloves and socks for the army. It was "a fundamental military enterprise," said Hayk. The production and distribution of gloves nicely exemplifies the workings of the Soviet economy. Each day, twenty tons of fabric for the gloves reached Yeghegnadzor from a factory in the Ural Mountains. Every third day, a twenty-ton container of gloves was shipped by train to a military facility in Moscow, where the gloves were redistributed to defense units across the country. According to Hayk, this was the only factory in the USSR that made gloves for the Ministry of Defense. The enterprise employed some 1,200 women in its main factory and three affiliate branches in nearby wool-producing villages. The factory continued to operate as a public enterprise through the dark years of the 1990s, when Hayk took to the forests to gather timber to heat it. By that point, workers were hand-knitting wool socks for Armenian forces in the first Nagorno-Karabakh war.

Five days after the factory's privatization in 1998, Hayk became embroiled in a legal dispute. Armenia's State Revenue Committee sued the company on charges of tax evasion, even though it had successfully filed for bankruptcy and had scarcely any debts. Five years later, the court decided in the company's favor, but the State Revenue Committee refused to accept the judgment. Tax authorities froze the factory's assets, imposed steep, arbitrary fines, and sequestered thirty machines. "They wanted to steal," Hayk said of the State Committee. "Take the machines and sell them in Iran." There were many more lawsuits and hundreds of court proceedings. For years, the factory lay dormant, its machines creeping toward obsolescence. Hayk spent more than two decades fighting for the future of the factory. He sold his home and barely managed to put his kids through college. "The word *court* was a synonym for *bribe*," he told me. "Tax authorities would just hand over money to judges, and the most illegal decisions would be made." The ordeal ended following Armenia's 2018 Velvet Revolution, a series of anti-government, non-violent protests that forced the resignation of Serzh Sargsyan as prime minister and led to sweeping anti-corruption efforts. A judge ruled that much of the State Revenue Committee's case was unfounded. All that remains is a reduced US\$10,000 debt. Hayk contests even this, and felt angry that he was not compensated for twenty years of lost time. He told me he intended to take the case to the European Court of Human Rights. But Hayk worried that time was not on his side, and if he didn't pay soon "they'll come and take my machines. Maybe in one month." His trial of ruination is as much a literal, legal trial as a personal struggle

against the demise of his machines and an embodied race against time as he, just as the Chemist, enters into advanced age.

As tax authorities held the factory hostage, its eventual revitalization became the focus of Hayk's life's work. The Yeghegnadzor Knitting Factory is a fossil of late-Soviet light industry, and emphatically not a ruin. To render it as such would be to discount the very potential vitality that sustains Hayk in his trials (see also [Middleton 2021](#)). As Hayk tells it, "For the most part, the Communists left, and since then, not a thing here has been touched." On the contrary, he has invested significant savings into preserving the factory's use-value, for instance installing a new roof so that the hibernating machines would not succumb to water damage, and regularly replacing broken windows. The machines may be rusty, antiquated, and dusty, he acknowledged, but they work, and could be put to use until he has the capital to buy new equipment. He has installed locks and comes to the factory "morning, noon, and night" to guard it. Hayk is deeply critical of the orgies of oligarchic plunder that defined the 1990s, which he says were orchestrated in part by powerful industrialist Telman Ter-Petrosyan, the brother of Armenia's first president. He witnessed events that many have recounted but that remain absent from the media archive of those years. He told me:



Figure 7. The Yeghegnadzor knitting factory. Photo by Lori Khatchadourian.

Yeghegnadzor is on the road between Yerevan and Iran, and we saw it with our own eyes, all day, all night, beginning in 1994, 1995. . . . I would watch them [Ter-Petrosyan's people] hauling such great machines that—being an engineer and understanding what they were—I would think, “if only just one of those machines were mine.” Out in the wide open! There were some machines that the Iranians didn't even put to use. Someone I know went to Iran, said there are all these Soviet machines piled up like a haystack in a desolate field near [unintelligible] Metro. They've been picked apart. There was gold, silver, mercury, valuable metals in those machines. They separate the steel, the cast iron, the colorful metals. They took the machines from Armenia for measly kopecks. The scrap metal they sell to Turkey or Pakistan for \$200, \$300 per ton.

For Hayk, the government-backed wholesale stripping of the country's assets and the fate of his factory, targeted by officials seeking to grab the salvage value of its knitting machines, are inseparable. Together they attest to intentionally destructive governance. Speaking of Armenia's three post-Soviet leaders, he said, “When independence and Levon Ter-Petrosyan came, they thought, let's see how quickly we can destroy this country. The sooner we destroy, the sooner we will build. They destroyed quickly, but they forgot all about building. Levon destroyed it; [Robert] Kocharyan ruined it; Serzh completely privatized it to himself.” Such searing resentment is unanimous among my interlocutors. Far from abetting the salvage economy, Hayk's trial has been to resist it. He wanted to put the machines and their operators back to work: “An Iranian came, wanting to buy one of my spinning machines. I said no. . . . If I can close the debt, I will rescue those thirty machines. If not . . .,” his voice trailed off. Hayk's deeply felt but tenuously founded dreams for those machines would seem to reflect what [Lauren Berlant \(2011, 21\)](#) calls “cruel optimism,” yet here Hayk maintains an attachment to a “problematic object” both already and not yet lost. The cruelty of Hayk's optimism is that it results from the broken promises of both liberal capitalism and socialism.

In the climate of hope that swept the country following the Velvet Revolution, Hayk seized the moment, extemporizing. Days after the revolution, he sent letters to the new prime minister, the director of the National Security Service, the minister of justice, and the human rights defender. Months later, he mobilized people from Yeghegnadzor to protest in the capital, demanding the reopening of the factory. Unlike most privatized enterprises, the knitting factory is an open joint-stock company. Former employees, “now grandmothers,” Hayk said with

fondness, retain shares in the business. “There are 309 owners of this privatized enterprise, 95 percent of whom are the women who worked here,” Hayk notes. Many in Yeghegnadzor feel invested in Hayk’s cause. He promises the return of three hundred jobs if the factory reopens, and speaks passionately about industry as the means toward national self-sufficiency. “We should make what we need to dress ourselves. . . . Did you see the words on the side of the building? One letter has fallen, but the rest are there. It says ‘glory to work.”” Suddenly reinventing himself as an activist, Hayk mobilized the community around the promise of wage labor.

But activism only made for his most recent act of extemporization. While Hayk waited for his factory, he decided to launch a new business venture: manufacturing oak wood barrels for wine and brandy production. The forests of his home province are rich in oak, the required wood for brandy’s aging, and he has the necessary technical skills. Hayk worked in a factory that made satellite parts before coming to the knitting factory. As scholars of improvisation have long recognized, extemporization entails “a union of some Ad Hockery with some know-how” and “the pitting of an acquired competence or skill against an unprogrammed opportunity” (Ryle 1976, 77). While the legal dispute stretched on, Hayk built a structure on the grounds of the knitting factory and assembled a stunning array of apparatuses to make barrels using machines otherwise destined for the foundry,



Figure 8. Assembled machines and oak barrels in Hayk’s workshop on the grounds of the Yeghegnadzor factory. Photos by Lori Khatchadourian.

as well as an assortment of other contraptions—a machine for shelling sunflower seeds that he will use to distill sunflower oil, a machine for pressing lumber waste into bricks that can be used as firewood, and so forth. “There is no useless metal,” he told me, “only useless people.” Here, the “industrialist ethos of work” so central to state socialism, and in many postsocialist contexts impossible to realize, remains the invigorating affective register, and moral failure belongs to those who do not exercise their creative potency (Rajković 2018, 49). The profits from the barrel business are invested in the upkeep of the decaying factory.

At some point, Hayk realized that his factory could appeal to socialist nostalgia and decided to try his hand at the “culturalization of industrial ruins” (Barndt 2010, 276), turning the suspended factory into an unofficial museum. On my first visit to the knitting factory, he gave me a guided tour, saying, “turn on your voice recorder and we’ll begin.” In the dusty building, Hayk paused to offer brief recitations about various objects: “Here is a Singer sewing machine made in Nazi Germany”; “here are locked workers’ safes—the owners died but I haven’t cut the locks”; “this machine is nearly one hundred years old and it still works”; “these are our gas masks, in case of chemical attack.” Hayk’s improvisational curatorial practice caters to the ruination tourist’s taste for the sensational, the bizarre, the authentic: “If someone was a spy in the Soviet Union, whether in Vladivostok or Kaliningrad, for sure they were wearing my gloves.” When we arrived at a room that stores wool socks made for the war effort, he offered me a pair as a souvenir. The tour culminated in the director’s office, where he had brought together an assemblage of high-impact artifacts into an improvised exhibition: Lenin’s portrait; a volume from Lenin’s collected works; Russian and Armenian typewriters; a gas mask; a Geiger counter; a device for identifying attack by mustard gas, phosgene, etc.; and an unfurled workers’ banner—the so-called transferable red banner (переходящее знамя)—awarded annually to factory collectives “for high performance in fulfilling the plan in a socialist competition.” On another table, samples of the factory’s products, including the spy gloves, were displayed with handwritten artifact labels. I asked Hayk how many visitors had come to the factory. “Many,” he replied, “hundreds, thousands.” He claimed that the site appears on online tourist itineraries “as a preserved Soviet enterprise,” but I haven’t been able to find it, and there is little indication that the factory functions as a museum (I was not shown a visitors’ log, nor is there a ticket booth, although Reddit and blog posts suggest paying Hayk ₴5,000 [US\$10] for individual tours and ₴10,000 [US\$20] for groups, cash only). To Hayk, “the factory is a museum now,” but as an unregistered heritage institution, it might be more accurate to call it a mu-



Figure 9. Display of Soviet artifacts in the director's office of the Yeghegnadzor Knitting Factory. Photo by Lori Khatchadourian.

seological extemporization, quite unlike projects elsewhere in postcommunist Europe that aestheticize industrial ruins (Barndt 2010; Oushakine 2019; Pusca 2010). Hayk seems to affirm Berlant's (2011, 2) point that optimism is cruel when "the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming."

It was in the director's office that I began to understand the relationship between Hayk's curatorial sensibility and the trial of ruination in which he is engaged. On the director's desk he had arrayed a seemingly incongruous assortment of objects: shoes worn by factory workers, the building's intercom, blank union cards, one of which he gave to me. These artifacts were perfectly commensurate with the room's other museological displays. But placed beside them were unrelated documents attesting to his business ventures and credentials, such as brochures advertising the oak barrels and certificates from trainings he attended in the United States and Europe. In other words, Hayk plays with the idiom of heritage tourism not only to generate revenue but also to attract investors for the revitalization of the knitting factory. Museological extemporization constitutes a business tactic deployed in response to the forces of ruination, legal and material. Hayk—quite like Khimik in offering me a 50 percent cut of any vodka I exported

to the United States—is poised to discover that any given visitor might be the one who joins him in this trial.

Before I departed, Hayk handed me a trilingual informational document reading, “Business Invitation to Armenia: ‘Taron’ OJSC invites partner-investors on mutually profitable terms for the production of textile clothes, handmade carpets, jams, juices, marmalades, teas, dried fruit, fruit vodka.” He asked me to give it to whomever I could in the United States. When I responded that, as a researcher, business remains outside my sphere of expertise, he seemed bewildered by the rigid box I was satisfied to inhabit and laughed in gentle reproach, as if to say, “Can’t you extemporize?”

TEMPORALITY AND MATERIALITY IN THE TRIALS OF RUINATION

Recent studies of the old, the ruined, the lost, or the failed often conjure nostalgia and other past-oriented affects as prevailing temporal postures. Nostalgia emerges as a dominant temporal and affective motif in the ruins of modernity when the livelihoods of those engaged in such memory work are not directly dependent on the remnants of their past-oriented imaginaries. For example, nostalgia for Fordism in postindustrial Detroit is possible because Detroit’s white suburbanites do not live precariously off the decaying factories they romanticize (Steinmetz 2010). “Secondhand nostalgia” is possible in some parts of the former USSR because the post-Soviet generation that is stirred and charmed by the power of Soviet remnants does not subsist off that very debris (Oushakine 2019). “Critical nostalgia” can be at play in New Orleans because the ruins that profoundly shape the city’s aesthetic sensibilities are not directly enlisted in everyday, individual struggles to discover economic value in them (Dawdy 2016). Nostalgia blooms in the temporal imagination of the distant ruins gazer, removed and detached from the precarity of loss (Huysen 2006).

Yet for those whose livelihoods are tethered to the remnants of decline and failure, other temporal dispositions exceed or even eclipse the nostalgic register, even if attachments to lost worlds also persist. Nostalgia for the past becomes inseparable from hopes for the future (Pelkmans 2013), or from once expected futures (Yarrow 2017; Finkelstein 2019). Threatened lifeways under conditions of decline require dwelling meaningfully in the “meantime” and “staying with the present” as a temporal-political tactic to forestall unwanted futures (Middleton 2021). For their part, Khimik and Hayk have little time for nostalgia, unless, as with Hayk’s museum, it can assist them in their trials. They thus alert us to an

alternative experience of time under conditions of ruination inflected not by a receding past, but by urgency and immediacy. The life extempore entails a relation to time that dwells in the present, encourages experimentation, and embraces the kind of spontaneity that prompted both Khimik and Hayk to invite me into business partnerships. The trials of ruination enlist them and others not into nostalgic practices, but into high-stakes, tactical maneuvers to revalue Soviet remnants in the here and now. As we saw with Hayk's museological extemporization, the capacity of Soviet artifacts to engender nostalgic sensations in their afterlife is not only a matter of affect, resonance, and subject formation (Oushakine 2019); it is also a performative asset—an economic resource in the trials to discover value from a declining material order. For people of the late-Soviet generation who live a life extempore, the time left to attain the good life is running out. Plans may not come to fruition in the years that remain. The vodka business may not come to pass, and the knitting factory may never be revived. Time threatens not only human lives but the life cycle of things as well: as time passes, decay accelerates. Hayk's machines will complete their fall into obsolescence, a decaying material order that will not wait for better times. And the finite material offerings of the factories on which Khimik depends are being depleted. If value is to be discovered from the ruins, now is the time to do it. Experientially, the immediate and future-oriented temporality of the trials of ruination is distinct from the endurance that shapes autonomous self-employment involving, say, recyclable garbage, where the valued resource is effectively unlimited (Millar 2018). Life extempore calls up a sense of improvisational urgency. It is not a life without regard for the past or the future, but one in which past and future imaginaries are overcome by constant creative adjustments in the present, and little time.

The senses in which extemporists live a life *ex tempore* are in fact multiple. Thus far, I have focused on their experience of time as running out, a condition that enjoins them into impromptu interactions with people and things. But in addition to this experiential extemporization, they are also *ex tempore* in an existential sense, displaced from both the time of the socialist state and the time of the capitalist market. The time of the socialist state was a prophesied, developmental temporality that moved inexorably along the path to noncapitalism through a multiplicity of related temporal modalities (Ssorin-Chaikov 2017). While socialist time had lost its ideological meaning as early as the 1950s, most of my interlocutors, including Hayk, served as leaders in their local *Komsomol* (the Soviet youth organization) and reproduced the utterances of late socialism (Yurchak 2006). Khimik

and Hayk reached adulthood on these performed promises of socialist time, only to be definitively cast out from that utopian vision in 1991.

Yet the time of the market has not provided refuge. Capitalist temporality, as Walter Benjamin and others teach us, is premised on the insistent valorization of the new, and on ruptures between past and present (Dawdy 2010)—a temporal ideology to which extemporists do not subscribe. The temporality of the global market renders Soviet objects anachronistic: things out of proper (i.e., present) time. But Hayk and the Chemist do not accept untimely matter as such; instead, they recognize the *persistence* of things—an endurance that hinges on their relations to other things (e.g., their use and exchange value) and not their relation to a discrete unit within a successive understanding of time (Lucas 2015). In the life extempore, the supposed obsolescence of a machinic order is not the end but the beginning of opportunity, a highly unorthodox posture in Armenia's neoliberal economy. In other words, Hayk and the Chemist are existentially *ex tempore* to the extent that they are outcasts of both socialist and capitalist time.

From this exteriority, in their trials they harness the vanishing habitus of socialist materiality to gain a foothold in the marketplace. All of the contraptions discussed above—Khimik's vodka distilleries and the refitted machines used at Nairian (both made from Khimzavod's remnants) and the assorted devices in Hayk's workshop used to finance the upkeep of the knitting factory—took shape in the frame of a Soviet conceptualization of human-thing relations. By Soviet materiality I am referring to what Alexey Golubev (2020, 27) calls vernacular Soviet "techno-utopianism," the ethos that "represented the Soviet person as a creative subject, a representative of the species *homo creativus*." Soviet inventor Genrikh Altshuller's theory of inventive problem solving (TRIZ) construed machines and materials as "'infinitely flexible,' as possessing a hidden potential for their more effective usage, and as fully subordinate to the human will" (Golubev 2020, 29). In the 1970s and 1980s, TRIZ emerged as an extremely popular movement and didactic system. It relates closely to another aspect of Soviet materiality, namely, the late Soviet do-it-yourself culture of extending the life cycle of material things for as long as conceivably possible, which was not only a state-supported response to commodity deficit but also a process of subjectivization centered on making things with one's own hands (Golubev and Smolyak 2013). In the do-it-yourself culture of late socialism, "any given thing could become anything else, and thus performed the function of raw material or assembly kit even if it was brand new" (Golubev 2020, 33). The late-Soviet practice of "working for yourself" (*rabota na sebia*), making and repairing things using factory resources (Смоляк 2014), belongs to this

same system of human-thing relations. For Hayk and Khimik's generation, inventing machines, making things with one's own hands (*rukodelie*), applying ingenuity, bending the material world to human will were essential not only to masculine self-fashioning but, as the discourse went, to socialist progress and the building of a communist future (Golubev 2020, 30).

These embodied practices of the Soviet proletariat, which were meant to create a socialist material order and realize a utopian vision, are now used to draw persistent Soviet matter out of the twilight zone and into relations of capital.³ They remain strongly inflected with an ethos of progress and morality. Hayk makes and sells oak barrels so that he can, one day, revive the knitting factory, because Armenians "should make what we need to dress ourselves." The scrap metal market is unscrupulous because "there is no useless metal." This moral residue of a system of subject-formation premised on making and using materials for as long as possible, and in as many ways as possible, sets the life extempore apart from the lives of those who tinker in the ruins of industrial capitalism (cf. Pine 2019).

It is helpful to consider this encounter of systems through reference to what Anna Tsing (2015, 63) has called "salvage," by which she means "taking advantage of value produced without capitalist controls" to expand capitalism's reach. Like the matsutake mushroom pickers of Tsing's study, Khimik and others draw on skills and habits of mind that are "simultaneously inside and outside capitalism" (Tsing 2015, 63). Yet an important difference obtains. In Tsing's (2015, 63) study, the agents of "salvage accumulation" are lead firms, looking to "amass capital without controlling the conditions under which commodities are produced." In contrast, in Armenia's ruins economy, it is the extemporist activities that drive the process of bringing Soviet salvage to capital.

This inversion affects the market and leaves its own mark. Consider Khimik's new trial over the glass tubing, which opened this essay. Success depends on whether the persistent remnants can stand up for substitution against global commodities, in this case quartz tubing from China. When we toured the backyard of his home in 2018, Khimik detailed his evasion of market prices through the procurement of goods from the twilight zone that he will resell: "I paid \$100 for this, but in a shop it would cost some €800. Do you see this machine? The glass alone is worth €500, but I gave only \$300 for it. I gave \$100 for this, but a new one in the store costs ₴1,200,000 [\$2,500]." In the ruins economy, the price of undead Soviet commodities has nothing to do with labor and investment, or even with supply in the secondhand market; rather, it depends on personal relations, faith in the persistence of matter, and a judgment concerning the upper threshold

of salvage value relative to the market value of new equivalents. Traders like Khimik harness never-untimely Soviet things to help businesses intercept global supply chains. They enter the market by disrupting it.

The inversion noted above also leaves a socialist residue, because the folding of Soviet materiality into capitalism produces an incomplete shift across different “regimes of value” (Appadurai 1986). The metamorphosis of Soviet things into capitalist commodities is not total. Suffice it to quote Serguei A. Oushakine’s (2014, 204) discussion of the Soviet commodity, drawing on Marx’s *Capital*:

In the situation of planned production and regulated prices and salaries, neither exchange-value (the commodity’s ability to generate different regimes of evaluation during its market circulation phase) nor even value (the aggregate expenditure of labor and ‘material constituents’) held any particular importance or interest. . . . The Soviet commodity made itself known first and foremost as a material thing—through its “sensuous characteristics” and, consequently, through its ability to meet or (more commonly) to fail the requirements of quality and functionality.

In the Soviet economy, use-value was paramount, not exchange value. Even as the remnants of socialist production become revalued within the logics of capital in a process akin to what Arjun Appadurai (1986, 16) calls “commodities by *diversion*,” this transformation remains somehow incomplete. The “sensuous characteristics” of objects still hold sway through the personal, bodily forms of labor required to realize their use-value. Persistent Soviet things do not permit reuse precisely as they are. Resurrection requires *rukodelie*, making things with one’s own hands, with all the attendant sensory pleasures (Widdis 2009). The resulting contraptions will be used to produce capitalist consumer goods, but they were never mass-produced through abstract labor on an assembly line. They acquire an insistent singularity (Kopytoff 1986). In fact, one person in particular takes credit for refitting and operating the autoclave used to produce beauty products at Nairian: Khimik’s son. He learned such *rukodelie* from his father. Unlike capitalist commodity relations, far from being concealed, the social origins of such improvisation are transparent because it requires idiosyncrasy and creativity embedded in social relations. In Tsing’s terms, when it comes to Soviet salvage, capital does not entirely control the conditions of revaluation. In the transfiguration into capitalist commodities of things once belonging to a planned economy, there is a socialist remainder.

CONCLUSION

This article has focused on post-Soviet Armenia's industrial twilight zone, a term that calls up a liminal ontological condition between use and abandonment, "a time of agony that is non-systemic but not fully archaeological either" (González-Ruibal 2019, 132). To investigate the twilight zone means to study "what happened after everything happened" (González-Ruibal 2019, 132). The privatized post-Soviet twilight zone offers new insights into both the possible forms of life in ruins and the temporal and material logics through which informal economic practices shape relations of capital. I introduced the concept of *trials of ruination* to refer to the struggles to unlock or forestall the salvage value of Soviet industrial matter that is decaying, becoming obsolete, and simply diminishing. The primary tactic in the trials of ruination is extemporization, here understood as condensing the temporality and materiality of the trials. *Life extempore* complicates the prevailing temporality of nostalgia that informs much writing on ruins, alerting us to an orientation to time grounded firmly in the present, marked by a sense of urgency as humans and nonhumans enter into senescence, requiring creativity and spontaneity, and existentially linked to a position of exteriority from dominant temporal ideologies of socialism and capitalism. From this marginal vantage, the life extempore calls on the conventions and ethics of socialist materiality to bring Soviet salvage to capital through minor but real disruptions of global supply chains and the refusal of capitalism's fetish of the new. A life extempore encompasses both an experiential sense of living for the moment and being short on time, and an existential sense of displacement from the temporal logics of socialism and capitalism. In the trials of ruination, socialist and capitalist materialities collide.

I made the case above that the life extempore is not reducible to precarity. Yet neither is it a life of freedom, like the one often associated with artistic improvisational practice. For all its creativity, extemporization is less empowering than forced by structural and material constraints. But to practitioners, securing gains within conditions of loss through considered inventiveness itself proves sustaining. To paraphrase Lydia Goehr's (2016, 5) analysis of Friedrich Nietzsche on improvisation, the life extempore is lived on a post-Soviet tightrope, "with and between joy and suffering, affirmation and doubt, experimentation and habit." As in all trials, during trials of ruination outcomes remain open-ended. The horizon of possibilities includes stasis, dystopian endings, and inventive reimaginations.

ABSTRACT

This essay attends to the temporal and material relations through which the former Soviet proletariat and former factory directors pull the remnants of the socialist factory into relations of capital. I introduce the concept of trials of ruination to refer to the struggles to discover value in old things, when the temporal and material logics of capital, and the waning life course of objects and humans, test the limits of those efforts. A life extempore is one in which the primary tactic for discovering value is perpetual extemporization, doing things one never planned or was trained to do. Life extempore alerts us to an orientation to time that is grounded firmly in the present, marked by a sense of urgency, requiring creativity and spontaneity, and existentially linked to a position of exteriority from dominant temporal ideologies of socialism and capitalism. This study focuses on the improvisational practices of two “extemporists”, and their efforts to revalue the persistent material world of Soviet industry. [ruins; postindustrial; value; temporality; materiality; post-Soviet; Armenia]

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

Հողվածում քննարկվում են այն ժամանակային և նյութական առնչակցությունները, որոնց միջոցով նախկին խորհրդային պրոլետարիատը և գործարանների նախկին տնօրենները կապիտալի հարաբերությունների մեջ են ներքաշում սոցիալիստական գործարանի մնացորդները: Ես առաջարկում եմ «փաստականացման փորձություն» (“trials of ruination”) կոնցեպտը, որն անդրադառնում է հին իրերի մեջ արժեք գտնելու համար պայքարին, երբ կապիտալի ժամանակային և նյութական տրամաբանությունը, ինչպես նաև առարկաների և մարդկանց կրճատվող կենսոնթացները փորձարկման են ենթարկում այդ ջանքերի սահմանները: «Extempore», այսինքն «հանպատրաստից» կյանքը այնպիսի մի վիճակ է, երբ արժեքի բացահայտման հիմնական մարտավարությունը հավերժական մի փորձարկում է, որի ընթացքում արվում են այնպիսի բաներ, որոնք երբեք չեն պլանավորվել կամ սովորական չեն համարվել: «Extempore»-կյանքը ժամանակային առումով միշտ վերաբերում է ներկային, նշանավորված է հրատապության զգացմամբ, պահանջում է ստեղծագործականություն ու ինքնարխություն և էքզիստենցիալ կերպով կապված է տարբեր ժամանակներում գերիշխող սոցիալիզմի և կապիտալիզմի գաղափարախոսություններից դուրս գտնվող դիրքավորման հետ: Այս ուսումնասիրությունը անդրադառնում է «extempore» կյանքով ապրող երկու անհատների իմպրովիզացիոն պրակտիկաներին և խորհրդային արդյունաբերության դիմակայող նյութականությունը վերարժևորելու նրանց ջանքերին: [ավերակներ; հետարդյունաբերական; արժեք; ժամանակայնություն; նյութականություն; հետխորհրդային; Հայաստան]

РЕЗЮМЕ

*В этой статье анализируются временные и материальные отношения, посредством которых бывший советский пролетариат и бывшие директора промышленных предприятий втягивают останки социалистических заводов и фабрик в отношения капитала. Я ввожу концепцию «испытания руинизацией», которая характеризует борьбу за обнаружение ценности старых вещей, в процессе которой временная и материальная логика капитала и сокращающиеся сроки жизни объектов и людей подвергают пределы этих усилий испытанию. Жизнь *extempore*, то есть экспромтом описывается как состояние, при котором основные тактики по обнаружению ценности представляют из себя непрерывный поиск и попытки делать вещи, которые никогда не делались раньше и никогда не были привычными. Жизнь *extempore* приводит нас к временной ориентации на настоящее, отмечена чувством срочности, требует изобретательности и спонтанности, а также в экзистенциальном смысле связана с позицией, которая всегда вне доминантных в то или иное время идеологий социализма и капитализма. Исследование сфокусировано на импровизационных практиках двух персонажей, живущих *extempore* и их усилиях по переоценке сохранившейся материальности Советского индустриального периода. [руины; пост-индустриальный; ценность; темпоральность; материальность; постсоветский; Армения]*

NOTES

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1. See *Oxford English Dictionary*.
2. Drastamat Isaryan (1994, 28) recounts an anecdote of the 1990s that captures the trade-off between independence and energy: “The country is not only independent of Russia, it’s also independent of gas, light, warm water, and heat.”
3. This transfer of socialist labor practices into capitalist production recalls the endurance of “socialist personhood” in the firm in privatized Poland (Dunn 2004).

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