CONDENSED WORD, DISPLACED FLESH
Freudian Typo
(Ghazaleh Avarzamani and Ali Ahadi)

11 June – 31 August 2025

'A debt is just the perversion of a promise … corrupted by both math and violence.'

– David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years*

The exhibition unfolds debt not as a financial anomaly but as a key element that forms the contemporary political economy of Western Christendom, imposed and made hegemonic globally. The exhibition highlights how historical systems of accumulation and coercion bind singular lives into perpetual debt, turning precarity into a universal human condition.

Departing from the English translation of *Chad Gadya*—an allegorical tale that operates on a chain of catastrophes and punishments after a little goat is bought for two *zuzim* (coins)—the exhibition invokes the illusionist tactics of capital, where all accumulation *is made* to appear as the *disappeared*. In turn, generations pay the debt they never caused. What vanishes is never capital, but the visibility of those made to repay it—and the ledger that never balances.

Visitors are invited into a 'Debterinary', a dreamlike multimedia installation resembling a veterinary, a tax office, a clinic, and even a gallery. It operates along the Freudian mechanisms of *condensation* and *displacement* that structure the logic of dreams: meanings are sometimes condensed into a single image, and sometimes displaced onto another that is seemingly separate yet psychically linked. At the heart of the dreamscape is a video where a cat—representing the first debtor who ate the goat in *Chad Gadya*—undergoes a surreal surgery only to find out that the doctors' real intention is to search for the two missing coins. When two coins cannot be found, visitors might question who is next on the operating table?

With references to finance, medicine, and classical English literature—particularly Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Moor of Venice (Othello)* where the emblematic Jewish and Moor figures are both subjects to the same system of prosecution—visitors encounter a series of bureaucratic posters, images, and sculptures shaped by the financial (moral) grammar of Western Christendom. Within this horizon, where debt and finance gave rise to the lexicon of guilt, sin, and redemption, the exhibition ponders how a shift in the way we imagine collective autonomy and individual agency can emerge through a rupture in the language of finance and morality.

BIOGRAPHIES

Ali Ahadi (born in Tehran, Iran) is an Iranian-Canadian Vancouver based artist. His practice spans site-specific installations, sculpture, photo and video-based works, writing and translation. In Ahadi's practice, *the work* is constituted through addressing art's problems of *presentation* and *representation, demonstration* and *monsteration*, and the entangled relations between aesthetics and the contingencies of abstraction. His proposed protocol of abstraction calls for what he terms a "monster": a triadic assemblage of incommensurable relations between the linguistic and the optical economies of the object, on the one hand, and the intervention of the *Visitor*— a linguistic conceptual persona devised by Ahadi—on the other.

His recent exhibitions include *Shit Yes Academy* at Ag Galerie (Tehran), *Alibaba Conundrum* at Griffin Art Projects (with Babak Golkar, Vancouver), as well as presentations at Milan Image Art (Italy), Tehran's 8th Sculpture Biennial (Iran), Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Grunt Gallery, Richmond Art Gallery, Access Gallery, and Satellite Gallery (Canada), FWAR (USA), and Azad Art Gallery (Iran).

He holds a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus on continental philosophy and aesthetics from the University of British Columbia. He currently teaches in the UBC's Department of Art History, Visual Art, and Theory, where he previously received his MFA in visual arts in 2012.

Ghazaleh Avarzamani (born in Tehran; lives and works between Toronto and London) works primarily in sculpture and installation. Avarzamani's practice addresses the unsettling social hierarchies, often invisibly in place. Through her practice, she explores the fallacies and inequities in our inherited knowledge. By creating visual narratives that simultaneously deconstruct and reconstruct time and space, she aims to reconfigure materials to highlight dysfunctionality and failure. She reveals the extraordinary about

the ordinary and seeks ways to disrupt the hegemonic systems of control.

Avarzamani holds an MFA from Central Saint Martins, London. Her work has been shown across a wide range of international venues, including the Dhaka Art Summit (2023), Aga Khan Museum (2021), MOCA Toronto (2021), Toronto Biennial (2022), Calgary Contemporary (2025), Rockefeller Foundation (2024), and Meet Factory (2023), among others.

Her work is in private and public collections, including the Art Gallery of Ontario, Google, Rockefeller Centre, Arsenal Contemporary, MOCA Toronto, TD Art Collection and Red Mansion.

INTERVIEW WITH FREUDIAN TYPO

Erin Li, Curator, Delfina Foundation: The project departed from a fascination with the allegorical tale of *Chad Gadya*. How did you then arrive at the central theme of the exhibition—debt as a key element that forms the contemporary political economy?

Freudian Typo: Yes, it's indeed a fascinating text—one that's circulated across different cultures and traditions. But perhaps most famously, it appears in the *Prague Haggadah* around 1590, written in Aramaic within a Hebrew manuscript, which sets forth the order of the Jewish Passover Seder. The text itself, however, is of an older Germanic origin, adapted from a medieval nursery rhyme—with the same characters in it—that translates roughly as *"The Lord Sends the Jackal Out,"* which itself is argued to trace back to a medieval French nursery rhyme. It has also served as a model for several other nursery rhymes, including the well-known *This is the House that Jack Built* and *The Old Woman and Her Pig*.

But what truly became our source of fascination with it was when we approached it through what Louis Althusser, the French structuralist philosopher, calls a *symptomatic reading*—a mode of reading that transcends surface interpretation and instead reads for absences, gaps, inconsistencies, or contradictions, symptomatising what the underlying ideological apparatus of the text suppresses from representation. In other words, it's a form of reading not for what a text openly says, but for what it refrains from saying—what it structurally excludes in order to maintain its ideological coherence.

Here, the story begins with a father who buys a goat for two *zuzim*—two coins. Then a cat eats the goat. A dog bites the cat. Then a stick beats the dog, fire burns the stick, and so on—each figure replacing or punishing the one before it for what they owe to the other. Eventually, the butcher is killed by the Angel of Debt, and finally, divine justice intervenes. But what remains, fascinatingly, concealed is—what happened to the two coins? The goat is gone early on, and nothing that follows seems to account for that original exchange. The stick can't redeem the coins. Neither can the fire, the water, or the butcher. Even when the divine steps in, there's no restoration—no mention of the capital lost. That absence doesn't feel merely narrative—it's ideological.

For us, *Chad Gadya*, as a text and not as a representative of any cultural particularity, became a parable about the disappearance of capital and debt. Each figure is caught in a chain of obligation, punished and justified through what it owes or is owed. And yet by the end, there's no clarity—no resolution about who owed what to whom, or whether the debt was ever settled. That unresolved logic—where the initial value seemingly disappears and debt circulates without anchorage—echoes what David Graeber describes as the "moral confusion" at the heart of debt: where obligations are endlessly redefined, moralized, and unequally enforced, not with the aim of resolution, but to sustain hierarchies and social control. It's the same typical trick of capital that's with us to this day of techno-capitalism: the two coins are still accumulating, yet the debt is still to be paid. So, this was the thread that brought us to the central question of the exhibition—Debt!

EL: Most artworks in the exhibition play with language, attempting a rupture in the language of finance and morality. Why do you place such importance on language in this project?

FT: You know, art historically, there's a great tradition of working with language—particularly from the late 20th century art practices onward, within the broader field of conceptual art. For instance, movements like the *Situationist International* and collectives such as *Art & Language*, which emerged here in the UK in the late 1960s, were crucial in shifting the focus, from representation to critique. But for us, language isn't just a legacy—it's an operational artistic material, allowing us to construct the very mode of abstraction that the exhibition functions through. The protocol of abstraction, at work here aims to engender disorganised, incommensurable relationships between the optical economy of what you see and the linguistic economy that you expect to be preset around what you see. In that sense, the exhibition departs quite sharply from the dominant and normative mode of abstraction in contemporary art, which tends to be purely visual. That form of abstraction—so often positioned in an obsession with body, sex, and identity—is, paradoxically, one of the most concrete currencies in today's postmodern art economy. Our approach, by contrast, treats language not just as a system of communication or predication, but as a carrier

of material and social relations—which includes, of course, the so-called language of art itself.

But coming back to the exhibition, when visitors enter the space, they'll find themselves in an environment that feels simultaneously bureaucratic and ambiguous. There are posters and displays that resemble the aesthetic and corporate logic of institutional sites—a waiting room in a veterinary clinic, a tax office like HMRC, maybe even an art gallery. But what sutures these disparate spaces together is the way language is used. You might encounter a poster that visually represents HMRC tax communication, but the language on it *Détourns* it to something closer to the theological lexicon of Western Christendom, or even Shakespearean monologues. Or another one might resemble an advert for a cat litter box in a veterinary clinic, but its instructional text unfolds in the grammar of finance, tax law, redemption, and punishment.

And that dissonance isn't just formalistic but through a body of *Détournements*[1] and *Hyperstitions*[2] it tends to be formalising something—it ties back to the exhibition's central concern: the entangled genealogy between the language of theology and morality in Western Christendom and the emergence of modern finance and debt. It's a relationship that hasn't disappeared—it structures our institutions, our communication, and our sense of obligation to this day. So, while the forms vary— whether bureaucratic, clinical, or devotional—the underlying reverberation across the entire space, structuring its visual and linguistic tensions, is Debt.

EL: You heavily referenced *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Moor of Venice (Othello)* in the exhibition. Could you explain how they tie to the other concepts and references in the exhibition?

FT: While we wouldn't say the referencing is heavy, it's certainly formative. Both *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Moor of Venice* serve as entry points into the juridical and racial grammars that still shape our present. Following Gil Anidjar, the Jew and the Moor—or, as he calls them, the enemy's two bodies—are inventions of Western Christendom, forged to define itself as a political nation-state and thereby sustain its political economy.

Importantly, these are English-language texts—texts that don't merely speak in English but work to install English as the language of hegemony. Just as Christianity is not one religion among others, but the system that determines what counts as religion and what as politics, the English language, too, is not one language among many, but the language

1.Meaning "rerouting, hijacking" in French, a technique developed in the 1950s by the Letterist International and later adapted by the Situationist International.
2. A term coined by Nick Land and Mark Fisher to describe how certain cultural ideas or narratives can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

that enforces the extant order of the world as is. So, our interest in these texts isn't to restage them, but to deconstruct them—to trace and explore the contemporary equivalence of this historical debt and the figure of the debtor, and how it becomes central in defining both the contemporary human and global geopolitics—and to us, the most emblematic and violent expression of the geopolitical case is unfolding today in Palestine, as a direct extension of the same theological-political grammar forged by Western Christendom. These texts help us map how moral, racial, and financial languages are historically entangled, and how that entanglement continues to govern the political economy of the institutional and affective landscapes we inhabit.

EL: The exhibition title, *Condensed Word, Displaced Flesh*, refers to Freudian theories. How did you decide on condensation and displacement as key strategies for constructing the installation and creating an oneiric atmosphere?

FT: Some key psychoanalytical concepts have long been deployed by many contemporary artists, art movements, and art critics to stress the mechanisms of meaning production—rendering obsolete the idea of "meaning" as something linear or fully controlled by the artist, and instead framing it as something formed through slippages, gaps, unconscious structures, external interventions of the *Visitor*, and so forth.

But that aside, condensation and displacement— two defence mechanisms that structure the logic of dreams—are drawn here to allude to the exhibition's seemingly disparate zones: a clinic, a tax office, a veterinary space, and an art gallery. While these environments feel fragmented on the surface, they could be conceived of as a set of *displacements* that are linked at a very fundamental and deeper level by a shared set of tensions or objects. Much like in a dream, meanings are not stable or literal—they're rerouted, compressed, veer off sideways, and re-emerge elsewhere. Understanding what's at work requires critical analysis that moves beyond their symbolic or manifest reality in order to be hit in the face by the underlying and latent truth they refrain from displaying. At the same time, the Word-Flesh part obviously references the Christian *"In the beginning was the Word… and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us"*—a well-known structure attesting to how language produces reality, not the other way around. This double structure—between psychoanalytic dream logic and Christian linguistic creation—became foundational for us, allowing the exhibition to operate in an oneiric, disjointed, yet ideologically and economically coherent space, where everything condenses and simultaneously *displaces* around a central, structuring object: Debt.

READING LIST

David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years*, Melville House Publishing, 2014.

Gil Anidjar, "The Enemy's Two Bodies (Political Theology Too)", *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy*, Stanford University Press, 2003.

Judith Butler, *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence.* Verso, 2004.

Judith Butler, *Frames of war: When is life grievable?* Verso, 2009.

Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.* Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton, 1978.

Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: 1959–1960.* Translated by Dennis Porter. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. New York: W. W. Norton, 1992.

Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, See Chapter VI, "The Dream-Work", Translated by James Strachey. New York: Basic Books. Originally published 1900, 2010.

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

Conversation
Friday, 13 June, 18:30–20:00
Conversation between Freudian Typo, Mohammad Salemy, and curator Erin Li

Guided tours
Wednesday, 9 July, 18:30–19:30
Guided tour by artist Ghazaleh Avarzamani

Wednesday, 23 July, 9:00–10:00
Breakfast and guided tour by curator Erin Li

Saturday, 9 August, 10:00–11:00
Breakfast and guided tour by artist
Ghazaleh Avarzamani

All events are free to attend, but booking is essential. Please visit our website or speak to a member of staff.

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Opening hours:
Tuesday to Sunday, 12:00 – 18:00

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