

Mediations

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Editors' Note

As this number of *Mediations* appears, the battle is well under way to frame discursively the current economic crisis. Is it a mere downturn, a discrete effect with identifiable causes — hapless borrowers, predatory lenders, lax overseers, greedy financiers, incompetent bureaucrats — strangely enough all already familiar to us as stock melodramatic figures? (These principals, it is true, all seem happy enough to play themselves on TV). Or is it rather the symptom of a systemic imbalance — of what the readers of this journal might prefer to call an inherent contradiction? For the moment it is nothing more or less than a rift in the smooth reproduction of society. What it will mean in the fullness of time — that is, in the retrospective gaze of historical narrative — is not something we can know; but nor is it something we can dispense with knowing. What the current crisis means (in other words, what it provisionally is for us — and therefore what it effectively is, what kind of openings and closings it represents, what kind of event it might then turn out to have been) is, at the moment, up for grabs. It seems likely that Keynesianism (or what the media call the “Left,” by which they mean competent neoliberalism combined with a nostalgia for social-democratic ideals) will walk away with a victory in the short term. Beyond that things get murkier. The struggle to name the crisis takes place not just between the Left and liberalism, but within the Left itself, and it is not our place here to attempt to decide among the various accounts of it, each of which carries with it its own prognosis and its own program. Nonetheless, it seems likely that the crisis is to be a long one — not in the customary sense of the prolonged downturn predicted by virtually everybody, but a crisis that will turn out to have extended into our past as well as our future; that is, a chronic imbalance that irrupts into historical time with increasing insistence. Whatever dire possibilities this entails, and these are profound, it also opens

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up a space in which to insist on the question of the sustainability of the system itself — a question which lurks as an anxiety beneath even the most officially confident rescue operations.

Meanwhile, the present is equally marked by the conspicuous absence of an organized Left, much less an organized proletariat. For the moment, nobody any longer believes that we have arrived at the end of history; but nor should we mistake the dissolution of a certain kind of “working-class politics” for the wholesale liquidation of class itself. The question of “political subjectivity” — of the mediations, be they institutions, ideas, or movements, that bind individuals to history, that open up spaces for the creation of new collectivities — is therefore an urgent one. Each contribution to this issue explores potentials for forms of political subjectivity that emerge from the productive limits — limits, that is, that are not to be thought as purely external and negative — of contemporary capitalism.

It is only fitting, then, that this issue should begin with Antonio Negri, whose contributions to what has been called (for better or for worse) “post-Marxism” remain incalculable. Originally presented as a talk at McMaster University in 2006, “The Labor of the Multitude and the Fabric of Biopolitics” presents us with a further elaboration of that conceptualization of the political familiar to us from Negri’s recent collaborations with Michael Hardt, *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2005). Here Negri revisits key concepts formulated by Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Giorgio Agamben, an engagement that leads to an historicization of the very concept of “biopolitics” that any future reading of Negri’s work will have to take into consideration. Examining a set of contradictions that Foucault’s work attempts to resolve, Negri conceives “biopower” as a dynamic function, suggesting that its transformation not only corresponds to the emergence of new productive forces under post-Fordism, but also immediately gives rise to new strategies of resistance. What this means, then, is that the theorization of subject formation (and subjection) that constitutes a hard core of poststructuralist thought also points to a locus of anti-capitalist politics (and modes of desubjection). One is reminded in reading Negri that the most powerful critics of the dialectic (beginning with Marx!) are themselves dialecticians. Here Negri draws our attention to the Marxian “watermark” of his own politics: the (dialectical) insight that capitalism produces its own gravediggers.

But while Negri’s conclusion might lead us to say that revolutionary potential today lies with the “multitude,” Mathias Nilges’s “The Anti-Anti-Oedipus: Representing Post-Fordist Subjectivity” (winner of the 2007 Michael Sprinker Prize, about which more below) suggests that nothing could be further from the truth. Like Negri, Nilges locates the development

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of a new logic of subjection in the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism; a transition, moreover, that he describes as the changeover from a centralized and strictly regulated mode of accumulation to the more global, deregulated, and flexible form we know today. For Nilges, nevertheless, Negri fails to distinguish between those forms of desubjectification that correspond to a rejection of Fordism, on one hand, and those that correspond to a flight from post-Fordism, on the other. This distinction proves to be critical precisely because postmodern theory, and Foucault’s work specifically, is revealed to be what Nilges calls “the ‘politico-philosophical expression of *Fordist* processes of desubjectification, processes that ultimately made the transition into post-Fordism possible.” The point, in other words, is not that postmodern theory and culture have been merely appropriated by the market. On the contrary, Nilges — who grounds his insights in the work of the French regulation school — insists that the transition to this new regime of accumulation (i.e., neoliberalism) would have been impossible without the concurrent development of a new mode of regulation, whose emphasis on decentered and fluid subjectivities not only facilitated the passage into post-Fordism, but more importantly corresponds to postmodernism itself. Much of his article is subsequently dedicated to showing, through analyses of contemporary culture, how the ascendancy of post-Fordism as the dominant socioeconomic structure — the emergence of postmodernity — signals therefore nothing other than the exhaustion of postmodernism as a political project rather than its realization. Postmodernism’s realization in postmodernity and its exhaustion as a liberatory project are in other words the same thing. At the same time, this movement gives rise to a new cultural logic marked by a nostalgia for not only Fordism but, when this nostalgia too sinks under the weight of its own contradictions, for a kind of “feral subjectivity.” In this way the vindication of dialectical critique that informs Nilges’s response to Negri ultimately becomes the point of departure for a powerful analysis of twentieth- and twenty-first-century cultural production.

From there, we turn to the failed state and the “long space” of imperialism, colonialism, and uneven development. In “The Failed State and the State of Failure,” Peter Hitchcock examines the proliferation of state collapse within the developing world following the dissolution of “actually existing socialism” in the 1990s. No doubt Marxism offers a means to comprehend the political conjunctures that culminated in the devastation of states like Somalia and Sudan; yet, Hitchcock reminds us that Marxist thought has long been marked by an inability to reconcile its critique of political economy with an analysis of state formations (or deformations). Hitchcock subsequently turns to the absence of any engagement with the State in *Capital* not in an attempt to square empirical phenomena (state failure) with

theoretical abstraction (political economy), but to demonstrate that the productive tension between these moments is ultimately capable of yielding a more complete understanding of each. The chiasmus invoked by the title, therefore, is in no way merely rhetorical, and instead points to impasses both within thought and in politics that are equally symptomatic of material transformations within the economic world system. For Hitchcock, then, the conceptual link that underwrites this chiasmus is provided by the rise in the organic composition of capital and the concomitant falling rate of profit that ultimately leads to those economic crises described in the first volume of *Capital*. There Marx observes that the general rate of profit falls as the organic composition of capital – a measure of changes in its technical composition and, therefore, productivity – rises. For this reason, Marx contends, crises are intrinsic to capitalism, which requires the development of those technologies that bring about increases in the levels of productivity but, nevertheless, drive the rate of profit down. Hitchcock subsequently offers a critique of the concept of the “failed state” as an ideology, which, eliding those structures and histories that have consigned the global south to the periphery of capitalist production, functions as a convenient justification for interventions of all stripes. At the same time, however, demystifying the notion of sovereignty alone is not enough, since, as he explains, sovereignty corresponds to objective circumstances within the world economy as well. Read in this way, the failed state is revealed to be an extension of the crisis in contemporary capitalism that renders whole populations and states superfluous within the worldwide system of commodity production. Superfluous, but for all that not nonexistent, and without, as his final sentence makes quite clear, romanticizing state failure, Hitchcock hints that the failed state too is a zone of creativity.

We next turn to Laura Hudson’s reflections on the role of the environmental and animal rights movements in contemporary politics. Responding to the skepticism with which the Marxist tradition has generally regarded these issues, Hudson’s contribution argues that the objectives of ecology and animal rights, far from being distractions from the social and economic concerns that underlie Marxist criticism, in fact contribute importantly to the latter. Significant commentary, to be sure, has been devoted to exploring the intersections between environmentalism and Marxism, while efforts to formulate possible linkages between the latter and animal rights have been scarce to say the least. Beginning with a critique of the weak essentialisms that typically inform deep ecology and animal rights alike, Hudson explains that the failure of these movements stems from the one-sidedness of their concepts, which paradoxically become more anthropocentric the more desperately they attempt to disavow their anthropocentrism. But capitalism

already tends to dissolve the distinction between human and animal, and here the emphasis is placed on the animalization of workers described in Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Needless to say, liberal democracy has always availed itself of humanism as a means of obscuring these very conditions. But it is precisely this belief in the singularity of human beings as citizens of the State that has been undermined by a certain account of sovereignty. Agamben’s understanding of “bare life” (*zōē*) reemerges at this point not as a mere theoretical linchpin, but as a marker of those sociopolitical changes that have resulted in a leveling of the ontological difference between the animal and the human. But the limits of Agamben’s analysis become conspicuous as soon as we realize that the power to undermine this distinction lies not with sovereignty, but with capitalism. Marx’s text, then, opens on to an account of human “species-being”: a form of self-consciousness whose radical potential lies in its negation of an unmediated relation to nature and in the idea that any substantial reconciliation with that nature is to be located in the overcoming of capitalism itself. If we understand animal rights in this way – as the desire for a not-yet-articulated concept of the human that points to a future utterly different from the present – then a possible confluence of this commitment and Marxism comes into view.

A similar evaluation of nascent forms of political subjectivity animates Brian Thill’s contribution, in which the examination of previously unexplored connections between Stokely Carmichael’s Black Power and Herbert Marcuse’s theory of liberation provides us with a reevaluation of the New Left. Dispensing with the nostalgia and oversimplifications that characterized our thinking about the 1960s, Thill highlights a set of limitations that characterizes the convergence of Marxism and the new social movements in the course of this period. Of particular importance to his account is the 1967 Congress of the Dialectics of Liberation. Staging exchanges between various commitments that would influence the shape of the New Left, the congress bears witness to what Thill describes as the beginnings of a dialogue between Black nationalism and the Frankfurt School. That these two positions have been considered incommensurable, if not antagonistic, is not surprising; the call to dismantle what Marcuse called the “affluent society” entailed a different set of exigencies than those that informed Carmichael’s militant anti-racism. And yet, the impasse between these two positions is potentially mediated here by their shared interest in the work of the nineteenth-century abolitionist Fredrick Douglass. For it is in Douglass’s conception of the rebellious slave, Thill argues, that both Marcuse and Carmichael discover a figuration of revolutionary subjectivity that we might understand as the negation of white racism and bourgeois conformism alike. Of course,

solutions that appear on the level of rhetoric are by no means transposable with those that emerge from the dynamic plane of history, and Thill's essay, which refuses facile conclusions, takes an unexpected turn when we discover that Marcuse and Carmichael share not so much a solution as a mistake. The figure of the slave in Marcuse and Carmichael performs a synecdochical function that now risks flattening the very real difference between the past and the present; a risk, moreover, that our own attempts to understand the New Left – and the 1960s more generally – must avoid at all costs.

Shifting focus, we turn to Pablo Castagno's "From Provinces to National Television: Celebrity Culture and Collective Recognition in the New Spain" (the 2005 Sprinker Prize winner). Castagno analyzes recent Spanish television in the light of changes in the economy that brought about profound shifts in Spanish social and political structures. Celebrated from both the right and the left of the Spanish political spectrum, the emergence in the 1990s of what economists have called the "New Spain" not only signaled a complete and welcomed integration into the networks of world capital, but served as evidence that the nation had succeeded in overcoming the forms of underdevelopment suffered under nearly four decades of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco. That "success," however, called for a new system of regulation that would precipitate wide-reaching transformations in Spanish culture, which, as Castagno's essay demonstrates, are nowhere more evident than in the production, distribution, and consumption of television programming. Turning to this particular form of social regulation, we encounter the familiar appropriations of popular culture carried out by the bourgeoisie in any number of national and historical contexts. The expropriation of Spanish popular culture, nevertheless, was submitted to a process of unparalleled intensification afforded by both the introduction of privatized broadcasting stations and the development of a new kind of cultural phenomenon: reality television. Engaging in close readings of television shows like *Gran hermano* (*Big Brother*) and *Operación triunfo* (*Fame Academy*), as well as interviews with individual viewers, Castagno's contribution reveals how the mobilization of fame and spectacle underlie the image of a "New Spain" in which everyone equally participates. And insofar as the recent crisis in the Spanish housing market as well as the influx of dispossessed African migrants reinforces the suspicion that such equality exists only within the realm of ideology, Castagno's intervention suggests that the "New Spain" was ideological in the classical Schwanian sense: nothing more than an illusion well-grounded in appearances.

We conclude with Joel Woller's investigation of working class culture, social movements, and politics in the United States, and of the role of collective memory in union activism during the Great Depression. This

period in American history, as is well known, was defined by an open and head-on conflict between capital and labor that would bear witness to the great struggles of the working class; that these struggles should today appear alien and strange to us signals not only the impasses constitutive of contemporary politics, but also the lack of any concept capable of mediating the relationship between that past and our present. For Woller, then, it is this particular mediation – this conceptual missing link, so to say – that collective memory provides. Turning to the efforts of the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee (SWOC), Woller analyzes the various ways in which organizers mobilized the history of labor unions in the course of the 1930s and 1940s. But what is striking about Woller's intervention is that "collective memory" is here not a positive link, forming the backbone of a kind of "Left (or Union or working-class) heritage." Rather, it functions negatively. It is significant that what is memorialized most powerfully is not success, but failure; not working-class accomplishments, but the destruction of a union and the end of an era of union politics: the violent repression of the 1892 Homestead Strike and its aftermath. Why? Past success is by definition the prehistory of the present, and celebration of past accomplishment is in this sense an endorsement of the status quo. But failure marks the history that didn't happen, the utopian possibility of a path foreclosed; more paradoxically put, failure points to the real history to which our own dismal present is the counterfactual alternative. In the commemorations of the Homestead Strike, we meet unexpected confirmation not of mainstream progressive historiography, but of the "weak messianism" of Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History."

A final word on the Michael Sprinker Prize, which, as we have noted, was awarded to two of the essays published in this issue. The Michael Sprinker Graduate Writing Competition was established to remember Michael Sprinker's commitment to Marxist intellectual work and to graduate teaching and students. The award recognizes an essay or dissertation chapter that engages with Marxist theory, scholarship, pedagogy, and/or activism. Submissions are judged by a committee composed of members of the Marxist Literary Group. The winner receives professional recognition and a prize of \$500. Traditionally the article is, after peer review, published in *Mediations*. The deadline for submission is usually in May. Full details on the 2009 competition will be posted soon on the MLG website: <http://www.mlg.eserver.org>.

Emilio Sauri and Nicholas Brown, for the *Mediations* editors.

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The Labor of the Multitude and the Fabric of Biopolitics

Antonio Negri

Translated by Sara Mayo and Peter Graefe with Mark Coté

Edited and Annotated by Mark Coté

Editor's Note

I had the pleasure of driving Toni Negri to the McMaster University campus for his brief stay as the Hooker Distinguished Visiting Professor. As contingency would have it, we approached the city from the east, since I had picked him up at Brock University. Anyone familiar with Hamilton knows that this necessitates driving past the heart of "Steeltown." Negri, in a driving practice true to his theoretical orientation, excitedly requested that we follow the route most proximal to the mills and smokestacks of Stelco and Dofasco. He asked many questions about the history of steelworkers' labor struggles, the composition of the labor force, its level and form of organization, and the role of heavy industry in the Canadian economy.

Negri's keen interest in the conditions of a quintessentially material form of industrial production provides a necessary counterpoint to the strong poststructuralist inflection of his lecture. After all, his stated focus was on the subjective, the cultural, and the creative as key modalities of labor under globalization. These contrapuntal elements bring us to the heart of Negri's project, wherein the conceptual deployments of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze act as articulated elements of his longstanding and ongoing commitment to Marxist theory and praxis. It is, of course, an open Marxism, iterable as necessitated by our historical moment. But then innovation, as

Antonio Negri visited McMaster University as the Hooker Distinguished Visiting Professor in 2006. This lecture was delivered on 18 April 2006. [Ed.]

opposed to orthodoxy, has been a hallmark of Negri's distinguished and sometimes incendiary career.

In the lecture that follows, Negri asks two basic questions. First, how can we understand the organization of labor under neoliberal globalization, where it has been anchored in the *bios*? Second, when and by which modalities does life itself enter into the field of power and become a central issue? In answering these questions, he offers an exciting reconceptualization of power (pace Foucault) that provides a unique and provocative lens through which to examine globalization in relation to the human condition. The purpose of this brief introduction will therefore be both to contextualize the work of Negri and to introduce key concepts used in the lecture, namely biopower-biopolitics and the crisis of measure.

Negri may be most familiar to some through his scholar-as-celebrity status achieved with the massive success of *Empire*.¹ In Italy, however, he has been producing important work since the 1960s. The autonomist Marxist tradition from which Negri emerged — historically called *operaismo* (workerism) in Italian — was distinguished by turning orthodox Marxism “on its head,” as it were. Its fundamental conceptual innovation was to reverse the dynamic of labor-capital power relations. Rather than beginning with capital's domination over labor, the autonomists — via Mario Tronti in the early 1960s — began with the struggles of labor. In short, this new model understood capitalist power as having a reactive dynamic, only ever responding to the potential, the practices, and the struggles of labor. Thus capitalist development proceeds through the rearticulation of existing social and productive forms of labor. Under such a model, questions about the composition of labor are of preeminent importance, particularly as they can reveal the weakest points of capitalist control.

Negri attained another kind of prominence in the 1970s. At that time, the Left in Italy was certainly the largest and most febrile in Europe.² It was also polyvalent, active both within representative democracy and on an extraparlimentary level. Throughout the 1970s, the Eurocommunism of Enrico Berlinguer's Italian Communist Party was tantalizingly close to gaining power, falling only four percent short of plurality behind the ruling Christian Democrats in 1976. The Party's institutional successes created a wider swath for more critical and open Left politics. Negri was a preeminent part of this tradition, long active in the more radical extraparlimentary Left, both as a revolutionary militant and as professor and head of the Institute of Political Science Department of the University of Padova. Clashes grew more constant, not only between the variegated radical Left and the Italian state but with the Italian Communist Party as well. Indeed, Negri's work from that time cannot be properly understood without recognizing that the antagonism

it expresses is directed as much against the Italian Communist Party as the state and capital. After the murder of Italian prime minister Aldo Moro in 1978 by the Red Brigades, the state went on the offensive with its net indiscriminately cast wide. Despite the lack of evidence, and the fact that Negri had been a vocal opponent of the Leninist-vanguardist Red Brigades, he was accused of being their theoretical wellspring.

He quickly fled to Paris, and while in exile there was invited by Louis Althusser to deliver a series of lectures at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, eventually transcribed as *Marx Beyond Marx*.³ Based on the *Grundrisse*, the lectures evinced not the despair of post-insurrectionary failure but a liberatory focus on making Marx more adequate to a historical moment in which post-Fordism was beginning to take flight through neoliberal globalization. As such, it signaled an expanded theoretical perspective that would lead Negri increasingly to Foucault, Deleuze, and the conceptual cornerstones of his Hooker lecture, which follows.

Negri identified a “crisis of measure” in the Marxist labor theory of value as *both* an emergent characteristic of global capital *and* a new path for radical political, social, and economic change. A key factor in the breakdown of a simple temporal measure of the productivity of labor is the radical transformation of the production process through information and communication technology. This facilitates the rise of “immaterial labor” and the “general intellect” as the dominant productive forces, as opposed to unmediated material labor.

What is innovative about the interpretation by Negri and other autonomists is that this is primarily a subjective process — hence the increasingly poststructuralist trajectory. Marx, in the *Grundrisse*, posited “general intellect” as accumulating in the fixed capital of machinery. However, the “subjective” reading of the autonomists situates this value in new laboring subjectivities, the technical, cultural, and linguistic knowledge that makes our high-tech economy possible. Such subjectivities become an immediate productive force. And, as autonomist Paolo Virno notes, “They are not units of measure, but rather are the measureless presupposition of heterogeneous operative possibilities.”⁴ The temporal disjunction provocatively situates immaterial labor beyond the commodity form, signaling a “scissor-like widening” of the gap between wage labor/exchange value and this new subjective productive force.

For Negri, such a force is diffused — albeit asymmetrically — in an individuated manner across society, and it expresses the “global potentiality which has within it that generalized social knowledge which is now an essential condition of production.”⁵ In short, this new “subjective” condition of labor is the liberatory potential of what Negri would later call the “multi-

tude.” Thus inscribed in this new power dynamic is the possibility of labor being not only antagonistic to capital but autonomous from — as opposed to within — capital.

Foucault’s biopower offers a new conceptual foundation. Here Negri helps make visible the strong lines of affinity between Foucault (and Deleuze) and autonomist Marxism that have been largely overlooked. What is taken from Foucault is a thoroughly reconfigured understanding of power. What it enables us to see with greater precision is the intertwining of life and power in myriad productive formations. Foucault identified biopower as a form emergent since the end of the eighteenth century in the wake of the inadequacies of sovereign and disciplinary power. This is a productive form of power relations that “manages” populations (not individual bodies) in a “preventive fashion” to maximize their productivity as opposed to, say, punishing them after the fact as with sovereign power (Foucault offers sexual health and early epidemiology as initial examples). As Foucault notes, “biopower uses populations like a machine for production, for the production of wealth, goods, and other individuals.”⁶

Thus far, biopower has been presented as a more sophisticated form of command, but such a unidimensional interpretation obscures the very aspects that make it so favored by autonomists. Maurizio Lazzarato emphasizes this in his important essay, “From Biopower to Biopolitics.” Lazzarato reminds us that Foucault distinguished constituted biopower (a *dispositif* of command, management, and domination) from biopolitical becoming (creativity and resistance).⁷ It is the latter biopolitical form that holds the capacity for freedom and transformation identified by Negri in his lecture. Power, be it in the labor-capital dyad or in biopolitical-biopower form, is always in an indissoluble linkage between resistance and control. The pursuit of its productive, creative, and liberatory potential is the real heart of Negri’s lecture, and it contributes to bringing about more desirable forms of globalization. [Ed.]

The Labor of the Multitude and the Fabric of Biopolitics

I would like to discuss the problem of the anchoring of the organization of labor — and of the new postmodern political field which results — in the *bios*. We will see in a moment when and according to which modalities life enters into the field of power and becomes an essential issue.

Let’s take as a starting point the Foucauldian definition of biopolitics. The term “biopolitics” indicates the manner in which power transforms itself in a certain period so it can govern not only individuals through a certain number of disciplinary procedures but also the set of living things constituted as “populations.” Biopolitics (through local biopowers) takes control of the management of health, hygiene, diet, fertility, sexuality, etcetera, as each of these different fields of intervention have become political issues. Biopolitics thus comes to be involved, slowly but surely, in all aspects of life, which later become the sites for deploying the policies of the welfare state: its development is in effect entirely taken up with the aim of a better management of the labor force. As Foucault says, “the discovery of population is, at the same time as the discovery of the individual and the trainable [*dressable*] body, the other major technological nucleus around which the political procedures of the West were transformed.”⁸ Biopolitics is thus based on principles which develop the technologies of capitalism and sovereignty: these are largely modified by evolving from a first form — disciplinary — to a second, which adds to disciplines the *dispositifs* of control.⁹ In effect, while discipline presented itself as an anatomo-policy of bodies and was applied essentially to individuals, biopolitics represents on the contrary a sort of grand “social medicine” that applies to the control of populations as a way to govern life. Life henceforth becomes part of the field of power.

The notion of biopolitics raises two problems. The first is tied to the contradiction that we find in Foucault himself: in the first texts where the term is used, it seems connected to what the Germans called in the nineteenth century the *Polizeiwissenschaft*, that is to say the maintenance of order and discipline through the growth of the State and its administrative organization. Later on, however, biopolitics seems on the contrary to signal the moment that the traditional nation/State dichotomy is overtaken by a political economy of life in general. And it is this second formulation that gives rise to the second problem: is it a question of thinking biopolitics as a set of biopowers? Or, to the extent that saying that power has invested life also signifies that life is a power, can we locate in life itself — that is to say, in labor and in language, but also in bodies, in desire, and in sexuality — the site of emergence of a counterpower, the site of a production of subjectivity that would present itself as a moment of desubjection (*désassujettissement*)? It is evident

that this concept of biopolitics cannot be understood solely on the basis of the conception that Foucault had about power itself. And power, for Foucault, is never a coherent, stable, unitary entity but a set of “power relations” that imply complex historical conditions and multiple effects: power is a field of powers. Consequently, when Foucault writes of power, it is never about describing a first or fundamental principle but rather about a set of correlations where practices, knowledge, and institutions are interwoven.

The concept of power becomes totally different — almost totally post-modern — in relation to this Platonic tradition that has been permanent and hegemonic in a good part of modern thought. The juridical models of sovereignty are thus subject to a political critique of the State that reveals first the circulation of power in the social, and consequently the variability of phenomena of subjection to which these models give rise: paradoxically, it is precisely in the complexity of this circulation that the processes of subjectification, resistance, and insubordination can be given.

If we take these different elements, the genesis of the concept of biopower should then be modified as a function of the conditions in which these elements have been given. We will now seek to privilege the transformation of work in the organization of labor: we have here the possibility of working out a periodization of the organization of labor in the industrial era that permits us to understand the particular importance of the passage from the disciplinary regime to the control regime. It is this passage that we can see, for instance, in the crisis of Fordism, at the moment where the Taylorist organization of labor no longer sufficed to discipline the social movements, as well as the Keynesian macroeconomic techniques that were no longer able to evaluate the measure of labor. Starting in the 1970s, this transformation (which will provoke in turn a redefinition of biopowers) was most clearly seen in the “central” countries of capitalist development. It is thus in following the rhythm of this modification that we can understand the problematization of the theme of production of subjectivity in Foucault and Deleuze by underlining that these two schools of thought have common ground. In Deleuze, for instance, the displacement of what he takes to be the genuine matrix of the production of subjects — no longer a network of power relations extending throughout society but rather a dynamic center and a predisposition to subjectification — seems completely essential. From this point of view, when we speak of the themes of discipline and control and of the definition of power which follows, Deleuze does not limit himself to an interpretation of Foucault but integrates labor and develops his fundamental intuitions.

Once we have established that what we mean by biopolitics is a non-static, non-hypostatized process, a function of a moving history connected to

a long process that brings the requirement of productivity to the center of the *dispositifs* of power, it is precisely that history that must be understood.

The danger to avoid is to read at the heart of biopolitics a sort of positivist vitalism (and/or materialist: in effect we could very well find ourselves before what Marx called “a sad materialism”). This is what we find, for instance, in certain recent interpretations of the political centrality of life. These interpretations develop a reading of biopolitics that creates a sort of confused, dangerous, even destructive magma: a tendency which refers much more to a thanatopolitics, a politics of death, than to a genuine political affirmation of life. This slippage toward thanatopolitics is in reality permitted and fed by a great ambiguity that we lend to the word “life” itself: under the cover of a biopolitical reflection, we slide in reality to a biological and naturalistic understanding of life which takes away all its political power. We have thus reduced it to, at best, a set of flesh and bones. We would have to ask at what point a Heideggerian ontology doesn’t find in this move from the *zōē* to *bios* an essential and tragic resource.¹⁰

Furthermore, the fundamental specificity of biopolitics in Foucault — the very form of the relationship between power and life — which immediately becomes, in Deleuze as in Foucault, the space for producing a free subjectivity was given an indiscriminately vitalistic interpretation. But as we well know, vitalism is a dirty beast! When it begins to emerge in the seventeenth century, after the crisis of Renaissance thought and from the interior of modern thought itself, it paralyzes the contradictions of the world and of society to the extent that it considers them as impossible to resolve. Or more exactly: it brings them to define the very essence of the world starting from the postulate of their invariability. In the confusion of vitalism, there is no capacity for discernment. Life and death are locked in a relation of great ambiguity: the war between individuals becomes essential, the co-presence of an aggressive animal and a society exasperated by the market — what we call the dynamic of possessive individualism — is presented as a natural norm, that is to say, precisely as *life*.

Vitalism is thus always a reactionary philosophy, while the notion of *bios*, as it is presented in the biopolitical analysis of Foucault and Deleuze, is something entirely different: it was chosen in order to rupture this frame of mind. For us who follow their lead, biopolitics is not a return to origins, a manner of re-embedding thought in nature: it is on the contrary the attempt to construct thought starting from ways of life (whether individual or collective), to remove thought (and reflection on the world) from artificiality — understood as the refusal of any natural foundation — and from the power of subjectification. Biopolitics is not an enigma, nor a set of such inextricable fuzzy relations that the only way out seems to be the immunization of life: it

is on the contrary the recovered terrain of all political thought, to the extent that it is crossed by the power of processes of subjectification.

From this point of view, the idea of a biopolitics accompanies in an essential manner the passage to the postmodern — if we understand by this a historical moment where power relations are permanently interrupted by the resistance of the subjects to which they apply. If life has no “outside,” if it must by consequence be totally lived “inside,” its dynamic can only be one of power. Thanatopolitics is neither an internal alternative nor an ambiguity of biopolitics but its exact opposite: an authoritarianism transcendent, a *dispositif* of corruption.

To finish this point, let me rapidly mention two last things regarding thanatopolitics. It is no accident that it was particularly affirmed in the experiences that are sometimes called “revolutionary conservatism” (let us think for example of a figure such as Ernest Jünger), that is to say, a type of thought where individualist and vitalistic anarchism functioned as a genuine foreshadowing of Nazi thought. We can think today of what is meant by the act of a kamikaze: if we make an abstraction of the suffering and desperation that leads to such choices — suffering and desperation that are absolutely political — we are then again face-to-face with the suicidal reduction of the *bios* to the *zōē* which suffices to remove all biopolitical power from the act that one commits (notwithstanding the judgment that we may have on this act).

It is important to note the type of methodological approach that biopolitics necessitates. It is only by confronting the problem from a constitutive (genealogical) point of view that we can construct an effective biopolitical discourse. This discourse must be founded on a series of *dispositifs* that have a subjective origin. We are perfectly aware that the concept of *dispositif*, as it appears in Foucault and in Deleuze, is used by the two philosophers as a group of homogeneous practices and strategies that characterize a state of power in a given era. We thus speak of *dispositifs* of control or of normative *dispositifs*. But to the extent to which the biopolitical problematization is ambiguous, because it is at the same time the exertion of power over life and the powerful and excessive reaction of life to power, it has seemed to us that the notion of *dispositif* should assume the same ambiguity: the *dispositif* could equally well be the name of a strategy of resistance.

When we speak of “*dispositif*,” we want therefore to speak here of a type of genealogical thought whose development includes the movement of desires and reasonings: we thus subjectify the power relations that cross the world, society, institutional determinations, and individual practices.

However, this line of argument, which was that of Foucault and Deleuze, finds a profound anchoring in the non-teleological philosophies that have

preceded *Historismus* or that have developed in parallel to this.¹¹ These schools of thought, from Georg Simmel to Walter Benjamin, have brought with them theoretical formulations that permitted, through the analysis of forms of life, the reconstruction of the ontological weave of culture and society. From this point of view, and beyond our legitimate insistence on the origins of the concept of biopolitics in French poststructuralist thought, it would be equally interesting to find in German thought at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries an epistemological development of the same type. The fundamental figure would clearly be Nietzsche: we would have in effect to analyze all the Nietzschean efforts to destroy positivist and vitalist teleology and the manner in which we find in this same effort the project of a genealogy of morals. The genealogy of morals is simultaneously an ensemble of subjectification processes and the space of a materialist teleology that both accepts the risk of projectuality and recognizes the finiteness of its own subjective source. This is what we have chosen to call, many years later, and following a postmodern reinvestment of Spinozist thought, a “dystopia.”

It is therefore possible to push the analysis of biopolitics as it was in the liberal and mercantile era — and the resistance to it — toward the location of the functions it takes, once removed from modernity, in the context of the “real subsumption of society under capital” [to paraphrase Marx — Ed.]. When we speak of real subsumption of society under capital (that is to say, how capitalism is actually developing), we mean the mercantilization of life, the disappearance of use value and the colonization of forms of life by capital, but we also mean the construction of resistance inside this new horizon. Once again, one of the specificities of postmodernity is this character of reversibility that profoundly marks the phenomena which are present: all domination is also always resistance. On this point, one must underline the surprising convergence of certain theoretical experiences within Western or postcolonial Marxism (we can think here obviously of Italian *operaismo* or certain Indian culturalist schools) and the philosophical positions formulated by French poststructuralism. We will come back to this.

In addition, we have already insisted on the importance of “real subsumption,” to the extent that one must consider it as the essential phenomenon around which the passage from the modern to the postmodern has occurred. But this transition’s fundamental element seems also to be the generalization of resistance on each of the nodes that make up the great weave of real subsumption of society under capital. This discovery of resistance as a general phenomenon, as a paradoxical opening inside each of the links of power, as a multiform *dispositif* of subjective production, is precisely what comprises the postmodern affirmation.

Biopolitics is therefore a contradictory context of/within life. By its very definition, it represents the extension of the economic and political contradiction over the entire social fabric, but it also represents the emergence of the singularization of resistances that permanently cut across it.

What do we mean exactly by “production of subjectivity”? Here we’d like our analysis to go beyond the anthropological definition assumed in Foucault as in Deleuze. What seems important in this perspective is in effect the historical (also productive) concreteness of the constitution of the subject. The subject is productive: the production of subjectivity is thus a subjectivity that produces. Let us insist at present on the fact that the cause, the motor of this production of subjectivity, is found inside power relations, which is to say in the complex set of relationships that are nonetheless always traversed by a desire for life. However, to the extent that this desire for life signifies the emergence of a resistance to power, it is this resistance that becomes the genuine motor of production of subjectivity.

Some have judged this definition of the production of subjectivity to be unsatisfactory because it makes the mistake of reintroducing a sort of new dialectic: power includes resistance, resistance could even feed power. And, on another level, subjectivity would be productive; the productivity of resistances could even construct subjectivity. It is not difficult to stymie this argument: it only suffices to return to the concept of resistance we spoke of earlier, that is to say, the productive link that binds the concept of resistance to subjectivity and immediately determines the singularities in their antagonism to biopower. We do not understand very well why all allusion to antagonism must be necessarily reduced to a return to the dialectic. If this is truly a singularity that acts, the relationship that develops with power can in no case give rise to a moment of synthesis, of excess, of *Aufhebung* — in sum, the negation of negation in the Hegelian manner. On the contrary, what we’re dealing with is absolutely a-teleological: singularity and resistance become exposed to risk, to the possibility of failure, but the production of subjectivity nonetheless always has the possibility — better still, the power — to give itself as an expression of surplus. The production of subjectivity can therefore not be reabsorbed into the heart of dialectical processes that seek to reconstitute the totality of the productive movement under transcendental forms. Certain effects of “reabsorption” are of course inevitable (as underlined by the particularly subtle schools of modern sociological thought such as Luc Boltanski and Richard Sennett), but it has to do in all cases with unpredictable phenomena, ones that go in all directions and never give rise to consequences that can be determined in advance. As we will insist again shortly, when it is obliged to pass from the exercise of government to the practice of governance, the machine of power reveals itself incapable of

running its own mechanical dimension in a unilateral and necessary manner. Any attempt to reabsorb subjective productions can try to block new ways of life, but it will only immediately solicit other resistances, other surpluses. This becomes the only machine that we recognize in the function of post-modern societies and politics: a machine that is paradoxically not reducible to the mechanics of power.

We could object that politics and statism have always proceeded according to a logic which, in the heart of capitalism, would give to power relations the Leviathanian figure of a unilateral negotiator and resolver of problems: that is precisely what power consists of. In the eighteenth century, theories of the “raison d’État” included not only the arts of violence but also the arts of mediation. When we move the theme of power into the context of biopolitical relations, what appears — and what is new — is exactly opposed to this capacity of neutralization or immunization. It is in effect the emergence of rupture that forms alongside the production of subjectivity — the intensity of this surplus is its defining characteristic.

Two words on this concept of surplus — or, as we have sometimes called it, the notion of excessiveness. This idea was born inside a new analysis of the organization of labor, a moment at which value comes from the cognitive and immaterial product of a creative action, and when it escapes at the same time from the law of labor value (if we understand this in a strictly objective and economistic manner). The same idea is found at a different level in an ontological dissymmetry that exists between the functioning of biopower and the power of biopolitical resistance: where power is always measurable (and where the idea of the measure and the gap are in fact precise instruments of discipline and control) or power is on the contrary the non-measurable, the pure expression of non-reducible differences.

At a third level, one must be attentive to what is happening in State theories: the surplus is always described as a production of power — it takes, for example, the face of the “state of exception.”¹² Yet this idea is inconsistent, even grotesque: the state of exception can only be defined on the inside of the relationship that links power and resistance in an indissoluble manner. State power is never absolute; it only represents itself as absolute, it offers a panorama of absoluteness. But it will always be made up of a complex set of relations that include resistance to what it is. It is not by chance if, in the theories of dictatorships that exist in Roman law — that is to say, in those of the state of exception — the dictatorship can only exist during brief periods. As Machiavelli noted, this temporal limitation cannot be referred to as a constitutional guarantee but to a reasoning in terms of efficiency. Consequently, the state of exception, even if it is in force for short periods, is

unacceptable for free spirits and can thus only be valued as a desperate recourse in an equally desperate situation.

Finally, we find it grotesque that theories of totalitarianism (be they thought up by dictators themselves or, later on, by certain figures of contemporary political science, in particular during the cold war) make of it a version of power where all resistance is excluded. If totalitarianisms have existed — and if their sinister political practices continue to haunt our memories — the so-called absolute totality of their power is a mystifying idea that is long overdue for critical examination.

We must finally insist on one fundamental element: there is a sort of Marxist watermark that is found in all critiques of univocal conceptions of power — even if these, paradoxically, were produced in Marx's name. Capitalist power, according to what was put in evidence by the current critiques we have just mentioned, is always a relationship. Constant capital is confronted with variable capital, capitalist power is confronted with the resistance of labor power. It is this tension that produces the development of the economy and history. It is true that “official” Marxism locked labor power and variable capital inside relations that were objectively prefigured by the laws of the economy. But it is precisely this prefiguration having the value of necessity — more closely resembling the Heideggerian conception of technique than the liberation desire of proletarians — which certain Marxists, starting in 1968, began to break into pieces. This is the point of theoretical convergence between the *operaismo* of Laboratory Italy in the 1970s, schools of Indian postcolonial thought, and the analysis of power formulated by Foucault and Deleuze.

Let us return to the link between subjectivity and social labor. As we have said, labor possesses genuinely new dimensions. The first remarkable thing is without a doubt the transformation undergone by the temporal dimension in the postmodern modification of productive structures. In the Fordist era, temporality was measured according to the law of labor value: consequently it concerned an abstract, quantitative, analytic temporality, which, because it was opposed to living labor time, arrived at the composition of the productive value of capital. As it is described by Marx, capitalist production represents the synthesis of the living creativity of labor and of the exploitive structures organized by fixed capital and its temporal laws of productivity. In the era of post-Fordism, on the contrary, temporality is no longer — nor totally — enclosed within the structures of constant capital: as we have seen, intellectual, immaterial, and affective production (which characterizes post-Fordist labor) reveals a surplus. An abstract temporality — that is to say, the temporal *measure* of labor — is incapable of understanding the creative energy of labor itself.

On the inside of the new figure of the capitalist relation, the surplus permits the creation of spaces of self-valorization that cannot be entirely reabsorbed by capital: in the best case, it is only recuperated by a sort of permanent “pursuit-race” of this mass of autonomous labor — or, more exactly, of this multitude of productive singularities. The constitution of capitalist temporality (that is to say, capitalist power) can therefore no longer be acquired in a dialectical manner: the production of goods is always followed by the subjectivities that oppose it, under the form of a virtually antagonistic *dispositif* that comes to frustrate any capitalist synthesis of the process. The Foucauldian distinctions between regimes of power and regimes of subjectivity are therefore totally reinvested inside this new reality of capitalist organization; they are represented by the scission between capitalist time/value and the singular valorization of labor power.

We must thus return to an essential problem that we have already quickly mentioned: the problem of the simultaneous measure of capital's labor and time. If we start from the idea that living labor is the constituent cause and motor — material or immaterial — of all forms of development, if we think that the production of subjectivity is the fundamental element that permits us to escape the dialectic of biopower and to construct, on the contrary, a fabric of biopolitics to complete the passage from a simple disciplinary regime to a regime that equally integrates the control dimension and permits at the same time the emergence of powerful and common insurgencies, then the theme of measure (that is to say, of the quantified rationality of valorization) becomes central once again. Yet it only becomes central in a paradoxical manner because all the measures that capital wanted to discipline and control henceforth become evasive.

Without a doubt, it will be necessary to one day open a new field of research so we can understand if the thematic of measure can be proposed once again today on a terrain of social production, according to new forms and modalities that will have to be defined. In that case, the ontological rupture that we have located between living labor and constant capital will have to be considered as the presupposition of any analysis. The fact is that the surplus of living labor in relation to constant capital presents itself as production “beyond measure” — that is to say, as “outside” quantitative measurement — and it is in this that the difficulty forever reappears. Rather it is a production that goes *beyond* the idea of measure itself, that is to say, it ceases in reality to be defined as a negative passing of the limits of measurement to become simply — in an absolutely affirmative and positive manner — the power of living labor. This is how it becomes possible to foresee at least tendentially the end of exploitation. And it is without a doubt what Foucault and Deleuze allude to when they speak of the process of subjectification.

We have thus arrived at the edge of a new definition of capital as crisis — a capitalist relation which, from the point of view of constant capital, seems from now on totally parasitic; we have also arrived at the center of what is perhaps the possibility of a recomposition of antagonisms that engage with both the production of subjectivity and the expression of living labor.

We started by attempting to close in on the terms of biopower, biopolitics, discipline, and control. It seems now essential to address the question of multitude.

In effect, all our analyses constitute in reality this presupposition of the multitude. Let us therefore propose, as a point of provisional support that we will have to reformulate and modify, the following definition. The concept of multitude is derived from the relationship between a constitutive form (that of singularity, of invention, of risk, to which all the transformation of labor and the new measure of time has brought us) and a practice of power (the destructive tendency of value/labor that capital is today obliged to put in effect). But while capital was in the past capable of reducing the multiplicity of singularities to something close to the organic and unitary — a class, a people, a mass, a set — this process has today failed intimately: it no longer works. The multitude should thus be necessarily thought of as a disorganized, differential, and powerful multiplicity. But this could be the subject of another lecture.

I thank you.

Notes

¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000). [Ed.]

² There are three excellent sources for an overview of the Italian autonomist Marxist movement. S. Lotringer and Christian Marazzi's *Italy: Autonomia—Post-Political Politics* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1980) has contributions from core members of the movement and was written in the wake of the state crackdown. Steve Wright's *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002) offers a comprehensive historical overview. Finally, Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno's *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996) is a collection of essays that both assess the tradition of autonomist thought and propose future directions. [Ed.]

³ Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* (New York: Autonomedia, 1989). [Ed.]

⁴ Paolo Virno, "Notes on the General Intellect," *Marxism Beyond Marxism*, ed. Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino, and Rebecca E. Karl (New York: Routledge, 1996) 269. [Ed.]

⁵ Antonio Negri, "Archaeology and Project: The Mass Worker and the Social Worker," *Revolution Retrieved: Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis, and New Social Subjects (1967–1983)* (London: Red Notes, 1988) 224. [Ed.]

⁶ Michel Foucault, "Les mailles du pouvoir," *Dits et écrits, t. 2* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994) 1012. [Ed.]

⁷ Maurizio Lazzarato, "From Biopower to Biopolitics," *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2002): 112–25. [Ed.]

⁸ Foucault, "Les mailles" 1012.

⁹ The *dispositif* is an important concept developed by Foucault that has been literally "lost in translation" and thus largely overlooked by English-language interlocutors. Most prominently, it was used by Foucault in *Histoire de la sexualité, tome 1: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) as the "dispositif de sexualité." Inconsistently translated as "apparatus," "arrangement," or "deployment," the *dispositif* is a methodological frame for understanding power. A *dispositif* is both discursive and non-discursive. Foucault describes it thusly: "[It is] firstly, a resolutely heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions — in short, the said as much as the unsaid" (299). Thus *dispositifs* are always in the middle of things, comprising a complex "system of relations" of discursive and non-discursive elements. We can see that the *dispositif* brings together heterogeneous elements that have distinct registers: from the *materiality* of institutions, to the *regulation* of juridical processes, to the *expression* of what elsewhere might be called ideology, and finally to the *techniques* and *practices* of particular subjectivities. There is a complex composition to these distinct elements; yet this heterogeneity, in part, is designed to go beyond the reductive schema of an all-determining mode of production. This shift to more complex causal relations reflects Foucault's inexorable turn to seeing power as diffused, decentralized, and arranged in microphysical relations. Methodologically, this means not just examining each element of this heterogeneous composition but focusing on the effects of a given dispositive — in terms of what we can say, see, or be. [Ed.]

¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben (*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen [Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1998]) revived the terms *zoē* and *bios* from Greek antiquity where they were key conceptual markers distinguishing "natural life" (*zoē*) and "political life" (*bios*) — the former refers to the home as the sphere of influence and the latter the polis.

For Negri, *bios* expresses a dynamic of power — particularly in biopolitical form — which cannot be contained by older forms of sovereign power. In turn, this reveals the limits of such constituted power and necessitates the permanent turn to

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the “state of exception.” Here Negri is expanding on key insights made by Maurizio Lazzarato (“From Biopower”), a contemporary autonomist theorist who made important contributions to a more critical and political deployment of Foucauldian biopower. He notes, “The introduction of the *zoē* into the sphere of the polis is, for both Agamben and Foucault, the decisive event of modernity; it marks a radical transformation of the political and philosophical categories of classical thought. But is this impossibility of distinguishing between *zoē* and *bios*, between man as a living being and man as a political subject, the product of the action of sovereign power or the result of the action of new forces over which power has ‘no control’? Agamben’s response is very ambiguous and it oscillates continuously between these two alternatives. Foucault’s response is entirely different: biopolitics is the form of government taken by a new dynamic of forces that, in conjunction, express power relations that the classical world could not have known. [Ed.]

¹¹ *Historismus* is a German variant of Historicism initiated by Leopold von Ranke in the nineteenth century. It is of relevance to Negri as it was an early methodological break with “universal history” and instead emphasized the particularities of different historical periods and their unique conditions of possibility. This “relativism” was also a central characteristic of the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce. [Ed.]

¹² Carl Schmitt was a German political theorist who was active in the Nazi Party, attractive therein no doubt because he postulated that the actions of sovereign power are never limited by the laws of the state. In other words, sovereign power has the permanent option of transgressing its own internal regulations, and at any time it can negate the rights of citizens through the “state of exception.”

What was a virtuous and functional insight for fascists takes on unintended consequences when critically deployed, most notably by Agamben. The “state of exception” is turned on its head, as it were, and presented as the manifest limit to safeguarding political rights and life under sovereign power. Agamben, who has long focused on the relationship between sovereign power and marginalized political subjectivities, uses the “state of exception” as the permanent model for our historical moment, as seen in everything from Guantanamo Bay to the refugee camp.

Negri has had a longstanding interest in Agamben’s work and wrote an important review of *State of Exception* for the Italian paper *Il Manifesto*, which has been translated as “The Ripe Fruit of Redemption,” trans. Arianna Bové, *Generation Online*, 2003, <<http://www.generation-online.org/t/negriagamben.htm>>. [Ed.]

Mathias Nilges. "The Anti-Anti-Oedipus: Representing Post-Fordist Subjectivity." *Mediations* 23.2 (Spring 2008) 26-69.
www.mediationsjournal.org/the-anti-anti-oedipus.

The Anti-Anti-Oedipus: Representing Post-Fordist Subjectivity

Mathias Nilges

Me, I knew my dad for about six years, but I don't remember anything. My dad, he starts a new family in a new town about every six years. This isn't so much like a family as it's like he sets up a franchise.

What you see at fight club is a generation of men raised by women.¹

Chuck Palahniuk
Fight Club (1996)

Yet in the midst of all these healthy movements of disgust and revulsion, indeed, to the very sound of windows breaking and old furniture being thrown out, we have begun in the last few years to witness phenomena of a very different order, phenomena that suggest the return to and reestablishment of all kinds of old things, rather than their wholesale liquidation.

Fredric Jameson
A Singular Modernity (2002)²

One of the central assertions of Marxist political economy is the rejection of the existence of economic equilibria. Instead, we should understand capitalism as a mode of production that operates on contradictions, containing tendencies toward change, instability, and crisis that periodically necessitate a radical restructuring of the logic of the capitalist mode of production. It is precisely this notion of classical Marxism that the economic regulation school takes seriously.³ Since capitalism always moves toward crisis, the

regulation approach suggests that we can arrive at a fuller understanding of the historical development of capitalism as a heterogeneous structure by transcending analytical approaches that remain singularly focused on economic laws and structures. The writings of the French Regulation School hence emphasize the centrality of the social component of capitalism. The social networks that surround the economic structure of a mode of production fulfill a vital function insofar as they create the social basis for and in turn replicate the conditions of the mode of production. Simply put, capitalism as a crisis-prone structure requires the support of its social dimension in order to regulate itself and produce moments of relative stability. An analysis of capitalism, the regulation approach thus argues, should focus on both capitalism's economic structure (the Regime of Accumulation, hereafter ROA) as well as its accompanying social dimension (the Mode of Regulation, hereafter MOR). This extended model of Marxist political economy presents an invaluable basis for cultural analysis, since it assigns culture a vital function in the dialectical interaction between ROA and MOR, producing and contesting those ideological structures and social forms that both stabilize and ultimately transcend different periods in the history of capitalism. This essay consequently constitutes a beginning exploration of contemporary culture based on this theoretical model. Specifically, I shall explore the consequences of the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism for contemporary cultural production. Since the transition to a new economic structure requires a new MOR, that is, new forms of subjectivity and social forms, we can gain valuable insights into the sites of contestation between capitalist structure and its social dimension by examining the ways in which culture represents post-Fordist subjectivity.

Before entering into the analysis of cultural production, however, it seems necessary to establish the terms and basic definition of the analytical model that will inform this inquiry. As indicated above, the model of the regulation approach forms a valuable basis for cultural analysis, since it allows us to understand culture not simply as a mirror of social reality. Rather, culture occupies an active position and is an instrumental part of the ways in which capitalism resolves moments of crisis. Expanding the model of the regulation approach for our purposes, we can locate culture in relation to both social and material dimension in the following manner:

$$\text{ROA} \leftrightarrow \text{Culture} \leftrightarrow \text{MOR}$$

This means the following: a given economic structure (ROA) requires the support of (and is regulated by) its social dimension (MOR). This MOR is produced in the terrain of culture. Culture itself is therefore located at the

heart of the dialectical relationship between "the economic" (ROA) and "the social" (MOR). Culture is the terrain in which new attitudes, norms, conventions, and desires (and, of course, forms of subjectivity) are produced, contested, disseminated, and buried. Always necessarily heterogeneous and filled with contradictions between residual and emergent forces that surround a temporarily stable socioeconomic structure, culture is the arena of historical progress and the arena in which crises of capitalism meet sociopolitical structures in struggle, ultimately superseding former ROAs and MORs. Changes in the ways in which we narrativize knowledge and culturally represent structures of feeling must therefore always be interpreted in relation to the dialectical relationship between ROA and MOR within which cultural narratives and cultural forms assume a productive function.

To understand fully the ways in which capitalism supersedes a moment of structural crisis, we need to examine the ways in which the social dimension contributes to and ultimately facilitates the transition into a new ROA. Michel Aglietta summarizes the project of the Regulation School as follows:

We intend to show, therefore, how the regulation of capitalism must be interpreted as a . . . social creation. This theoretical position will enable us to conceive crises as *ruptures* in the continuous reproduction of social relations, to see why periods of crisis are periods of . . . intense social creation, and to understand why the resolution of a crisis always involves an irreversible transformation in the mode of production.⁴

If we then examine, for example, the crisis that necessitated the departure from Fordism, as its centralized, standardized, and strictly regulated mode of accumulation proved itself, beginning in the 1960s, to be increasingly unfit for the production of surplus value, we quickly realize the ways in which postmodernism (postmodern culture as well as postmodern theory) played an instrumental role in managing this moment of crisis. The forms of subjectivity (decentered, post-national, post-geographical) and the social forms and norms (pluralism, diversity, productive chaos, boundary-blurring) postmodern theory and culture advocate reveal themselves from this perspective as fundamentally important to the development of a new MOR that supports post-Fordism, the now dominant capitalist structure.⁵

By "post-Fordism" I therefore refer not just to the new, deregulated mechanisms of production and distribution. Rather, I use post-Fordism as an umbrella term describing both the contemporary ROA and MOR, uniting terms such as globalization, deregulation, flexible accumulation, neoliberalism, and multicultural capitalism, which are all facets of the larger structure

of post-Fordism. An analysis of the transition from Fordism into post-Fordism ultimately also has significant consequences for our understanding of the history of cultural production since the 1960s, the point at which Fordism had passed its height and began to experience a significant moment of crisis. The understanding of the dialectical function culture occupies as a concrete mediation between the economic (ROA) and the social (MOR) presented above indicates a necessary periodizing distinction between postmodernism and what I call post-Fordist culture. The intricacies of this periodization clearly transcend the limits of this particular project. Suffice it to say at this point that we should understand postmodernism as the culture of Fordism in crisis. Postmodernism exhausts itself at the moment at which Fordism is effectively superseded and post-Fordism has become the dominant socioeconomic structure. After the exhaustion of postmodernism we witness the emergence of radically different cultural narratives and forms that mark the transition into post-Fordist culture. It is at this point that the project postmodern theorists and authors hoped to be liberatory reveals itself not only as the very logic post-Fordism rests upon but also, and possibly even more significantly, as central to the supersession of Fordism and the resolution of a severe crisis within capitalism by generating what we now recognize as post-Fordism's MOR.⁶

If, then, we understand post-Fordism as the period in which Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's anti-Oedipus, the personification of the postmodern sociopolitical project, has developed from what was considered to be a liberating philosophical and cultural concept into what revealed itself to be the ideal form of subjectivity supporting a new, deregulated, arguably even rhizomatic socioeconomic structure, we need to ask what the response to this development is. Looking at cultural representations of post-Fordist subjectivity can provide us with insight into the psychological and political consequences of the realization that postmodern subjectivity has revealed itself to have always already been post-Fordist subjectivity. Not surprisingly, as we shall see, contemporary representations of such forms of subjectivity differ greatly from the ways in which early postmodernism represented decentered subjectivity and the anti-Oedipus. Marked by anxiety and loss, narratives of post-Fordist subjectivity seem to point toward a distinct moment of crisis between the post-Fordist ROA and MOR. Simply put, life in post-Fordism is frequently represented as not very enjoyable. Since we are essentially dealing with a large-scale transformation in the socioeconomic structure that leaves behind Fordism's paternalistic logic (structurally as well as socially) and a transition into a post-Fordist structure in which we face a radically new form of standardization that in opposition to Fordism could be described as the "standardization of difference," it is not surprising that the

figure of the father occupies a central role in culturally representing the effects of structural anti-Oedipalism.⁷ In post-Fordist culture, as we will see, the schizo is no longer a character out for a happy stroll. Instead, the schizo is frequently represented as the characteristic subject of post-Fordism, angrily roaming the world, an orphaned, involuntary nomad in search of his lost father.⁸

The Schizo's Angry Stroll: Capitalism and Schizophrenia

The recognition of the functionality of postmodernism in general and of decentered subjectivity in particular in the context of post-Fordism has given rise to a moment in cultural production that is characterized by negative representations of the social and psychological consequences of post-Fordism's need for a radically restructured, often perplexingly complex and unstable MOR. What is it that makes deregulated subjectivity not enjoyable, what is our basis for evaluating subjectivity, and how does this basis interact with the demands of post-Fordism? The anti-Oedipus has not surprisingly (given the nature of the above-described socioeconomic transition) become one of the most dominant cultural narratives used to represent post-Fordism's anti-paternalistic, decentered, and deregulated structural and social logic. However, in contradistinction to early postmodernism, the anti-Oedipus no longer functions as a symbol of liberation from centrally repressive structures. Instead, the anti-Oedipus has become associated with the very reasons for which post-Fordist subjectivity is increasingly perceived as unpleasant and alienating in previously unknown forms. The anti-Oedipus has been replaced by the anti-anti-Oedipus.

To illustrate this, let us first turn to *The Sopranos*, one of the most critically acclaimed TV dramas in recent years.⁹ The show famously represents a situation of increasing social instability through the father narrative. In *The Sopranos* a crisis in the socioeconomic structure is represented via the narrative of the existential crisis of an Italian-American mob boss Tony Soprano, a Fordist stock character in U.S. culture, traditionally depicted as ruling over and productively stabilizing the "family," an alternative Fordist economic system. The general plot of the show revolves around Tony Soprano's attempt to cope with the impossible task of acting as the central patriarch of his (economic) family. As Fordist father, the mob boss is expected to be able to keep the "family" together and under control, utilizing centralized repression to guarantee the productivity of the mob family as an economic system. The law of the father of the mob family hence clearly illustrates the relationship between paternalism and surplus production in the Fordist MOR, in which a centralized set of economic, social, and moral rules

in relation to which the subject must orient himself guarantees productivity. In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* this logic famously finds expression in the common exclamation "Oh my Ford!" that illustrates the (ideo)logical and functional connection between the Fordist father, the religious/heavenly father, and the father of the family.¹⁰

The plot of *The Sopranos*, however, revolves around Tony Soprano's struggle with this Fordist role, which no longer seems to be accessible to him. Constantly lamenting the loss of the "good old values" of organized crime that used to structure the "business," Tony Soprano's existential struggle is essentially the struggle with the anti-Oedipal structure of post-Fordism. The "traditional values" (in other words, the MOR) that used to stabilize the mob family as a centrally organized, Fordist structure are now threatened by the influences of global capitalism, represented by the struggle between the Italian-American mob and various international forms of organized crime (which presents itself, to Tony Soprano's great frustration, increasingly as deregulated, globalized crime). Quintessentially strong, powerful, and productively ruthless mafia patriarchs of Fordism such as Al Capone who were able to develop a parallel economy to Fordist capitalism have in contemporary cultural representation been superseded by impotent, Prozac-dependent, and anxiety-ridden mob bosses who struggle in vain to keep the family together. Tony Soprano inherits a role that no longer exists. The result of being confronted with these systemic changes is Tony Soprano's intense feeling of irreparable loss and insecurity that famously drives the show and contributes to the consolidation of the narrative of the weak or absent father as the dominant social allegory of post-Fordism. Furthermore, the structural disappearance of the Fordist Italian American mob father is logically paralleled by the growing popularity of the mafia narrative in contemporary U.S. culture. The necessary reframing of the contemporary mob narrative produces and in turn thrives on the nostalgia for a lost, stable, and pleasant past. Even the horrific violence upon which organized crime is founded can in this scenario not only be redeemed but even be justified (if not comically glorified), as it "at least" operated upon a stable, centrally located set of rules and norms that structured the business and the family, and that endowed each necessary killing with a purpose resulting from economic necessity. In other words, mob killings are a means of policing the boundaries and stabilizing the constitution of the Fordist MOR. Once again, it is the father who nostalgically signals Fordist stability and whose loss, weakness, or absence allegorizes the chaos of post-Fordist deregulation.

For the purposes of our inquiry, one of the most interesting literary explorations of the struggle with post-Fordist subjectivity and the emerging nostalgic desiring structures is Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*. The beginning

pages of *Fight Club* introduce the reader to what will form the motor of the novel's plot, namely the narrator's intense feelings of depression and existential anxiety. In parallel fashion, the reader is introduced to the reason for the narrator's depression. Post-Fordist society as the narrator finds it is marked by rampant consumerism, the ultimate logic and end of which is disposability (regarding commodities proper as well as the human being as commodity), substituting trash and lack of permanence for stable teleological narratives.

[C]rying is right at hand in the smothering dark, closed inside someone else, when you see how everything you can ever accomplish will end up as trash. Anything you're ever proud of will be thrown away. . . . It's easy to cry when you realize that everyone you love will reject you or die.¹¹

Stressing the nonexistence of teleological life narratives and forms of subjection and the impossibility of leaving behind something of enduring permanence (in other words, signaling the disappearance of structures of paternal lineage), the passage also introduces what will become the second level of the narrator's struggle against contemporary U.S. society: the perception of this society as inherently post-social. Society in *Fight Club* is represented as fragmented into isolated, bourgeois individuals.¹² Commodity exchange and the relationships between commodities become the sole determination of processes of subjection within the post-Fordist MOR. The central trauma of *Fight Club*'s narrator regarding the post-Fordist condition seems to be a general, initially not clearly defined sense of loss and lack.

The narrator works as a recall coordinator for a major automobile company, a job that further amplifies the perception of society as marked by the utter absence of a social bond, the reification of human relationships and the radical alienation of individual subjects. The relationships between subjects take on the form of mere numerical values in a mathematical equation, as becomes clear in a passage that describes the rationale of the narrator's job. He examines car accidents that have occurred as a result of mistakes in the manufacturing process.

[Y]ou take the population of vehicles in the field (A) and multiply it by the probable rate of failure (B), then multiply the result by the average cost of an out-of-court settlement (C). A times B times C equals X. This is what it will cost if we don't initiate a recall. If X is greater than the cost of a recall, we recall the cars and no one gets hurt. If X is less than the cost of a recall, then we don't recall.¹³

Marked by the necessary and functional dehumanization of others, his job does not produce compassion for the people he has to transform into abstractions. Instead, the horror of the situation lies for the narrator in his own function in this process. His job description corresponds to the function of the new “invisible” worker in the post-Fordist service and management economy. The narrator does his job well as long as he remains completely invisible, when he can avoid a recall and negative publicity. This form of labor makes social isolation a vital part of his job description, an impression that is amplified by the fact that the narrator remains unnamed. The narrator’s social isolation also extends to his private life, which mostly consists of outfitting his condo with new furniture (the “IKEA nesting instinct”). Interpersonal contact in the private sphere is limited to what the narrator in an analogy to airplane food and utensils describes as “single-use friends.”¹⁴ As a result of his interaction with post-Fordism, the narrator develops a form of insomnia that seemingly can only be relieved by being able to enjoy a “real experience.” As everyday life in its absence of social interaction appears to the narrator to be simulated (“a copy of a copy of a copy”), the insomnia resulting from this experience can only be cured by actual social interaction.¹⁵

The narrator consequently attempts to locate such “real” social interaction in support groups for the terminally ill, and memorably in a support group for men with testicular cancer, which introduces the logical connection between post-Fordism and what is perceived to be a crisis of masculinity resulting from the anti-Oedipal structure of contemporary culture. This strategy of attending support-group meetings introduces the twofold logic underlying the narrator’s psychological problem: a social situation that is marked by the complete absence of an operating dialectic troubles, in Hegelian terms, the process of formulating a conception of oneself as a self. Already at this point we can see the beginning stages of a problematic logical connection between an anti-dialectical and an anti-Oedipal situation characteristic of contemporary cultural production. The perception of the alienating effect of ultimate difference between bourgeois individuals in post-Fordism potentially gives rise to both the critique of capitalism and the critique of anti-Oedipalism. But here, the search for “real” social interaction for the sake of formulating a functional form of subjectivity and the development of (self-)consciousness (the dialectic) becomes attached to the search for paternalistic/Oedipal relationships. This solution, however, is logically and politically clearly problematic. Suffice it to suggest at this point that post-Fordist subjectivity is represented as unpleasant precisely because it is inherently anti-dialectical. The impression of anti-Oedipal instability is connected to the absence of functional dialectical structures that offer the

potential for actual dialectical articulations of identity and self-consciousness.

“Self-Consciousness,” Hegel writes, “exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged.”¹⁶ The process of developing self-consciousness, of developing a sense of oneself as a self, requires the subject to recognize and to simultaneously be recognized by an “other” (subject). Developing a functional sense of self in a situation of social isolation (ultimate bourgeois individualism in utterly reified consumer capitalism) thus appears increasingly impossible, since subjection as a dialectical process is moved forward by mutual feedback between two subjects. Through an act of negation that sublates the prior state of consciousness that was marked by pure “being-for-self,” hence by supplementing the consciousness of “being-for-others,” the subject is able, through struggle or engagement with an other, to “survive its own supersession” and develop a functional sense of self.¹⁷

Fight Club’s narrator quickly determines that it is this lack of a dialectical struggle with an other that results not only in his insomnia but in his general dissatisfaction with post-Fordist subjectivity. Especially in the context of anti-Oedipal post-Fordism, the deregulated socioeconomic structure complicates such a dialectical process. The plot of the novel is thus driven by the narrator’s attempt to locate a situation in which a dialectical exchange between equal subjects allows him to develop a functional sense of self. The narrator develops various strategies for re-creating a substitute for the lost dialectic, such as attending the aforementioned support groups, which, he realizes, are ultimately not able to solve his problem. His insomnia returns as soon as Marla Singer begins to visit the same support groups the narrator frequents. Since she ironically also begins to visit the testicular cancer support group, Marla can easily be identified by the narrator as a “liar” and a “fake.” Problematically, however, the narrator has to engage in what is one of the few instances of a sign of a functioning dialectical movement that provides the narrator with some truth about himself: “with her watching, I’m a liar. . . . In this moment, Marla’s lie reflects my lie, and all I can see are lies. In the middle of all their truth.”¹⁸ The truth the narrator has to realize is that he, like Marla, visits the support groups purely to receive support without being willing to offer support in return. The narrator’s attempt to solve his problem by parasitically frequenting support groups inevitably fails and reminds us of Hegel’s insistence that recognition only has meaning when it is exchanged in a situation of equal power.¹⁹

After the failure of his first attempt to solve his problem, the narrator (with the help of his schizophrenic hallucination Tyler Durden) develops a new solution. The narrator founds fight club, a forum in which subjects that

suffer from the same form of social isolation and existential anxiety can engage in bloody fistfights that appear as brutally literal interpretations of a dialectical struggle. Yet, it is obvious that physical violence between two men does not quite correspond to the dialectical formulation of consciousness. Fight club, as well as its gradually developing political component “Project Mayhem,” are therefore characterized by clearly logically flawed attempts to solve the problems posed by post-Fordism. This in turn complicates readings of *Fight Club* that describe it as “a provocative anti-capitalist cultural artifact.”²⁰ Such readings miss the elements that actually form the primary focus of the narrative as well as the contradictions out of which the narrator’s depression actually arises. To be sure, the narrator struggles with consumer capitalism. However, the problem the narrator truly attempts to resolve is the transition into post-Fordist subjectivity that requires the departure from Fordist, Oedipal, centered subjectivity. The narrator’s problem is not repression by consumer capitalism but the ungratifying, hollow “freedom” it offers. In other words, the narrator does not struggle with repression (be that capitalist or otherwise) but with the absence of repression. This absence of repression finds its metaphorical expression in the figure of the absent father. The novel’s famous nihilism is thus not an expression of resignation facing a hegemonic structure of centrally regulating capitalism but rather arises out of the experience of post-Fordist capitalism, which operates without the centralized, repressive structures that were the hallmark of the Fordist MOR.

If the struggle against a centralized system of repression, often represented by a father-like, authoritarian figure standing in for the whole of capitalism, marks the literature of Fordism (proletarian literature being a clear example), we must conclude that the literature of post-Fordism is characterized precisely by the struggle with the experience of the *absence* of such an authoritarian figure representing a centralized mechanism of determination. As post-Fordism transitions into an economic logic of increasing deregulation and pluralism, leaving behind marginalization and repression via overt segregation and standardization, the “freedom” that is produced out of this system is increasingly perceived as a new form of unfreedom, since it is functionally opposed to dialectical processes of forming self-consciousness. As indicated in the epigraph to this essay taken from *Fight Club*, the narrator’s central psychological trauma is the absence of his father, who turned fathering into “franchising” and hence was unable to provide a stable family structure that would have been able to provide the narrator with guidance and a paternalistic “center” with which to dialectically struggle. Accordingly, Tyler Durden’s greatest wish is to fight his own father.²¹

The father becomes the symbol of the possibility of articulating one’s existence in relation to a centralized structure of rules and norms (through struggle), a center that is increasingly erased under post-Fordism. Tyler Durden, leader and father substitute for the men in fight club (he invents the rules of the club and implements the “law of the father”), summarizes the existential dilemma of the post-Fordist subject as follows: “If you’re male and you’re Christian and living in America, your father is your model for God. And if you never knew your father, if your father bails out or dies or is never at home, what do you believe about God? . . . If you could be either God’s worst enemy or nothing, which would you choose?”²² To this the narrator adds, remarking that this is all “Durden dogma” (and as such corresponds to centralized paternalistic logic), “we are God’s middle children, according to Tyler Durden, with no special place in history and no special attention. Unless we get God’s attention, we have no hope of damnation or redemption. Which is worse, hell or nothing? Only if we’re caught and punished can we be saved.”²³ If resistance to capitalism under Fordism meant equating capitalism’s repression with damnation and the act of resisting it with promising salvation, the understanding of salvation under post-Fordism has radically changed. As post-Fordist capitalism itself stands opposed to unproductive centralized mechanisms of repression, the psychological struggle as represented in *Fight Club* is transformed into the desperate desire to recover a *pre*-post-Fordist repressive structure against which one can rebel and by which one can be judged.²⁴ The (negative or positive) outcome of the ideological resistance to capitalism proper is thus only a secondary concern. The narrator’s primary concern is the rejection of the anti-Oedipal element within post-Fordist capitalism.

At this point it appears prudent to pause for a moment and establish a clear definition of the central terminology involved in this examination, particularly of the concept of subjection/subjectivity. In his article on biopolitics and the labor of the multitude, also featured in this edition of *Mediations*, Antonio Negri presents a slightly different interpretation of subjectivity in postmodernity than the one I argue for in this essay. Attempting to clear what he sees as the often misunderstood concept of biopolitics from its false association with biological and naturalistic determinisms, Negri also argues for the significance of the concept of biopolitics as a “contradictory context of/within life” that highlights the existence of resistance as a “general phenomenon” in postmodernity. For Negri, biopolitics is a concept that points toward the “multiform *dispositif* of subjective production” that constitutes the very essence of what he calls the “postmodern affirmation.” I fully agree with Negri’s rehabilitated use of the concept of biopolitics, which must, in the function Negri correctly attributes to it, take on a central role in

the examination of immaterial labor (which, as I argue elsewhere, requires us to stress the non-naturalistic function of biopower to the degree that we can extend the examination of biopower in times of cognitive capitalism to the structural realm of what one could almost more accurately call *cogito-* or *cerebropower*). Yet, not just because of my argument regarding the need to historically differentiate between postmodernism and postmodernity, I would like to depart from Negri's description of contemporary subjectivity, most significantly when examining the relationship between subjectivity and resistance.

Negri's account of subjectivity and processes of subjection relies on the Foucauldian understanding of subjection as the product of contemporaneous processes of subjectification (the move toward specific subject positions, including moving toward new ways of thinking and being produced out of a new context) and desubjectification (the process of breaking free from, rejecting, or reformulating subject positions). Hence, according to Foucault (and Negri), a process of subjection always includes an element of desubjectification. For Negri, it is this element of desubjectification that reveals itself especially clearly in an examination of biopolitics in the context of postmodernity. In an examination of post-Fordist subjectivity, we must, indeed, pay close attention to the significance of desubjectification that accompanies this process. However, we must also distinguish between at least two forms of desubjectification: 1) desubjectification that constitutes a rejection of post-Fordist processes of subjectification and 2) processes of desubjectification that are aimed at the rejection of Fordist processes of subjectification, in other words, Fordist processes of desubjectification that under post-Fordism have become institutionalized and in fact have become crucial to the transition into and further development of a new MOR. As we shall see in more detail, postmodern culture and philosophy, narratives of resistance and political strategies of liberation, have in post-Fordism (or full postmodernity) not merely become co-opted, as is so often inaccurately claimed, but (and this is where the necessity of a rigorous periodizing project can be illustrated once more) postmodernism in fact has to be understood as the cultural and politico-philosophical expression of *Fordist* processes of desubjectification, processes that ultimately made the very transition into post-Fordism possible (the point at which they also lose their transformative power).

Furthermore, Negri correctly argues for a historically and materially specific examination of processes of subjection. This means that we must not only examine the changing function of processes of desubjectification in the context of the large-scale socioeconomic shift to post-Fordism, but also closely examine the multitude of functions processes of desubjectification

take on in the context of post-Fordism itself. We will get a more detailed insight into the need to complicate our understanding of categories such as "resistance" or the rejection of certain subject positions later in this essay. For the moment, suffice it to suggest that, especially in times of post-Fordist decentralization and its functionally chaotic structures of production and accumulation, resistance and liberation/progressive anti-capitalist action become increasingly difficult to link directly. To be sure, even moments of relative stability in the history of capitalism are always filled with contradictions and struggles that drive capitalism's development forward. Yet, especially since post-Fordism operates on a functional standardization of difference, it is of fundamental importance to foreground the dialectical interrelation of ROA and MOR that drives forward the historical development of the capitalist structure. Consequently, the function of dialectical critique is not primarily the reliance on a teleological aim (the grounds upon which Negri rejects such analysis) but the focus on the contradictions that are the motor of historical and structural development. Regarding post-Fordist subjectivity and processes of desubjectification in times of post-Fordism, this means that the development of the post-Fordist ROA and MOR depends on processes of desubjection that create, reproduce, and expand the decentralized networks. Championing difference and identities, the post-Fordist structure collapses the distinction between subjectification and desubjectification. Indeed, processes of desubjectification are often more appropriate and lucrative for post-Fordist economies than subjectification and we can thus suggest that one fundamental characteristic of post-Fordism is the effective institutionalization of desubjectification. It is for this reason, as we will see, that resistance and anti-capitalist critique become increasingly difficult to think. It is because we cannot simply link desubjectification and resistance that the psychological conflict I will trace in this essay emerges and that we must feel compelled to complicate rigorously our understanding of categories such as difference and desubjectification and analyze them in their precise functions in the context of post-Fordism.

Returning to our examination of the function of culture as the arena in which the struggles between ROA and MOR are carried out, we can see that post-Fordist cultural narratives critically interrogate postmodernism (which was centrally connected to Fordist processes of desubjectification). Postmodernism's demands for liberation based on a conception of freedom arising from a politics of pluralism and the abolition of centralized, repressive, Oedipal structures have in full post-Fordism structurally been met. However, as *Fight Club* argues, this has not been done in a manner that provides the subject with a form of freedom that is actually capable of producing pleasure. The supposedly liberating project of the anti-Oedipus is represented as a new

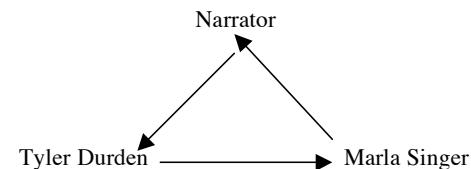
form of repression that arises out of the absence of traditional repression, and traditional repression thus becomes the paradoxical object of the post-Fordist desire of the anti-anti-Oedipus. The desire for liberation from Fordist repression has been transformed into the nostalgic and politically regressive desire for the restoration of repression as a way to recover stasis and control. The political and philosophical logic of the struggle against post-Fordist subjectivity hence merely gives rise to a nostalgically romanticizing (and de-historicizing) “at least” argument: at least Fordist norms and repression had a stable, easily identifiable centralized structure; one was at least able to rebel against the centralized father and formulate teleological narratives based on the desire to replace the father. *Fight Club*’s narrator remarks that “nothing is static. Everything falls apart.”²⁵ Impermanence and the lack of enduring teleological narratives, once the hallmarks of arguments that attempted to locate a liberatory potential within the abolition of “metanarratives,” have now become the main source of an impression of unfreedom arising out of the meaninglessness of total freedom in the absence of the centralized law of the Oedipal father.²⁶

The interesting development toward the end of the novel is thus less the question regarding the success or failure of Project Mayhem’s supposedly anti-capitalist terrorist acts than the question regarding the development of the narrator’s process of subjection in relation to the trauma of anti-Oedipal post-Fordism. The point at which the narrator begins to reject categorically both Tyler Durden and Project Mayhem, the point at which the narrator for the only time feels deep regret for his actions, thus follows the killing of his former boss: “the problem is, I sort of liked my boss. If you’re male and you’re Christian living in America, your father is your model for God. And sometimes you find your father in your career.”²⁷ This realization illustrates that the object of the narrator’s desire is less the resistance to capitalism than the desperate search for a stable, paternalistic structure, which, as he ultimately realizes, can also be found in a paternally centralized company. The answer to the alienating effect of post-Fordism, according to the narrator’s logic, does not have to clash with capitalism itself, as post-Fordism’s unpleasant component is singularly understood as its lack of a centered paternalistic structure. Resolving his psychological crisis as he understands it hence does not require the narrator to be fundamentally opposed to the logic of capitalism. The answer does not lie in the destruction of capitalism but instead in the return to a more stable and therefore on an ontological level supposedly more gratifying stage of capitalism. The logical problem the novel tries to represent is the tension between two desires characterizing the deregulated, post-Fordist subject: the attempt to revive the dialectic and the desire to complete this task via the restoration of a paternalistic MOR. Rather

than voicing a critique of post-Fordist capitalism proper, *Fight Club* constitutes a critique of the rejections of deregulated subjectivity that merely focus on its anti-Oedipal logic without examining the post-Fordist mode of production in whose service deregulated subjectivity stands.

The restoration of Oedipal logic that results from the “faulty” critiques of deregulated subjectivity that Palahniuk’s novel ironically represents is symbolically expressed in the rite of passage that unites the members of Project Mayhem and marks them as members of a centralized structure replacing the lacking Oedipal family. Tyler Durden marks one hand of every member with a burn scar by kissing their hands and burning the trace of this kiss into their flesh with industrial lye activated by his saliva. Tyler’s kiss functions as the restoration of paternal lineage and as the replacement of the “name of the father,” the centrally organizing principle of the group. To everybody in Project Mayhem Tyler Durden becomes “the Great and Powerful,” “God and father.”²⁸ Tyler’s kiss-scar hence functions similarly to the way the “scar of the navel,” described by Drucilla Cornell, draws the marked subject into the Oedipal stage.²⁹ However, while the scar of the navel signifies an almost violent “symbolic tear” that “rips us away from the imagined cocoon of the preoedipal phase,” Tyler’s kiss transforms the entrance into the stage of Oedipal law nostalgically into a loving process that signifies an emotional social bond and disregards the psychological struggle associated with the entrance into a universe centrally dominated by the law of the father.³⁰

Even the relationship with Tyler and Marla (who becomes Tyler’s girlfriend) that the narrator develops based on his schizophrenic hallucination is indicative of his desire to return to an Oedipal family arrangement. It is possible to map graphically the relationship of the narrator’s desire and the imaginary triangle of desire he creates among the three main characters (narrator-Tyler-Marla) as follows:



The narrator desires Tyler, who desires Marla, who in turn desires the narrator, as we find out at the end of the novel (in fact, the relationship between Marla and the narrator in the triangular situation is perceived by the

narrator distinctly as one of mothering). In Freud, the Oedipal model functions as an allegory for the necessity to curb the son's desire for unlimited enjoyment (represented by his desire for the mother) by means of paternal prohibition of incest, which stands in for all the desires that are detrimental to the stability of a given social structure.³¹ Lacan extends this model by stressing the centrality of the acquisition of language for processes of subjection and the development of consciousness.³² Just as we are marked by the father's last name that assigns us a position in a historical lineage and in a present structure of rules and norms, learning to name things (i.e., acquiring language) similarly forces us to adopt an entire set of social laws along with those names.³³ The triangle narrator-Tyler-Marla is an exact recreation of the Oedipal Triangle within which Tyler "stabilizes" the narrator's subjectivity by occupying the role of the father (marked by the kiss-scar as substitute for the father's last name) and by enforcing the law of the father (in part exemplified by fight club's famous rules and Project Mayhem's dogmatic ideology). The narrator willingly imagines this as a situation that represents the dysfunctional family structure, reminding him of his youth: "me, I'm six years old, again, and taking messages back and forth between my estranged parents. I hated this when I was six. I hate it now."³⁴ Despite his hatred for this, it nevertheless appears to offer more potential than his present situation. "Which is worse, hell or nothing?"

Why Post-Fordist Subjectivity Is Not Enjoyable

According to the narrator, post-Fordist, anti-Oedipal subjectivity cannot be enjoyable. Within contemporary cultural production, this is a rather widespread logical conclusion that finds expression in narratives of weak or absent fathers. This argument may be most famously expressed in Jonathan Franzen's 2001 novel *The Corrections*, whose plot revolves around the gradual dissolution of a midwestern family, pained by the inevitable progression of the father's insanity, as well as by a condition common to most family members: anhedonia, the inability to experience pleasure.³⁵ Yet, the association of anti-Oedipal subjectivity with anhedonia bears the mark of a fundamental misrecognition. Moreover, it is this misrecognition that underlies the history of both the Oedipal narrative as one of the most significant metanarratives of Western civilization as well as much of the history of psychoanalysis as a discipline. As we shall see, the narrator tragically misinterprets the Oedipal process of subjection and mistakes a dialogical for a dialectical relationship.

Psychoanalysis describes (self-)consciousness as a result of the dialectical interaction between the son and the father, who socializes or "civilizes"

the son by regulating access to pleasure. Ontogenesis and phylogenesis are, according to Freud, dialectically interconnected and require a centrally located "law of the father" to guarantee that the development of each individual is stabilized (hence civilized) via the struggle between the "pleasure principle" and the "reality principle." In other words, the process of subjection, of developing a functional sense of self within the context of a civilization, necessarily carries with it, as Freud would have it, an element of discontent. Freedom for the subject reveals itself not as unlimited individual freedom but as freedom in contingency. Freedom is constituted but at the same time limited by the law of the father (a society's legal structure).³⁶ In Lacanian terms, the birth of the conscious individual coincides with the subject's acquisition of language, the passage into the Symbolic. Thought is born along with language, which means that the world with which the subject, through dialectical struggle, formulates a sense of self is the realm that is entirely overwritten with symbolic signifiers, which in turn carry with them the legal, moral, and ideological structure of a given society.³⁷ To develop consciousness means to acquire dialectically the language of the Symbolic and with it the law of the father that constitutes the structure of the Symbolic (or what Lacan would call the Other).³⁸ This logic is deeply ingrained into the history of Western cultural production, in which father narratives are the common context for representations of processes of subjection. One need only think of the *Bildungsroman* in this context. In both the classic and the modern *Bildungsroman*, plot is produced by the central character's dialectical struggle with the law of the father/the Symbolic, and the success of the protagonist's education is measured by the degree to which he/she is successful in articulating a functional conception of self in relation to the central Oedipal structure.³⁹ Looking in detail at the father narrative and its disruptions and complications in a story that describes a problem in the process of subjection (or represents an unpleasant form of subjectivity) can thus provide us with a valuable entrance into the logic of a narrative's argument regarding a failed process of subjection.

As indicated previously, *Fight Club* is fundamentally concerned with paternal prohibition. According to Slavoj Žižek, one must supplement basic descriptions of the Oedipal triangle with the figure of the primal father, as each narrative only describes half of the social workings of prohibition. In the Oedipus myth prohibition is externalized, whereas in the myth of the primal father prohibition has been utterly internalized.⁴⁰ Žižek combines Freud's classical formulations of the interaction between repression and enjoyment to account for the phenomenon that the absence of the father must not necessarily result in the absence of his law — in fact, the law of the father operates ever more strongly in his absence once it has been internal-

ized by society proper. *Fight Club* describes this kind of reinstitution of the law of the father. Faced with a social situation that is marked by the absence of a centralized, paternalistically organized structure of determination, hence by the actual absence of an Oedipal logic of subjection and the stabilizing power of the law of the father, the narrator re-creates such a father figure complete with a social network/symbolic structure surrounding him. This network, the fight clubs, notably operates even after the disappearance of Tyler by following the internalized law of the father (Tyler's rules). The realization that the parricide (killing Tyler) cannot remove the father from the center of the structure, the realization that Project Mayhem cannot be stopped, hence presents the true horror of the situation for the narrator, who ultimately has to realize the gruesome and repressive consequences of his nostalgic longing for the return to centralized order.

As *Fight Club* indicates, the reason that post-Fordist subjectivity is not enjoyable appears to be connected to the logic of the father narrative as well. What then is the relationship between the father/Oedipal structures, subjectivity, and enjoyment? The most common (and most uncomplicated) formulation of the concept of enjoyment constructs it simply as the freedom from repression, as the ability to do what one pleases. Yet, as mentioned above, this basic formulation (much to the dismay of people who remain invested in the idea of bourgeois liberalism) is fundamentally flawed. Within Oedipal logic, freedom and subjectivity not surprisingly only have meaning in the context of a paternalistic structure (in dependency, therefore), which suggests that it is impossible to arrive at an idea of enjoyment in the absence of Oedipal repression. Consequently, parricide, as explained above, only consolidates and internalizes the law of the father. There is a direct and necessary relationship between enjoyment and repression/the law of the father. Žižek's writings on the interrelation among enjoyment, power, and Law can help us further illuminate this point. According to Žižek, transgression (that is, the formulation of enjoyment in postulating a situation of freedom beyond repression) necessitates for its logical conception the existence of Law — "without Law there is no transgression, transgression needs an obstacle in order to assert itself." Following this assumption, according to Žižek, one must further conclude that "it is not enough to say that the 'repression' of some libidinal content retroactively eroticizes the very gesture of 'repression' — this 'eroticization' of power is not a secondary effect of its exertion on its object but its very disavowed foundation, its 'constitutive crime.'"⁴¹ The absence of repression, of the superego, can thus easily be understood as resulting in the lack of enjoyment as defined through negative opposition to a centralized rule, shedding light on the obviously strange and partially ineffective forms of resistance-

enjoyment in *Fight Club*. The preferred form of freedom that provides enjoyment to the narrator and the men in fight clubs is thus defined by the desire to be actively able to resist a father figure.

This argument regarding the relationship between repression/the law of the father and enjoyment is further underscored by Žižek's analysis of what he calls in reference to Lacan the "paradox of desire." To understand how enjoyment functions in dialectical relation with repression one must additionally consider the roles played by fantasy and desire. Desire, according to Žižek (channeling Freud and Lacan), is a socially produced element created out of previously constructed social fantasies.⁴² In simpler terms this means that, for example, the desire to win the lottery must be analyzed in relation to the preexisting social fantasy that winning the lottery is a good thing, in itself hence fundamentally intertwined with the logic of capitalism. Desire is socially created and as such depends on a social network of values and norms. Furthermore, Žižek argues, the paradox of desire is that we "mistake for postponement of the 'thing itself' what is already the 'thing itself,'" that desire "retroactively posits its own cause."⁴³ There is, therefore, a tension between desire and the object of desire. This object of desire paradoxically appears to constitute desire by eternally remaining out of reach. It is this paradox of desire that Lacan expresses in his description of *objet petit a*, the object cause of desire. For the sake of our inquiry it is worth quoting Žižek's summary of this argument at some length.

It is the famous Lacanian *objet petit a* that mediates between the incompatible domains of desire and *jouissance*. In what precise sense is *objet petit a* the object cause of desire? The *objet petit a* is not what we desire, what we are after, but, rather, that which sets our desire in motion, in the sense of the formal frame which confers consistency on our desire: desire is, of course, metonymical; it shifts from one object to another; through all these displacements, however, desire none the less retains a minimum of formal consistency, a set of phantasmic features which, when they are encountered in a positive object, make us desire this object — *objet petit a* as the cause of desire is nothing other than this formal frame of consistency.⁴⁴

Enjoyment, defined as the fulfillment of desire, is not created at the point at which we reach *objet petit a*. Rather, it is the endless deferral of *objet petit a* to which paternalistic rule bars access that constructs desire and thus pleasure. Unbarred access to *objet petit a* results not in unlimited pleasure but, on the contrary, in the very absence of desire and ultimately of pleasure. It is

this phenomenon *Fight Club*'s narrator discovers to be the ugly underbelly of bourgeois individualism's flawed logic, the very logic that becomes increasingly hegemonic in anti-Oedipal post-Fordism. The actual absence of the father appears to be the cause of the unpleasant perception of deregulated subjectivity.

Let us then put together the parts of our inquiry into the logic of enjoyment and subjection and articulate the relationship between the (law of the) father and enjoyment. In his examination of Lacan's seminar on the name of the father, Jacques-Alain Miller explores this point in a somewhat simplified but for our purposes effective manner. According to Miller, enjoyment's constitutive moment is located in the father barring unhindered access to *objet petit a*. Enjoyment, therefore, is defined by and as an aspect of the name of the father.⁴⁵ Expressed in a matheme, the relationship presents itself as

$$\frac{NP(J)}{\text{DM}}$$

NP, the law or name of the father (*le nom du père* stands in for the logic of a patriarchal order most commonly indicated as a result of lineage, locating the subject via the process of being assigned the father's last name), constitutes *J* (enjoyment, or *jouissance*) by barring access to the object cause of desire DM (which, in the context of the Oedipal triangle, corresponds to the desire for/of the mother), thereby producing and reproducing the forms of desire that in turn make enjoyment possible. For the question of enjoyment in relation to subjection this formulation hence takes us back to the well-known Lacanian formulation of subjection: $S \ll a$.⁴⁶

The actual absence of the law of the father and of a stable centralized mechanism of repression in post-Fordism, as *Fight Club*'s narrator experiences, thus result in the impossibility of formulating a conception of enjoyment. This assertion may initially seem nonsensical, yet one has to look no further than our basic expectations for literary plot to illustrate the value of this point. Plot in traditional literary narratives is fundamentally directed at but also a result of what presents itself as the literary equivalent to *objet petit a*. We could turn to the basic narrative conventions of the *Bildungsroman* as one of the dominant genres in Western literary history to illustrate the importance of this logical structure for cultural production. For our purposes, however, it suffices to look at the narrative that is possibly the least interested in complicating the relationship between desire and enjoyment: the story of revenge. The entire plot of such a story is driven by the simple and all-consuming desire for revenge, a scenario whose imagination is sufficient

for the production of enjoyable plot (and fantasies) for the reader as well as for the protagonist while postponing the actual act. Now, let us imagine a slightly different novel, one that begins after the dramatic act of revenge has taken place. A post-revenge story, we quickly realize, would inevitably be ranked among the most boring stories ever told. Who would truly be interested in the harmonious life of the Count of Monte Cristo after he has "satisfied" his lust for revenge? Who would enjoy reading an alternative version of *Moby Dick* in which Ahab succeeds in killing the white whale, finally achieves transcendence, and returns to shore to lead a satisfied, peaceful life? Just as struggle is the essence of the dialectical progression of processes of subjection, the lack of a continual deferral of *objet petit a* is the very essence of plot.

The current moment in cultural production is in part defined by nostalgia and representations of returns to previous, simpler, paternalistic moments in history. Yet, as we see in *Fight Club*, such attempts to locate enjoyment in the past are not merely regressive. They are, as indicated earlier, fundamentally based on a misrecognition regarding the relationship between the dialectic and Oedipal subjectivity. As illustrated by the narrator's coping mechanisms, the experience of post-Fordism tends to create the impression that the Oedipal structure is the only way of locating a functioning dialectical process of subjection, which suggests to the narrator that the only way to resolve the problems of post-Fordist subjectivity is to return to an Oedipal past. Yet this regressive trend emerging out of the resistance to post-Fordism fails to distinguish between dialogical and dialectical relationships and, as a result, conflates enjoyment and happiness. As we saw earlier, Freudian and Lacanian models of subjection are indeed helpful for the project of critiquing the logical flaws of facets of capitalist ideology, such as the concept of bourgeois individualism. However, this should not be taken to mean that what appears to be the dialectical interaction between subject and the Symbolic (the Other) in the Oedipal triangle is the same as the relationship between being for self and being for other in the Hegelian dialectic, or as the relationship between subject and material reality in the Marxist dialectic. On the contrary, there is something in the Oedipal structure that is hostile to true dialectical progress. Simply put, a true, functioning dialectic defines progress as sublation, that is, as the result of the interaction between thesis and antithesis that are both changed, yet preserved in the process of supersession. In the relationship between son and father, or between subject and the Symbolic, only one pole of the structure changes: the subject. The father and the Oedipal order, however, remain centrally located and unchanged, which is necessary for the perpetuation of the paternalistic order. Paternal repression, as we can see in *Fight Club*, is not dialectical, yet is frequently

mistaken for a dialectical relationship in the context of post-Fordism.⁴⁷

Especially in the context of post-Fordism, it becomes necessary to emphasize the distinction between Hegelian/Marxian processes of subjection that are dialectical and Oedipal processes of subjection that are dialogical. In fact, Lacan's linguistic account of subjection that essentially describes a process of productively disrupting a singular, pre-social voice that must be replaced with the voice of the Symbolic (which is always pluralistic, yet still paternalistic) indicates that we should conceive of this process of subjection as dialogical in a Bakhtinian sense.⁴⁸ Expressed in Bakhtinian terms, Lacan equates Oedipal subjectivity with the entrance into the Symbolic as the moment at which the subject learns to speak in a dialogic or polyphonic voice. Like the Oedipal subject, polyphony is a multitude of phonetic values which, in order to gain value in the first place, are contingent on a centrally located, organizing structure. In such a situation the subject merely "takes meaning" and the structure of "meaning" itself remains fixed. Within the context of this distinction, enjoyment, which can only exist in relation to and is constituted by the Oedipal, reveals itself as similarly dialogical in nature. Happiness, as we shall see, is the positive affect created out of a dialectical interaction. The narrator's inability to recognize enjoyment as dialogical results in the misinterpretation of anti-Oedipal subjectivity as defined by the inability to produce positive affect.

Furthermore, the political danger of this misrecognition of Oedipal subjectivity as dialectical, as the narrator learns toward the end of *Fight Club*, is that he locates the problem of anti-Oedipal capitalism in the adjective, not in the noun. Consequently, the return to paternalistic structures is constructed as opposed to or even as a progressive alternative to post-Fordist subjectivity. Even narratives that represent the desire to restore a "real" dialectic by reintroducing the struggle between the subject and material reality are compromised by the nostalgia for Oedipal subjectivity, literalizing the materiality of subjection and less focusing on the actual experience of materiality than advocating the struggle with "real, natural life" as the locus of masculinity. One popular example of this is the booming branch of the reality television genre that focuses on the "realism" of Fordist or manual labor. Especially in the context of post-Fordism's increasing supersession of Fordist production, the labor associated with "Fordist peripheries" becomes an exciting (and escapist) spectacle in contemporary cultural production. Already at this point it becomes obvious that such regressive projects carry with them the forms of reactionary gender politics that will be discussed in greater detail later in this essay. First, however, we shall turn toward a regressive trend that Palahniuk's novel and countless other cultural artifacts illustrate: locating opposition to post-Fordism in the return to a previous

stage of capitalism, in particular to the enjoyable structures of paternalistic Fordism.

Nostalgia for Ford(ist Labor)

As we have seen, not all rejections of post-Fordism and deregulated subjectivity are anti-capitalist. However, they often look as though they are, which explains the common misinterpretation of *Fight Club* (both novel and film) as an anti-capitalist work. Henry Giroux and Imre Szeman argue that "the truth is that *Fight Club* in the end offers a critique of the social and political conditions produced by contemporary capitalism only in a way that reconfirms capitalism's worst excesses and re-legitimizes its ruling narratives."⁴⁹ While this is a valid argument, I would like to add that a more rewarding reading differentiates between the film and the novel, reading the novel as decidedly self-conscious regarding the narrator's inability to produce a critique of capitalism proper. As Giroux and Szeman correctly observe, the novel is mainly interested in problematizing rejections of post-Fordism that "re-legitimize" certain "ruling narratives" of capitalism. These ruling narratives, however, are notably not part of post-Fordism but of Fordism and its paternalistic MOR, the return to which appears to the men of *Fight Club* to be a viable solution to the problems post-Fordism poses. Whereas the novel attempts to interrogate this problematic regressive political potential that the transition into post-Fordism includes, the film in contradistinction spectacularly fails to capture this interesting and complex facet of post-Fordist capitalism, indeed reducing *Fight Club* to a one-dimensional, uncomplicated, and ultimately logically flawed and politically regressive rejection of capitalism.

The objective of Project Mayhem as represented in the film is the destruction of the credit system, which seems to suggest that anti-capitalism is Project Mayhem's primary ideological and political goal. In the novel, however, Project Mayhem's goal is the destruction of the Museum of Natural History, a quite striking difference that is often disregarded, since it does not quite match up with the anti-capitalism many readers would like to find in the novel.⁵⁰ After all, if the novel were indeed centrally motivated by anti-capitalism, why would Project Mayhem's target be a museum and not something more attractive and radically chic such as the credit system? Substituting the destruction of the credit system for a narrative of destruction aimed at the return to a previous moment in history, the movie thus transforms the narrative into a far more pleasant and fashionable radical story. In contrast to the film, the novel succeeds as a politically progressive work precisely because it is *not* interested in representing a hip, attractive group of

anti-capitalist revolutionaries. Instead, the novel focuses self-consciously on the ironic failures of the fight clubs and Project Mayhem and on the regressive politics created out of the negative experience of post-Fordism. The problem examined in the novel revolves not merely around the question of whether one dislikes consumer capitalism. Rather, the novel represents the politically troubling desiring structures that the experience of post-Fordism produces. Palahniuk's novel asks the same question much contemporary cultural production seems to be concerned with: what happens when the widespread political solution to the rejection of post-Fordism in fact becomes Fordism?

In his examination of the initial reaction to the pressure of the emerging post-Fordist ROA (or what he calls "flexible accumulation"), David Harvey seemingly cannot do without a descriptive vocabulary that illustrates the fundamentally ambiguous if not negative reaction to the ontological dilemma of suddenly having to articulate one's existence within the context of a radically changing socioeconomic environment. Flexible accumulation and the gradual supersession of paternalist Fordism produces reactions Harvey describes as "baffling," "bewildering," or "difficult," creating a perception of widespread "confusion."⁵¹ In his latest book, *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, Richard Sennett describes the common effect of the experience of the contemporary stage of capitalism as the longing for the stability of Fordism, which was "at least" characterized by the development of stable skills, the existence of a regulated workday, career and social services provided by the state, and a more tangible, material form of production and dissemination of commodities. Sennett himself is not entirely free from this nostalgically romanticized construction of the Fordist past, yet he is quick to point out that this desire for a return to Fordism is not altogether logical, since instability, as Marx already pointed out, has always been central to the capitalist mode of production and is thus not exclusive to post-Fordism's standardization of difference.⁵²

Still, Sennett claims, this nostalgic reaction to the new capitalism has become widespread and is motivated by a logic of the lesser evil, the "at least" logic we are already familiar with by this point. This becomes apparent in a passage that makes it especially difficult to dissociate Sennett's criticism of idealizing Fordism and his own nostalgia for its stability. "In terms of wealth and power," Sennett writes,

a paternalist like Henry Ford was indeed as unequal to workers on the assembly line as any modern mogul. In sociological terms, however, he was closer to them, just as the general on the battlefield was connected to his troops. The sociological idea here is that inequality

translates into distance; the greater the distance — the less a felt connection on both sides — the greater the social inequality between them.⁵³

Separating social and economic structure in his analysis of anti-Oedipal post-Fordism, the two dimensions whose dialectical interconnection the regulation approach foregrounds as the necessary basis for an accurate analysis of capitalism, Sennett replicates the logic of the narrator of *Fight Club* and attempts to salvage paternalism's stability, as if it were possible to consider it in purely sociological terms, that is, independently from its capitalist implementation. For Sennett, as for *Fight Club*'s narrator, the decision comes down to choosing between a social situation that induces "dread" and one that induces "anxiety": "anxiety attaches to what might happen; dread attaches to what one knows will happen. Anxiety arises in ill-defined conditions, dread where pain or ill-fortune is well-defined. Failure in the old pyramid was grounded in dread; failure in the new institution is shaped by anxiety."⁵⁴ It is once again the "at least" attitude that reveals itself as characteristic of literary mediations of post-Fordist culture. The underlying logic is representatively summarized in the pragmatically anti-dialectical solution of *Fight Club*'s narrator to the problems posed by deregulated subjectivity: Which is worse? Hell (dread/Fordism/Project Mayhem/centered subjectivity) or nothing (anxiety/post-Fordism/the lack of the father/deregulated subjectivity)?

The regressive consequences of this logic become apparent in the desiring structures that allow for the transformation of fight club into Project Mayhem, which constitutes the sociopolitically devastating exaggeration of the logic of fight club. Whereas fight club introduces the interconnection between the desire for the restoration of a dialectical struggle and the desire for the restoration of the father figure (Tyler Durden and "Durden dogma" as the law of the father), replacing hollow, total freedom with the desired "contingent freedom" offered by dialectical struggle, Project Mayhem is the consequence of this flawed logic taken to its extreme. Rather than being content with their relatively comfortable lives in the service industry, countless men are willing to subject themselves to the centralized physical and psychological repression of Project Mayhem and Tyler Durden. Project Mayhem is not an anarchist collective but the result of the nostalgic desire of a return to Fordism. It is a Fordist factory in which Tyler Durden functions as father/Ford/God, complete with division of labor and Fordist alienation.

[T]hey all know what to do. It's part of Project Mayhem. No one guy understands the whole plan, but each guy is trained to do one simple

task perfectly. . . . I hug the walls, being a mouse trapped in this clockwork of silent men with the energy of trained monkeys, cooking and working and sleeping in teams. Pull a lever. Push a button. A team of space monkeys cooks meals all day, and all day, teams of space monkeys are eating out of the plastic bowls they brought with them.⁵⁵

The novel is not about the desire to end capitalism, nor does it depict a single strategy that is actually opposed to capitalist logic. *Fight Club* is a novel about the shocking insight that resistance to post-Fordism is indeed capable of producing desiring structures that paradoxically lead subjects to willingly subject themselves to Fordist exploitation, seeking enjoyment in the restoration of a paternalistic leader.⁵⁶ The “clockwork” Project Mayhem stands opposed to the logic of post-Fordism but not to the logic of capitalism proper. On the contrary, the image of the “clockwork of silent men” with which the narrator associates Project Mayhem functions as a nostalgically idealized construction of Fordism as a simpler time in history in which manual skills and physical labor were at the heart of the labor process.⁵⁷

The Importance of Being Versed in Country Things: Immaterial Labor, Feral Subjects, and Simulations of Interiorized Knowledge

One facet of the psychological crisis post-Fordist subjectivity tends to create is what is frequently described as a lost connection to reality, a concern that is reflected in the common anxiety to have lost the ability to have “real” experiences. The reality of an experience in turn, as *Fight Club* illustrates, is in post-Fordism commonly measured in terms of its physicality. In this context, Fordist labor allows for both the restoration of paternalistic structures as well as the return to the possibility of having a “real” experience via physical labor. Tyler Durden himself is accordingly not a post-Fordist but instead the perfect Fordist subject. Time and again the narrator admires the fact that Tyler is “full of useful knowledge” (Tyler knows how to put common products of consumer capitalism to use by making them into a bomb, napalm, etcetera). The kind of knowledge Tyler possesses stands opposed to the kind of knowledge that characterizes post-Fordism. Jean François Lyotard discusses the effects of increasing computerization and digitalization on knowledge in *The Postmodern Condition*. Lyotard claims that cybernetics and the new hegemony of computers necessitate the translation of knowledge, if it is to remain operational, into quantities of information. The consequence of this is an increasing “exteriorization of knowledge with respect to the knower.” “Knowledge,” says Lyotard, “is and

will be produced in order to be sold; it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its ‘use-value.’”⁵⁸ What Lyotard understands as the “exteriorization of knowledge” corresponds to what Sennett describes as the disappearance of traditional skills (which for Sennett are corporeal skill, mostly relating to manual or Fordist labor).⁵⁹ Knowledge is only accumulated in order to be exchanged, without a direct implication for the subject who has accumulated the knowledge. This emptying out of traditional use-value of knowledge forms the basis of the anxiety of post-Fordism and, as we can see in *Fight Club*, constitutes the form of post-Fordist alienation that lies at the heart of the anxiety of the post-Fordist subject.

Contemporary capitalism is frequently represented as primarily interested in exchanges in knowledge, erasing the primacy of the actual product and, more significantly for the men of *Fight Club*, of the (laboring) body. Similarly, information becomes increasingly important in the context of immaterial forms of capitalist trade and accumulation such as the stock exchange. As the example of the trade in stocks illustrates, the new capitalist structure is based on an increasingly complex and decentralized network of determinations that become increasingly hard to oversee for the individual subject and almost entirely independent from the individual’s physical existence. As indicated earlier, certainly not everyone’s labor in the contemporary context is digital, immaterial, or professional/managerial. The dominant forms of labor in post-Fordism, however, are becoming increasingly immaterial, which, as cultural production indicates, appears to be one of the reasons for its negative experience. It is thus beneficial for our analysis at this point to establish a workable definition of the concept of immaterial labor in order to concretize the analytical model, which we shall use to evaluate contemporary culture’s representation (and rejection) of immaterial labor. One of the first explorations of the concept of immaterial labor can be found in Maurizio Lazzarato’s writings on the emergence of forms of labor he associates with the rise of “mass intellectuality” since the end of the 1970s. According to Lazzarato,

The concept of immaterial labor refers to *two different aspects* of labor. On one hand, as regards the “informational content” of the commodity, it refers directly to the changes taking place in workers’ labor processes in big companies in the industrial and tertiary sectors, where the skills involved in direct labor are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control (and horizontal and vertical communication). On the other hand, as regards the

activity that produces the “cultural content” of the commodity, immaterial labor involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as “work” — in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion.⁶⁰

While the basic terms laid out by this definition are valuable for our purposes, cultural production frequently indicates that we are finding ourselves already one step beyond the situation described by Lazzarato. As William Gibson’s representation of the socioeconomic function of “the footage” in *Pattern Recognition* illustrates, contemporary society has in fact moved closer to what Lyotard would call a complete trade in exteriorized knowledge, an economy, thus, in which networks of information and the dissemination of knowledge begin to function independently from and begin to take precedence over the exchange and production of commodities proper.

Parallel to the decreasing importance of the laboring body, post-Fordist, immaterial economies begin to be characterized by what Paolo Virno describes as an “essential homogeneity” resulting from the full inclusion of the life of the mind into labor processes. Similarly, labor time and enjoyment are fused in the life of *Fight Club*’s narrator, since private time for him consists exclusively of the consumption and (re)production of trends. “Therefore,” Virno argues, “since work ceases to constitute a special and separate praxis, with distinctive criteria and procedures in effect at its center, completely different from those criteria and procedures which regulate non-labor time, there is not a clean, well-defined threshold separating labor time from non-labor time.”⁶¹ Post-Fordist labor, since it is increasingly immaterial in nature and therefore troubles traditional definitions of labor, allows for a radical increase in new forms of exploitation. Simply put, the troubling of the boundary between labor and private life gradually erodes the last forms of the individual’s control over his/her labor processes while simultaneously assigning unwaged, immaterial labor the individual may not even perceive as such a central function in the production of surplus value. We can, therefore, understand the frequent romanticization of physical labor in contemporary culture as the regressive result of the subject’s desperate wish to regain control over his/her own material and immaterial production processes.

Similarly, such regressive desiring structures indicate that the ways in which power is exercised over the subject have radically changed as a result of the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism. Whereas Fordism was characterized by centrally organized repressive mechanisms and an Oedipal logic of inclusion/exclusion, immaterial, anti-Oedipal post-Fordism’s

productive apparatus operates on differentiation and pluralism, a logic to which mechanisms of exclusion are fundamentally opposed. As Lazzarato points out, “the slogan ‘become subjects,’ far from eliminating the antagonism between hierarchy and cooperation, between autonomy and command, actually re-poses the antagonism at a higher level, because it both mobilizes and clashes with the very personality of the individual worker.”⁶² Once again, this illustrates the extent to which a transition in the structure in capitalism is always connected to a necessary transition on the level of its accompanying MOR. The transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist MOR is characterized by a specifically radical re-signification of ideological structures, beliefs, and forms of subjection. As contemporary cultural production demonstrates time and again, ideas that under Fordism constituted forms of opposition against centrally located apparatuses of repression have been transformed into the very logic of the post-Fordist MOR. Specifically, the desire to overcome mechanisms of exclusion and segregation that limited access to free and independent processes of forming “identities” has, under post-Fordism, been productively included in the diversifying logic of bourgeois individualism and neoliberal capitalism. Yet, as we see in *Fight Club* and other texts, this celebration of different identities, of the process of becoming subjects, does not offer true freedom and liberation but is completely included in post-Fordism’s immaterial processes of production.

Yet, more dramatic than the shift in the ways in which subjectivity, community, or Fordist narratives of liberation function is the perception of the effects of immateriality itself. Tyler Durden and fight club allow the members to learn “useful” and non-exteriorized knowledge, which is associated with a less alienated form of knowledge. The Fordism of Project Mayhem’s useful knowledge is mirrored in the ironic perception of physical labor as a less alienated form of labor. Labor in Project Mayhem, an extension of the physical literalization of dialectical struggle in fight club, does not only allow the men to “fight” an increasingly immaterial existence by being able to once again use their bodies: the goal of fight club and of Project Mayhem is completely to reduce the men’s bodies to objects of Fordist utility. However, it should now be obvious that this is not to be read as an act of opposing the logic of capitalism but, like the opposition to post-Fordism’s anti-Oedipalism, as merely an act of opposing the immaterial nature of post-Fordist capitalism, while nostalgically idealizing the function of the body within Fordism: “fight club gets to be your reason for going to the gym and keeping your hair cut short and cutting your nails.”⁶³

Similarly, the way in which the narrator meets Tyler Durden (or rather the way in which he imagines the meeting, since Tyler is the mental projection of the narrator’s desire for a supposedly less alienated form of Fordist

subjectivity) corresponds precisely to this rejection of post-Fordist immaterial labor and the new forms of alienation arising out of the “exteriorization of knowledge.” The narrator meets Tyler on a nudist beach. He watches Tyler, “naked and sweating, gritty with sand, his hair wet and stringy, hanging in his face,” as he collects driftwood and begins to build what the narrator later identifies as a giant wooden hand arranged in a specific angle in relation to the sun.

[W]hat Tyler had created was the shadow of a giant hand. Only now the fingers were Nosferatu-long and the thumb was too short, but he said how at exactly four-thirty the hand was perfect. The giant shadow-hand was perfect for one minute, and for one perfect minute Tyler had sat in the perfection of a hand he’d created himself.⁶⁴

The first meeting with Tyler thus introduces us to one of the fundamental desires of the narrator, namely the desire to possess actual, unalienated, material, manual skills, skills that are utterly inconsequential and devoid of value in a post-Fordist economy. Yet, Tyler’s hand and its method of construction also indicate the attachment to a form of knowledge that predates Fordism, which foreshadows the goal of Project Mayhem to resolve the pressures of the present by returning not just to a Fordist social structure but indeed to a pre-civilized situation. The post-Fordist subject stands in polar opposition to this escapist desire for “feral subjectivity,” which I will return to shortly.

Currently popular representations of the complete destruction of post-Fordist civilization can in this context be understood as logically similar responses to the complexity of post-Fordism. Destruction in this sense functions as a desperate and regressive means of simplifying post-Fordist chaoplexity in a way that allows for the return to relatively simpler structural determinations and therefore to a context that will hopefully once again allow for the formulation of stable (since regressively recentered) conceptions of subjectivity. As we can see in *Fight Club*, apart from simplifying context, destruction also becomes a means of escaping post-Fordism and returning to a Fordist or even pre-Fordist world. Fittingly, the ultimate goal of Project Mayhem is directed at bringing about such a radically regressive and nostalgic transformation of society that promises to offer enjoyable alternatives to post-Fordist subjectivity. The narrator of *Fight Club* describes the objective of Project Mayhem as follows:

We wanted to blast the world free from history. We were eating breakfast in the house on Paper Street, and Tyler said picture your-

self planting radishes and seed potatoes on the fifteenth green of a forgotten golf course. You’ll hunt elk through the damp canyon forest around the ruins of Rockefeller Center, and dig clams next to the skeleton of the Space Needle leaning at a forty-five-degree angle.⁶⁵

The rejection of immaterial post-Fordist subjectivity hence extends Project Mayhem’s “liberating” process of devolution even beyond the return to Fordism. Its ultimate objective is the de-historicized, nostalgic return to a pre-civilized existence that in its primary reliance on physical labor promises to be easier to map and more productive in terms of locating enjoyment. As we first saw in reference to the destruction of the body in *Fight Club*, the novel’s idealization of pain and injury is a result of the desire to reduce the body entirely to utility, transforming it first into a Fordist machine that stands opposed to the growing insignificance of the body in an immaterial economy. In a situation in which labor is increasingly cerebral or affective, the body’s remaining function is limited to that of a canvas for consumer capitalist signs and as the vehicle that keeps alive and transports the main productive organ of post-Fordism: the brain.

As contemporary cultural production illustrates, however, this growing insignificance of the body gives rise to a nostalgic attachment to physicality. Simultaneously, physical labor as an aspect of a lost MOR is constructed as standing in opposition to post-Fordist subjectivity, endowing the regressive reduction of the body to use-value with a seemingly transgressive or even revolutionary quality. To be sure, this nostalgia for the laboring body is singularly characteristic of the fully post-Fordist subject; of subjects, that is, that are completely included in a post-Fordist economy. This means at the same time that there persists a situation of uneven development regarding the inclusion of subjects into post-Fordism and there remain what Harvey calls Fordist peripheries that constitute possibly the last clear markers of class difference in post-Fordism. This well-known formulation, however, can lead to false conclusions regarding the nature of capitalist structures. As indicated earlier, even forms of labor we may associate more readily with a previous mode of production are not remnants of past capitalist structures. Instead such peripheries should simply be understood as part of the heterogeneous constitution of post-Fordism. As is the case with every mode of production throughout the history of capitalism, post-Fordism’s heterogeneity Harvey describes as a situation of uneven development does not constitute a historical difference but the uneven development resulting from structural complexity. It is, however, this impression of a historical difference that underlies nostalgic rejections of post-Fordism that reconstruct non-

immaterial or professional/managerial class forms of labor as idealized time portals that allow us to return to historically superseded forms of subjectivity. Simply put, we get a glimpse of the obfuscation of class difference by the simulation of historical (not structural) uneven development at the paradoxical moments at which the professional managerial class-subject derives pleasure from periodically and nostalgically choosing to inhabit the same subject position as the laborers who exist in spaces that are idealized as Fordist peripheries. Examples of this are currently booming sectors of the tourist industry that offer Fordist or pre-Fordist labor as adventure vacations for post-Fordist subjects.⁶⁶ The enjoyment of physical labor in an immaterial economy for the post-Fordist subject hence becomes more accurately identity-tourism, a form of tourism few subjects who are still forced to physically labor in Fordist peripheries would perceive as pleasurable.

Increasingly, however, as we can observe in cultural production, pleasurable subjectivity is represented as regressive subjectivity, or more specifically as nostalgic forms of physical existence. Examples of this are the current popularity of “reality” shows that depict Fordist or physical labor, such as Discovery Channel’s hit series *The Deadliest Catch* (2005–present) and *Dirty Jobs* (2003–present), truTV’s *Axe Men* (2008), and CBS’s *Survivor* (2000–present). The opposition to “hyper-real” life in the hyper-technologized and immaterial environment of post-Fordism produces not only the exclusive association of reality with physicality but a different version of hyper-reality that finds expression in truTV’s retro-Fordist motto advertising “actuality,” not “reality.” This “actuality” is frequently defined in contradistinction to post-Fordist immateriality and consists of what essentially are escapist “vacations in our own bodies” from whose physical utility we have been increasingly alienated as a result of the increasing dominance of immaterial labor. “Experiencing our bodies” via severe physical injury, as *Fight Club* illustrates, is not a sign of masochism or nihilism but comparable to the regressive idealization of physical labor and thus part of the enjoyable recentering of physical existence in a digital world. Accordingly, shows such as *Survivor* or Discovery Channel’s *Man vs. Wild* (2006–present) and *Survivorman* (2004–present) thrive on the spectacle of the difference between interiorized and exteriorized knowledge that confines “real” experiences to an exoticized outside to the post-Fordist world. The pleasure of such survival shows hence resides in the possibility for the viewer to enjoy the post-Fordist subject’s general lack of “real” knowledge and skills that make basic survival in the wild problematic. “We know even less about reality than pre-civilized people,” seems to be the self-flagellating tenor of the show, consolidating the perception of post-Fordist life as unreal. More significantly, perhaps, the general impression of this view of subjectiv-

ity rests on the assumption that we have lost control over our lives, singularly accumulating exteriorized knowledge for the purpose of exchange in an immaterial economy. The popularity of shows that teach us survival techniques are thus doubly therapeutic: we gather what we designate as real (hence material and interiorized) knowledge essential to our survival in the wild and simultaneously construct an outside to post-Fordist capitalism in the form of the constant threat of being stranded in the wild. However, this “reality” and the construction of an outside to post-Fordism clearly must be understood as simulations in a Baudrillardian sense. The knowledge we gather is never turned into interiorized knowledge but instead remains confined to an exteriorized function, purely serving the perpetuation of enjoyably nostalgic discourses.

The climax of the regressive attachment to Oedipal subjectivity is a form of subjectivity that is connected to the idealization of the return to a wild existence after experiencing the repressive domestication of post-Fordist immaterial subjectivity: the feral subject. Sean Penn’s directorial debut *Into the Wild* (2007) illustrates the desire to return to a more pleasurable form of subjectivity via the return to and struggle with nature not just as escapist but as a clearly bourgeois and anti-dialectical desire.⁶⁷ The basic plot of the film revolves around the decision of a young, white, middle-class man to abandon all worldly possessions after graduating from college, following his desire to lead a solitary life in the wild and rebirth himself as Alex Supertramp. The awkwardness of the expression “rebirth himself” here indicates the flawed, anti-dialectical logic of his project. The force of the film’s critique, however, is located in the fact that it becomes increasingly virtually impossible to approve of and identify with the central character’s selfish and clearly irrational actions. Even a viewer who completely identifies with the character at the beginning of the film and enjoys his romanticized project of living in the wild by the end of the film reaches the same conclusion Alex comes to. Before dying of starvation, Alex Supertramp has an epiphany regarding the definition of a pleasurable and at the same time functional form of subjectivity. The last entry in his journal, which expresses the necessarily dialectical formation of subjectivity and positive affect that stands opposed to Oedipal/feral subjectivity and enjoyment, consequently reads: “happiness is only real if it is shared.”

Critiquing the post-Fordist bourgeois ideal of feral subjectivity, *Into the Wild* is largely characterized by strikingly beautiful and grandiose shots of nature and of Alex’s enjoyment of its sublime qualities. Nature’s sublimity, however, gives way to the sublimity of the post-Fordist city in a striking scene in which Alex briefly enters the city limits of Los Angeles. Both Alex and the viewer are confronted with the shock of the transition into the reality

of social relations in a capitalist society. For most of the movie Alex is indeed able to be the “Supertramp” that corresponds to his idealized picture of a return to nature. In the context of Los Angeles, however, surrounded by countless homeless people, Alex Supertramp makes the shocking discovery that he really is Alex Bourgeois-tramp, since the context of Los Angeles for the first time casts him not as a tramp but as a bourgeois tourist of homeless and destitute subjectivity, a realization that prompts him immediately to leave Los Angeles. It is after this discovery that Alex undergoes a transition and his existence is increasingly represented in socially more realistic terms, focusing on the misery, hunger, violence, and lack of protection that characterize the lives of homeless people. The visit to Los Angeles thus illustrates to Alex the privileged position from which he defines reality as physical existence in the wild. In his version of the wild he misreads his own subject position as Alex Supertramp. In the city, however, he finds out that the subject position he truly occupies is that of the homeless. It is this ideological gap, which gives rise to his escapist desires, that is closed at the end of the movie, forcing Alex to realize the necessarily dialectical construction of subjectivity.

A Generation of Men Raised by Women: Gendering Post-Fordism

We have seen not only that contemporary critiques of post-Fordist subjectivity frequently are politically and ideologically regressive in nature but also that this regression, along with the positions of racial and economic privilege that inform many critiques of post-Fordism, tends to mask itself as anti-capitalist critique. Such critiques of post-Fordism that disregard the dialectical connection between ROA and MOR hence constitute bourgeois desires whose regressive opposition to post-Fordism masquerades as materialist critique, a sheep in wolf’s clothing with no potential for radical critique or negativity. Yet it should be obvious by now that there is one additional dimension that is affected by the devolutionary turn produced by post-Fordism: gender. Even mainstream, liberal columnists cannot help but note that we seem to be experiencing a general trend that abandons the investment in the achievements of the various feminist and women’s rights movements for the regressive return to mid-twentieth-century gender conventions.⁶⁸ If we once again consider the prevalence of the anti-anti-Oedipus and the idealization of physicality as a means of recentering the subject as the horizon of the solution to the problematic experience of post-Fordist subjectivity, it is by no means surprising that contemporary gender politics and cultural representation of gender relations should be significantly affected.

To explore this problem in greater detail it is worth turning our attention to *Fight Club* one last time. As indicated earlier, the overt homosocial if not homosexual overtones of the narrative should not be read as opposition to the traditional family structure but instead as the regressive desire to bring “back the father” who rules a society of men. As Tyler Durden famously notes, post-Fordist society is characterized by “a generation of men raised by women.” “I’m wondering,” he adds, “if another woman is the answer.”⁶⁹ Consequently, it is not simply that post-Fordist subjectivity is perceived as unpleasurable because the post-Fordist structure is anti-Oedipal in nature and thus disallows the formulation of enjoyable forms of subjectivity. Indeed, both post-Fordism and post-Fordist subjectivity are clearly gendered. Post-Fordism is represented as a feminized form of existence, and it is this construction of post-Fordism’s effect as feminizing that constitutes one of the bases for its rejection. Fordism, correspondingly, becomes not merely the idealized locus of pleasurable subjectivity as a result of its Oedipal structure but the locus of masculinity.

As we saw earlier, the regressive rejection of post-Fordist subjectivity is accompanied by the idealization of physicality and the laboring body that presents a positive alternative to immaterial, deregulated subjectivity. Yet, it is not just the laboring body that is romanticized; it is decidedly the male laboring body. In other words, the tension between Fordism and post-Fordism becomes reinscribed as the tension between a fundamentally masculine and a fundamentally feminine existence because masculinity and reality are singularly defined in relation to physicality and the male laboring body. Immaterial post-Fordist capitalism, therefore, creates a crisis of masculinity by supplanting masculine forms of subjectivity with the feminizing world of the digital age and immaterial trade. Even representations of knowledge and skills, as we have seen, are channeled through this gendering of these two stages of capitalism. Fordist skills and interiorized knowledge — knowledge signaled by his ability to build a perfect hand, knowledge that signals his physicality, his ability to control his existence in relation to the surrounding world and his masculinity, which ultimately makes him into a suitable leader and father-surrogate — are what Tyler offers.

Furthermore, the feminizing effect and logic of post-Fordist capitalism are represented as furthering the inability to formulate a stable sense of subjectivity. The narrator informs us at the beginning of the novel that “all of this . . . is really about Marla Singer. . . . This isn’t about love as in *caring*. This is about *property* as in *ownership*.”⁷⁰ Instability means anxiety. Enjoyment is attached to stability, centralization, the acquisition of a woman as a means of re-forming the Oedipal triangle, and thereby ultimately to the concept of “ownership” indicative of Fordist subjectivity. Richard Sennett

argues in this respect that the new capitalism is fundamentally characterized by surrender — the necessity to surrender previous forms of subjectivity. A new ROA requires a new MOR: in other words, forms of subjectivity that fulfill the demands of the new capitalism. According to Sennett, this new subjectivity resembles that of the consumer (who is open to changing with every new fashion) and replaces that of the owner (who finds stability in guarding private property). Sennett's argument here, however, is that these demands for the ideal subject clash with the persisting interest in those forms of narrating one's life that one is supposed to surrender.⁷¹ Paradoxically, Fordist life narratives, as a consequence of the rejection of post-Fordism, become increasingly vital to the ways in which we are willing to make sense of our existence and their absence results in anxiety, paranoia, and depression. These Fordist narratives, however, are always gendered.

The result of this gendering of Fordism and post-Fordism as an aspect of the rejection of post-Fordist subjectivity is the regression to atavistic gender conventions. Yet, even more troubling is the rise of misogynistic logic that, much like class and race privilege, hides behind what on the surface may indeed appear to constitute anti-capitalist critique. We can find notable examples in Richard Russo's Pulitzer Prize-winning 2001 novel *Empire Falls*, which represents life in a former industrial town in rural Maine, now economically devastated by the end of Fordism. Yet, the critique of the socially crippling effect of post-Fordism that constitutes the surface narrative is once again channeled through a version of the father narrative. The main plot of the novel follows Miles Roby's desperate attempts to be a good father to his adolescent daughter Christina ("Tick"). Miles's broken family (his wife left him for a hypermasculine bodybuilder) becomes the extension of and logically connected to his desperate struggle against economic adversity resulting from the closing of the mill and factory that were the economic (and social) center of the town. Once again, post-Fordism is represented as a crisis of fathering and of masculinity. Yet, the sympathetic representation of Miles's struggle that invites traditional bourgeois readings that identify with his subject position masks the troubling logic that underlies the novel's attempt at critique. A detailed exploration of its shockingly regressive and misogynistic gender politics transcends the boundaries of this essay. Yet, we get a representative sense of this problem by looking at the narrative that frames the novel, which establishes Miles's nemesis: Francine Whiting, the rich widow of the former owner of the factory who has effectively taken over as the new leader of the town.

The novel begins with the story of Charles Beaumont Whiting, whose death symbolizes the end of the factory and Fordism. His death, however, is the result of his being psychologically tormented by Francine, which

ultimately causes Charles to commit suicide.⁷² Henceforth, Francine, the symbol of post-industrialism, becomes the ultimate reason for the decline of the town (as defined by those who remain nostalgically attached to the idea of the factory, hoping that it will reopen and provide the men with work), as well as for the plight of Miles's life. The novel consequently ends with the only event that seems to be able to provide Miles with pleasure and with the possibility for a positive future. In a scene that conjures up the regressively reversed famous image of Addie Bundren in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Francine dies in a flash flood and Miles watches her dead body float down the river. The flood washes her away at the exact same spot at which her husband committed suicide years earlier, and the novel's final sentences leave us with a strikingly misogynistic representation of male, post-Fordist pleasure increasingly characteristic of contemporary cultural production.

Astride the body, crouched at the shoulders of the dead woman, was a red-mouthed, howling cat. Together, dead woman and living cat bumped along the upstream edge of the straining dam, as if searching for a place to climb out and over. Bumping, nudging, seeking, until finally a small section of the structure gave way and they were gone.⁷³

The answer to the problems of post-Fordism, as *Empire Falls* illustrates, is represented not only as the return to Fordism, Oedipalism, and male physicality but often as the outright (violent) opposition to what is perceived as the feminization of society.

If culture is located in the center of the dialectical interrelation of capitalist structure and its supporting social component, producing and contesting the social forms and ideological structures that move capitalism and history forward, we can see that the representation of post-Fordist subjectivity is one of the most significant projects of contemporary cultural production. Representing and contesting the regressive desires and politics produced out of the experience of post-Fordism therefore once again illustrate the renewed need for rigorous engagements with negative dialectics and materialist epistemology. Whether bourgeois-escapist, conservative-regressive, or radical-critical, the ultimate horizon of cultural representations of post-Fordism and post-Fordist subjectivity is the materialist dialectic, the structure at which virtually all such representations at some point arrive. It is precisely on the level of cultural production's more or less successful attempts to struggle with what is widely perceived as post-Fordism's anti-dialectical structure that we must locate one of the most significant moments

of crisis in post-Fordism and one of the most lively and rewarding sites for critical inquiry.

Notes

¹ Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* (New York: Owl Books, 1997) 41.

² Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (New York: Verso, 2002) 1.

³ Arranged around the writings of its key figures, Alain Lipietz, Michel Aglietta, Bob Jessop, and Robert Boyer, regulation theory set out to critique neoclassical economic models by updating Marxist models of (political) economy. Since the beginning of the 1970s, the writings of the regulation school have focused on studies of long-term developments in capitalism as effects of moments of structural crisis and analyses of modes of production as the result of the interplay between economy and a dialectically connected social structure, whose permanent struggle (especially in periods of crisis) produces determining economic as well as social, cultural, and political forms. Significant works for the development of regulation theory are the following: Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The U.S. Experience*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2001); Alain Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles: The Crises of Global Fordism*, trans. David Macey (London: Verso, 1987); Robert Boyer, *The Regulation School: A Critical Introduction*, trans. Craig Charney (New York: Columbia UP, 1990); Robert Boyer, *Regulation Theory: The State of the Art* (London: Routledge, 2002); Bob Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2003); Bob Jessop, *Beyond the Regulation Approach: Putting Capitalist Economies in Their Place* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2006).

⁴ Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation* 19.

⁵ I should stress that this is a claim of a different order than arguments that describe postmodernism as having been gradually absorbed by contemporary capitalism. I would like to propose an understanding of postmodernism as always already part of the emergence of post-Fordism, facilitating the development of a new MOR that made the transition into full post-Fordism possible. The liberatory potential located in postmodern culture and theory, in other words, retroactively reveals itself as the result of a misrecognition of the true interrelation of postmodernism and socioeconomic structure (emergent postmodernity or post-Fordism). Postmodernism, therefore, poignantly proves right psychoanalytic arguments regarding the interconnection of *jouissance* and *méconnaissance*.

⁶ For a detailed account of this periodizing distinction, see my dissertation, "Nostalgia for the Future: Post-Fordist Literature and Culture," diss., U of Illinois at Chicago, 2008.

⁷ This formulation of the "standardization of difference" is based on Jameson's famous description of the increasing standardization of contemporary society

precisely because of the spread and further differentiation of consumer capitalism. Jameson refers to this phenomenon as "the persistence of the Same through absolute Difference." For a more detailed version of this description of the relationship between standardization and the forms of "perpetual change" contemporary capitalism is based on, see Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 15–18.

⁸ For a detailed explanation of the ways in which the concepts "schizophrenia," "father," and "Oedipal family" are used in this context, see sections 1 and 2 ("The Desiring Machines" and "Psychoanalysis and Familialism: The Holy Family") in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983) 1–137.

⁹ *The Sopranos*, HBO, 1999–2007.

¹⁰ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998).

¹¹ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 7.

¹² As the narrator finds out, the concepts of "difference" and "freedom" in bourgeois individualism must always reveal themselves as hollow, as difference is reduced to ultimate, anti-social, and anti-dialectical difference, which the narrator perceives as social isolation. Expressed in terms of a currently popular concept, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's account of "singularity," the problems for the narrator emerge precisely out of his persistently bourgeois account of difference that never truly ends in a critique of capitalism (and its social dimension). In other words, as we shall see in detail later on, the narrator's critique of anti-Oedipal post-Fordism focuses singularly on the sociological problems post-Fordism poses. Dissociating the social from the economic, the narrator's attempts to overcome bourgeois difference and consequent social isolation can never lead to the moment at which, according to Hardt and Negri, "the common begins to emerge" as a result of the recognition of "singularity." In short, singularity can emerge out of difference only once we begin to analyze the ways in which we "share capitalist regimes of accumulation and exploitation" and the ways in which we "reproduce the common," which is where Hardt and Negri locate a possible moment of communication as singularities begin to communicate. For a more detailed exploration of this concept see Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin, 2004) 128–29. For our immediate purposes, however, it suffices to suggest that the narrator's dissociation of the economic and the social perpetuates his confinement in an inherently anti-dialectical situation.

¹³ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 20.

¹⁴ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 21.

¹⁵ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 11. The term "simulated" is here used in the context of Jean Baudrillard's writings on the hyperreal in *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994).

¹⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971) 111.

¹⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* 114–17.

¹⁸ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 13.

¹⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* 115–17.

²⁰ John McCullough, “Tedium and Torture: *Fight Club*, Globalization and Professionals in Crisis,” *Cine Action* 65 (2004): 44.

²¹ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 45.

²² Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 133.

²³ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 133.

²⁴ It should be noted here that this discussion is limited to a specific group of people who are in fact entirely included in the post-Fordist system. As David Harvey notes, it is important to realize that the contemporary socioeconomic structure, like all previous ones, is not homogenous. Instead, it includes areas of “peripheral Fordism,” such as workers in the Third World or workers in sectors of the U.S. economy responsible for the shrinking but still essential forms of manual and physical production and manufacturing. For an explanation of this concept, see Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990) 155–56.

²⁵ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 100.

²⁶ For a basic outline of the argument of postmodern theory mentioned earlier, as well as for the concept “metanarrative,” see Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) 34–37.

²⁷ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 177.

²⁸ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 190.

²⁹ Drucilla Cornell, “Fatherhood and Its Discontents,” in *Lost Fathers: The Politics of Fatherlessness in America*, ed. Cynthia R. Daniels (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1998) 193.

³⁰ Cornell, “Fatherhood and Its Discontents” 193.

³¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989) 640–41.

³² Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995) 24–25.

³³ Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* 57.

³⁴ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 57.

³⁵ Jonathan Franzen, *The Corrections* (New York: Picador, 2001).

³⁶ For the classic formulation of this argument, see Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989). A summary and further materialist exploration of Freud’s work as it relates to the basic arguments introduced here can be found in Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon, 1974) 21–105.

³⁷ See the chapters “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” and “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or

Reason since Freud” in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2004). Louis Althusser ultimately develops these arguments regarding the function of repression in the dialectical formation of consciousness in his description of the process of the birth of the subject as a process of “interpellation,” within which the subject is “hailed” by the law of a given society into a specific subject position. For a detailed description of this, see the famous chapter “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review P, 1971).

³⁸ For a brief yet accurate explanation of these Lacanian concepts, see the chapters “The Lacanian Subject” and “The Subject and the Other’s Desire” in Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*.

³⁹ Even in the modern *Bildungsroman* that is characterized by representations of failed “educations,” this Oedipal logic remains the same and forms the basis of the element of social critique that locates the source of the failure of the subject’s initiation in a crisis of society’s Oedipal structure. It is within this context of a failed initiation into a society that is a result of a significant moment of sociopolitical crisis that we can read contemporary narratives of absent and weak fathers, which becomes especially clear for our purposes when reading *Fight Club* as a *Bildungsroman*.

⁴⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1991) 23–25.

⁴¹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997) 26–27.

⁴² Žižek, *Awry* 6.

⁴³ Žižek, *Awry* 7–12.

⁴⁴ Žižek, *Fantasies* 39.

⁴⁵ Jacques-Alain Miller, “The Names-of-the-Father,” *Lacanian Ink* 27 (2006): 70–71.

⁴⁶ Žižek, *Awry* 197.

⁴⁷ Deleuze and Guattari’s anti-Oedipus hence reveals itself not as the end of the dialectic but as a radical dialectical move that supersedes the stage of centrally limiting, Oedipal subjectivity. Despite that fact that the anti-Oedipus is also of fundamental importance for the transition into post-Fordism, the way forward clearly does not lie in a restoration of paternalistic structures but in the exploration of the dialectical contradictions of anti-Oedipal, deregulated subjectivity within the context of post-Fordist materiality.

⁴⁸ For a detailed account of Bakhtin’s distinction between dialogic and polyphonic literature, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialectical Imagination*, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) and *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984).

⁴⁹ Henry Giroux and Imre Szeman, “IKEA Boy and the Politics of Male Bonding: *Fight Club*, Consumerism, and Violence,” *New Art Examiner*, 28 (2000–2001) 31.

⁵⁰ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 4.

⁵¹ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* 161.

⁵² Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006) 7–16.

⁵³ Sennett, *The Culture of New Capitalism* 55.

⁵⁴ Sennett, *The Culture of New Capitalism* 53.

⁵⁵ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 122.

⁵⁶ The restoration of masculinity, the Oedipal family, and the figure of a strong father in the person of Tyler Durden is therefore also clearly linked to a totalitarian potential residing within the regressive desiring structures postFordism produces, which is indicated via allusions to Hitler (the making of soap out of human fat) as well as to Stalin (the establishment of a totalitarian, agrarian collective in the back yard of the house on Paper Street). It is quite poignant that it is precisely the totalitarian logic of Project Mayhem and Tyler's function as fascist dictator that is most commonly overlooked, resulting in the transformation of the figure of Tyler into a pop-cultural icon in ways that illustrate the significance of *Fight Club*'s critical intervention. In the context of misguided critiques of postFordism, fascism may in fact reveal itself as an enjoyable alternative to anti-Oedipalism, reminding us of Klaus Theweleit's famous exploration of the relationship between (anti-)Oedipalism and fascism. See Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 2, *Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989).

⁵⁷ Within contemporary cultural production such nostalgic representations of Fordist labor are strikingly common, as are narratives that highlight the regressive nature of nostalgia for Fordist subjectivity. Popular examples include the TV drama *Lost*, whose entire second season revolves around various forms of re-creating Fordist assembly line labor as replacements for lost teleological narratives, and movies such as *Into the Wild* (which will be discussed in more detail later in this essay), which strikingly represents the bourgeois desire for and romantic construction of Fordist and manual labor.

⁵⁸ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 4–5.

⁵⁹ Sennett, *The Culture of New Capitalism* 92–96.

⁶⁰ Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2006) 133.

⁶¹ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti et al. (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004) 102–03.

⁶² Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" 135.

⁶³ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 41.

⁶⁴ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 22.

⁶⁵ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 116.

⁶⁶ Especially significant in this context are vacations that unite physicality and traditional narratives of masculinity. Among the most poignant examples of this in a U.S. context is the increasingly popular cattle drive.

⁶⁷ *Into the Wild*, directed by Sean Penn, Paramount Vantage, 2007.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Maureen Dowd's article "What's a Modern Girl To Do?" *New York Times*, Sunday, 30 October 2005. The article made it into the top ten of the *New York Times*' most e-mailed articles of 2005 and describes the perturbing return to seemingly outdated gender norms that is rapidly reversing the achievements of the feminist movements.

⁶⁹ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 41.

⁷⁰ Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 4.

⁷¹ Sennett, *The Culture of New Capitalism* 4–5.

⁷² Richard Russo, *Empire Falls* (New York: Vintage, 2001) 15–16.

⁷³ Russo, *Empire Falls* 483.

The Failed State and the State of Failure

Peter Hitchcock

The first step towards liberation is, in a way, the awareness of defeat.

Slavoj Žižek

The failed state is, for Marxism, comparable in significance to the falling or failing rate of profit because both are overdetermined by the crises associated with the rising organic composition of capital as a global matrix. There is more than one twist to this narrative, however, starting with a second-order comparison (linked in my schema to the invocation of a messy and unevenly developed chiasmus) that holds that such state failure harkens back to the concept of the falling rate of profit as itself a failure to explain adequately the current constellation of labor and capital on a world scale. In the following argument one supposition will ghost or harangue the other as if held in a dialectical tension, the state of a debt, as it were, that owes less to Derridean mourning than to a certain entropic function in any organic composition. Such historicity extends to the conceptual field, which is not to make a virtue of the failures of Marxism but to draw attention to what is living and dead in theories of the state, where I read the failed state as a decisive symptom. The tension at issue does not reveal chiasmus as a surrogate for dialectics within cultural materialism but is nevertheless a heuristic method regarding a constitutive reversal in the nature of the state that, as an organic composite, now threatens to recolonize the decolonized and decolonize the colonizers or the axis of the nation-state through which such power is networked. For Marxism the state is an X factor, the form of domination that is yet the architectonic for domination's diminution. The familiar mantra that the state constrains and is constrained (for it is always and never identical with a class

structured in dominance and capital as a divisible term) has always pivoted on the issue of autonomy, absolute for Hegel in terms of general interest and relative for more recent Althusserians eager to map the ideological dispensations of the economic. There is no space here to expound fully on the complex parameters of this genealogy, the interrogation of theoretical practice, but I hold it as axiomatic that much Marxism on the question is still bound by the conditions marked with an X by Pierre Macherey in 1979, *Hegel ou Spinoza*.¹ This is not a binary, especially for those who favor Spinoza, because it offers the possibility, as Warren Montag has suggested, of a dialectic of the positive, shorn of its negation of the negation.² By and by, it also opens up a space for anarchic thought vis-à-vis the state, and it is not for nothing that a libertarian like Noam Chomsky has pushed the issue of failed states to the fore (see below). My primary interest is in the long space of the failed state, which links its conceptualization after the end of the Cold War to the inception of international relations themselves, whose X factor is the Peace of Westphalia and its framework of autonomy, relative or otherwise. In this light, I will urge the prescience of chiasmus not just within poesis but within the very form of the state, within the texture of its time/space or chronotope. It is not a hermeneutical device but an analytical lever enabling us to ask questions of what becomes (of) Marxism where no proletariat dictates and where the state dissipates not from freedom's reign but precisely from the latter's disinterested abstraction under globalization.

No doubt chiasmus is a nod to my sense of a cultural materialism that acknowledges the material basis of the state in the economic and the juridical yet sees in failure and falling a decidedly tropological and cultural suasion, relations a tad more active in the apprehension of the state, individually and collectively. For Marxism, the dissolution of states is an impressively ambivalent event, not just because of the human costs but because history is littered with the detritus of states that claimed, rightly or wrongly, an allegiance to Marxism as an organizing principle. Engels, of course, held that the state is not abolished, it withers away, but by the early 1990s one might have been forgiven for thinking that most of this withering had occurred within socialism and that abolition of this state was achieved with velvet ease. However much we claim that what withered was not the rational kernel but the mystical shell, we live in an age beyond easy alibis. Fortunately, capital and its ailing trading partner, the nation-state, exist in the same world and this is why the theory of the failed state emerges precisely at the moment when capitalist triumphalism should have been at its highest, when indeed the specter of actually existing socialism gave up the ghost. States could no longer fail according to some highly nuanced Cold War calculus (the reds did it!); another set of measurements had to be developed and propagated, and

some of these might reflect the infrastructural crises of capitalist statehood even as capital itself has clearly sought a mobility relatively unfettered by state dictate.

The general research project from which the current discussion derives is to understand the extent and depth of crisis in postcolonial statehood and polity — the displacement of the falling rate of profit onto the production of failure in alternative decolonization. Previously I have argued this as not only a challenge to the forms of political transformation but one that places a special burden on the powers of imagination, not Homi Bhabha's pun, but that which seethes in a kind of psychic dislocation first tracked by Fanon.³ Some of that critique, like an obstinate symptom, will reappear below under the rubric of failure, but in the interest of brevity I will argue within three interlaced theoretical and historical problems that all descend from my initial proposition. First, the failed state concept as a festering bourgeois antimony over the future of the global south or an oppositional order once termed the Third World. What we might call the Westphalian *Weltanschauung* finds the meaning of globalization obstinately disjunct in a manner that reduces sovereignty to exchange value and threatens to exchange northern hegemony for redistributive regionalism and local delinking. Second, the failed state as an eruption of a constitutive non-space in the organic composition of capital, a terrifying void where subjectless natives cannot be depended on to give up value for extraction especially after a good bludgeoning via structural adjustment or forthright occupation. Third, the failed state as a creative space for catachresis that exists between the state as a paradigm and the invocation of specific nation-states. I insist on this admixture because they are organic interlocutors, like constant to variable capital, without which politics is itself subject to failure and the imagined community of nation itself is unimaginable.

The concept of the failed state owes its formulation to an article by Gerald Helman, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, and Steven Ratner, an international affairs fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, that appeared in *Foreign Policy* at the end of 1992.⁴ Yet before we consider its elements, and indeed its subsequent tabulation, we must emphasize that the failed state actually begins with the concept of state sovereignty read to be ratified by the Peace of Westphalia (1648), whose treaties (Munster and Osnabruck) still *remarkably* inflect the *ratio* of the nation-state today.⁵ The incredulity exists in several forms. The Peace is seen to set the terms for sovereignty, non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states, and the legal equality of states. Unfortunately, participants like France, Sweden, and the Holy Roman Empire assumed sovereignty and felt no particular urge to sanctify it for the benefit of others in either treaty. France

and Sweden, in particular, were accorded the right of intervention, especially where the Holy Roman Empire was concerned. As for legal equality, in the case of the Empire the emperor was more equal than anyone else and could dispense with princes on a somewhat less than equal basis. A sensitive dependence to initial conditions also serves to remind us that the world according to Westphalia consisted of Catholics and Protestants (indeed we have two treaties because the noble Christians did not want to share the same room) and that in general the model of the international order was definitively a European solution to a European problem, namely, the Holy Roman Empire as a failed or failing state. It has not escaped historical commentators that the Peace of Westphalia sought to both inhibit *and* preserve the beneficence of imperialism (the Empire lasted until 1806), and one non-signatory in particular, England, thought that contradiction was deliciously fertile, and still does, as mortars rain in Basra and as politicians twiddle their thumbs over the European Union. I should say, however, that while the European Union diminishes state rivalry, within its compass it holds fast to an original precept of Westphalia, that the model of polity is Europe itself. Abolish the Westphalian system, its defenders like Rawls say, and wars and fundamentalism will conspire in devastating hegemonies.⁶ It is certainly possible to derive a moral order from Westphalia as Rawls does but it comes with consequences that are not altogether moral, even when people are assigned a primary position over states (incidentally, something that the text of the treaties demonstrably overlooks). By reintegrating state failure into the state's most influential blueprint one can begin to track a different circuit in its extension, one that has ideological and political implications. If the original Peace offered rapprochement between several conflicting orders — feudal, imperial, religious, despotic — the medium of settlement is composed of property and law; indeed the law of property is pronounced in many of its pages. Yet, since it is read to say what it often does not, its consummate hold on international relations takes on the order of a fetish, or an *objet petit a* that is in fact split off from what is truly desired. This is an instance of both the mythology consonant with nationalism of which Benedict Anderson has written and a kind of originary forgetting we might associate with Renan's nation formulation (the latter, of course, highlighting the extreme violence in making nations).⁷ For nascent European bourgeoisies this functioned more like an investment opportunity where one could make something from nothing and use a prince or two to overthrow the feudal order. In all of this the desire is for a subsumption of state to the law of property and the development of class alliances only to the extent they submit to bourgeois identity itself. It is an instance where, as Marx and Engels point out in *The German Ideology*, the language of class directly

inflects its character: *eigen* (one's own), *Eigenschaft* (feature), *Eigentum* (property).⁸ Just as the European feudal order imploded in an eighty-year war and a thirty-year war that highlighted its failure to consolidate state hegemony, the treaty itself is haunted by failure and proceeds to cultivate characteristics it either cannot name or must contravene at all costs. It can be argued that strong states have emerged by riding roughshod over Westphalia, but any failure of the West is premised primarily on a fetishistic compulsion to accede to that which the Peace does not state. Far from marking this text therefore as irrelevant, its lack is a fundamental linchpin of bourgeois approbation in the current international order.

In 1992 what Helman and Ratner saw in Haiti, the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, and Cambodia is a form of a state "utterly incapable of sustaining itself as a member of the international community." The main characteristics, "civil strife, government breakdown, and economic privation," are understandable markers, but the writers then argue that the emergence of the failed state is a symptom of the very proliferation of nation-states after World War II, tied inexorably to the process of decolonization. "Self-determination" is placed above "long-term survivability."

Fundamental to the notion of decolonization was the idea that peoples could best govern themselves when free from the shackles, or even the influences, of foreigners. The idea, then, that states could fail — that they could be simply unable to function as independent entities — was anathema to the *raison d'être* of decolonization and offensive to the notion of self-determination. New states might be poor, it was thought, but they would hold their own by virtue of being independent.⁹

The logic here is worth examining because it girds a contradiction produced by the mythology of the world of Westphalia that to a great extent the UN Charter preserves. Clearly, the proliferation of independent states has much to do with the success of anti-colonial movements around the globe and the weakening of specific imperial states that could no longer maintain dominion. To this we could add the machinations of the Cold War that secured client states by investments, loans, and military support. We should also note this theorization of the failed state foregrounds both the problems of newly minted states and the more recent interpellation of the United States as a sole superpower and global "policeman." Initially the United States leveraged its power in the UN to share the burden of its global primacy (most evident in the conduct of the Gulf War where the United States was paid handsomely for dumping huge amounts of ordnance beyond its sell-by date),

but in general there was ambivalence in the United States about global stewardship. What Helman and Ratner do not address is the effect of this discomfort on UN intervention and relief. While they advocate UN trusteeship or conservatorship over and above the sovereignty concerns of the failed or failing state, they elide America's geopolitical influence in the matter. Only when direct U.S. or Western interests in general are met do we see significant humanitarian and security aid provided. If the nation-state is a victim of its own success ("the vast proliferation of nation-states," etc.), its viability has also been undermined both by its formulae and by the messy contradictions of the new world order.

One problem in this regard, artfully spun in the nature of a cruel reversal, is the principle of sovereignty, which the authors describe as a "talismán." Indeed. It is criticized as "an ill-defined and amorphous notion of international law [that] has been used to denote everything from a state's political independence — its separate existence as a political unit on the world scene — to the more extreme view that all the internal affairs of a state are beyond the scrutiny of the international community."¹⁰ It is not surprising that this vagary is applied only to new states of the Third World or postcolonial world and not to states like the United States, which have played with sovereignty's strategic ambivalence. Post-1945 states are described as attaching "an almost exaggerated importance" to sovereignty as if the experience of nations like Haiti, Panama, Grenada, Korea, Vietnam, Somalia, Indonesia, Chile, Afghanistan, Iraq, and so forth had not suggested a little emphasis on non-intervention might be appropriate. And now, according to Helman and Ratner, it is China that "hides behind sovereignty" despite some estimates that 40 percent of its GNP is owned by foreign capital. I have suggested that sovereignty's claim on nation-state identity has had a somewhat fetishistic function in international relations, but this desire is not primarily located in the muddleheaded mythologizing of anti-colonial struggle: it is rather constitutive of a necessary obfuscation in the real foundation of capital's organic composition. The point would be not just to redefine this sovereignty as Giorgio Agamben has done to encompass the bare life (*zoē*) of a simple living body but to analyze its historical purchase on state formation as a medium of capital circulation and accumulation.¹¹ The rule over bodies is not simply some philosophical contagion but a material embodiment of state desire. Statelessness, or the identification of the failed state, often now refers to the barely living rather than to those who have joyously reverted to an Aristotelian distinction. As a historical predicament it certainly reveals specific antimonies in the concept of sovereignty, but Agamben roots this in Nazi Germany (the current craze for Schmittism) and not to the somewhat pressing contemporary concerns of the world system

(we can say there are intimations of fascism in the latter but they are never only political structures and are not identical because of that).

In the face of a surge of *debellatios* (a term, Helman and Ratner remind us, that was once used to describe the shattered German state after World War II), what should the world order do? Within the UN Security Council, at least, you pick your interventions according to the imbalance of your power. When a few million Africans are dying across Burundi, Rwanda, the Congo (and then DRC), Sudan, and Somalia, the calculus appears to be the balance between their economic effects on global circuits of power and the ideological necessity of saving a few blacks to maintain the aura of beneficence. No one is ever that cynical, but even the Kuwaiti royal family must have noticed a difference between their rescue and those of the Tutsi a few years later. In *Capital* Marx famously brackets the question of the state, an omission often remedied by a Marxist emphasis on *The German Ideology* or *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, themselves parentheses of a particular crisis. Kojin Karatani suggests that the problem of the state in *Capital* should be answered by the method of *Capital* itself.¹² This approach has much to recommend it, for Karatani requires a critique of modern absolutist monarchical states (because Marx explains a current condition by reference to its previous conjunction). To some extent this is applicable to the current fix of the failed state (we could, for instance, read it into both the example of Kuwait and that of Rwanda — the latter historically hamstrung by that arch-absolutist, Leopold, in the Congo). The failed state recalls Marx's notion of fetishism as the confusion of gold for currency. The nation-state is the gold standard but its failure is on the order of *méconnaissance*, an event of interpellation in which intimations of a general equivalent form must be expunged, or demonized, or displaced as Third World dysfunction. For bourgeois rationalism an anti-mony requires more than stigmatization; it necessitates systematization — it must be itemized and graphed.

Thus, we move from linchpins of a league of nations to the league tabling of nations. The Fund for Peace, in cooperation with *Foreign Policy* magazine (home of the Helman and Ratner article), has developed a formula for failure around what it calls a Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST): a four-step trend-line analysis, consisting of (1) rating twelve social, economic, and political/military indicators; (2) assessing the capabilities of five core state institutions considered essential for sustaining security; (3) identifying idiosyncratic factors and surprises; and (4) placing countries on a conflict map that shows the risk history of countries being analyzed.¹³ The fund's main aim — to prevent war or alleviate the conditions that cause it — is admirable and I do not doubt the seriousness they bring to this task. The CAST, however, has a clinical resonance, like a twelve-step program as you

struggle with the issue of dependency. The Failed State Index (FSI) is produced using the first category with a precision that is breathless: “The CAST software indexed and scanned tens of thousands of open-source articles and reports using Boolean logic. The data are electronically gathered using Thomson Dialog, a powerful data-collection system that includes international and local media reports and other public documents, including U.S. State Department reports, independent studies, and even corporate financial filings. The data used in each index are collected from May to December of the preceding year. The software calculates the number of positive and negative ‘hits’ for the 12 indicators. Internal and external experts then review the scores as well as the articles themselves, when necessary, to confirm the scores and ensure accuracy.” For those unfamiliar with Thomson Dialog it is a subscription database that searches within English, French, German, and Spanish (too bad if your research or reports are in Russian, Chinese, or Kiswahili) and can turn up nuggets from the *Wall Street Journal* with consummate ease. And for anyone captivated by Colin Powell’s performance at the UN, State Department communications also pop up with edifying frequency. There is no spin filter, although the experts provide what some may call quality control, which is only to remark that once a position/view has been sanctioned by transnational media conglomerates it is subsequently true for the Boolean search (at least within the time parameters given). The indicators include easily measured features such as the “legacy of vengeance seeking group grievance or group paranoia”; “uneven economic development along group lines”; “criminalization and/or delegitimization of the state”; “suspension or arbitrary application of the rule of law”; “security apparatus operates as state within a state”; the “rise of factionalized elites”; and “the intervention of states or other external actors.” Each indicator is assigned a value out of ten (again a measure of general equivalence) and the results are tabulated. In 2005 Cote D’Ivoire won the race for failure, scoring a state-defying 106 out of 120. Obviously the civil war had much to do with this but the Fund/*Foreign Policy* also notes an unwillingness to bend to needed reforms (advocated, for instance, by Ivory Coast’s previous custodians, the French). The DRC came in a close second, a paragon of failure so obvious that it does not even require a country assessment in the fund’s analysis. The hideous predations of the Janjaweed only merit Sudan third place in 2005, and it was only by the valiant efforts of and training by the government that Sudan raised its position to first in 2006 and 2007 with an impressive 113.7. Iraq and Somalia round out the top five and point to the utter failure of the assessment of failure (they climb to second and third, respectively, in 2007 with a remarkable surge in failure). Why?

In both cases the indicators immediately reveal serious elements of state collapse but they do not connect these in any way to systemic foundations in the state apparatus and their meaning within a long space that would include imperialism, colonialism, and the deep structures of local polity. Why have these countries failed and what makes some more than others worth saving? In the case of Somalia, for instance, state collapse is linked to the anarchy following the overthrow of Siyad Barre, but this naked truth fails to comprehend the fantastic projection of statehood endured by Somalis and others who dared to think beyond the prescriptions offered by Britain, Italy, and France after the World War II. Without belaboring the point, Somalia’s democracy collapsed in 1969 with the assassination of Abdirashid Ali Shermarke, its second president. The state had already failed and was kept in that position by Cold War fiat. Like Mobutu or Idi Amin, Siyad Barre was permitted to be sovereign, that is, to exercise the right to the monopoly over violence within his borders, so long as it served the greater game. This is similar to the fate of the state in Iraq, although the tender mercies of the United States in that regard have been overdetermined by more forthright geopolitical and geoeconomic indicators. Such is the paranoia of its caretaker that one is no longer certain whether Iraq is actually required to fulfill American ambition; indeed, for some politicians the completion of Iraq’s failure as a nation would mark the success of U.S. involvement in that delegitimization (to borrow from the language of failure prescribed by the Fund for Peace and *Foreign Policy*). The latter are correct to assert that none of the indicators should be read in isolation, but this also means understanding the failed state as a state of failure necessarily at or beyond the normative assumptions of state viability. This may explain the curious position of Israel in the rankings, whose incursions into Lebanon and occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem are read as healthy exercises in sovereignty, and whose treatment of its Arab minority does not seem to vex the indicators, or that its skies are streaked with rockets that threaten its civilian population, or that it faces no sanctions or intervention for its contravention of UN resolutions, or that it is a bastion of theocratic apartheid, or that its nuclear arsenal is a massive destabilizing factor in West Asia, or that without the crutch of the United States (whether in arms, technology, or foreign direct investment) it would hear the wings of capital flight. Interestingly, its economic health offsets most of the negative indicators, and this activity is often focused on arms and technology traded to deal with other states’ failure. True, at position 67 Israel (75 in 2007) is failing more than Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Libya, but why it cannot climb above Egypt or the Dominican Republic suggests that the search engine might be missing a title or two in the CAST system of the FSI. I do not argue that merely by raising the specter

of chiasmus we might alter the preference for tabulation over transformation, but I do take the failed state as a symptom, in Althusser and Balibar's critique, of "inadequate knowledge" and this requires further comment and analysis.

Karatani's answer to Marx's lacunae on the state in *Capital* is to read his methodology transcritically, as a pronounced parallax of constant transposition in which the principle of association undoes the unholy trinity of capital, nation, and state. Of course, Kant plays a role in this figuration and one wonders whether indeed it is possible to maintain the parallax before Kantian hypotyposis, the difficulty of rendering concepts before the sensorium. No doubt, Žižek would say *that* is the precise advantage of the parallax because its impossible point of view cannot confirm seeing as believing. Karatani himself favors the trans in transposition as the trans in transcendental and thus we have the intriguing notion that the state is a sublime object of ideology. Yet Karatani means more than this, and crucially so because he reads Marx to expound on the state in its absence through a synchronic analysis of capital and value. Althusser and Balibar read the shortfall as itself symptomatic — the silence is constitutive of the method (a favorite move of the aforementioned Macherey in his literary critique). The former tracks the effects of Marx's assumption that the rate of surplus value of total social capital is constant in his examples; the latter suggest that such assumptions themselves arise from an adherence to preliminary abstractions before concrete manifestations. Althusser and Balibar write out this silence through a Spinozan reading as theoretical practice; Karatani, however, perhaps less spooked by Hegel, preserves this dialectical tension, especially in his critique of the third volume of *Capital*. Where they would agree is around the stress on abstraction, a transcendental level for Karatani that resists the drift of empiricism. The precise meaning of this tension and of alternative reading apparatuses must here remain a challenge rather than a formula. I would like to unpack a couple of elements from the approach to explain how the failed state might reverse the state of failure when theoreticism and empiricism are not read as options (either/or) but as dynamic constituents of a Marxist problematic on the State.

The nation-state, as capitalists well know, continues to be a vital platform for the preservation of surpluses and the distribution of liability. Within globalization it is a home for capital, not the scene of capital, especially not finance or fictive capital. The attribution of failed state is a risk assessment algorithm that helps decide whether a home should be part of the scene and vice versa, in the manner of chiasmus. Marx, for Karatani, faced an analytical dilemma because of this juxtaposition, which has only intensified

since he set out his framework. Capitals with a higher organic composition coexist with those of lower organic composition, as different fields of industry with relative surplus value accrue more rapidly toward the higher stage, given its exploitative advantage. The problem is in tracking the falling rate of profit across these fields when they are spatially defined not just by industry but by nation, region, and globality. As Karatani notes, "In the profit that a certain individual capital gains, what is distributed is the surplus value exploited from the workers of different industrial branches as well as independent small producers; in the profit that the total capital of a certain nation-state gains, what is distributed is the surplus value exploited from the workers and peasants of foreign countries (colonies). But the difficulty is that these details are always invisible."¹⁴ Karatani sees industrial capital as a variant of merchant capital, but whatever the distinction its global form continues to search for cheap labor power (fictive capital seeks accumulation through circulation itself via a logic of speed and technology). While he emphasizes that capitalist globalization remains partial as a mode of production, Karatani acknowledges it has become globally dominant. So, while Marx attended to a nation-state, Great Britain, as his model for the study of capital, it is nevertheless linked to the world system because of his consideration of the rate of profit across different branches of industry with contrasting productivities; in effect, world capitalism. Now if that sounds like a preference for synecdoche over chiasmus we must crucially factor in both the effect of Marx's synchronic reading *and* the importance of autonomy. Earlier I mentioned how England claimed (and claims) exceptionalism to the whims of Westphalia (while actually enacting the vagaries of its prescriptions) but this uncertainty principle, this failure as a state of desire, to be wanting, to be absent (some of the meanings of failure), structures the world system as such. The failed state is indeed relatively autonomous because the factors precipitating its contravention are uniquely arrayed but also because each state has a being autonomous from capital. Factors appear consonant when ascertained synchronically, but within the long space they emerge as radically disjunct and mutually exceptional. This causes several issues to disappear or become invisible (to use Karatani's parlance), including the falling rate of profit. The failure is, whatever else it is, the absence of this calculation. Thus says Marx in volume 3 of *Capital*: "In so far as foreign trade cheapens on the one hand the elements of constant capital and on the other the necessary means of subsistence into which variable capital is converted, it acts to raise the rate of profit by raising the rate of surplus-value and reducing the value of constant capital." Marx continues: "We have shown in general, therefore, how the same causes that bring about a fall in general rate of profit provoke counter-effects [chiasmatic reversals,

perhaps] that inhibit this fall, delay it and in part even paralyze it. These do not annul the law, but they weaken its effect. If this were not the case, it would not be the fall in the general rate of profit that was incomprehensible, but rather the relative slowness of this fall.”¹⁵ Given Marx’s conclusions, Karatani asks why Marx failed to approach the world economy, especially since Marx states that it tends to weaken the law that is so much more demonstrable in its autonomous form. Karatani argues that Marx wanted to show the weakness of the autonomous form so that, through a political economist’s sense of negative capability, one comes to understand the real relation of capital’s organic composition. We might say, as Marx says of the left-Hegelian Szélig, that his talent is “not that of disclosing what is hidden (*Verborgne zu enthüllen*), but of hiding what is disclosed (*Enthüllte zu verbergen*).”¹⁶ This, I believe, is what we mean by failed state.

To return to our Failed State Index, the factors considered imply that the criteria are of equal weight in each example and that the scores fluctuate according to the statistical sweep of publications that take up these factors. Clearly the emphasis is on governance, which is to say the preponderance or not of Westphalian sanctioned stability: Is security provided? Are borders defensible? Is there an infrastructure for the distribution of what are often called political goods (that include health care, communications, a legal system) that a citizen expects from her/his state? Any political position that would claim the failed state as a field of possibility must account for the social cataclysm it represents. However, abstractions from the nature of a state’s failure are not an endorsement of the production of failure. Using the criteria developed by Robert I. Rotberg on the failed state, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was weak and began to fail not just from the greed of Hussein, his family, and cronies but as a result of the years of sanctions placed upon it.¹⁷ The failure was enforced by an invasion that of course claimed to wish the opposite but has now placed Iraq on the brink of a special subcategory of failure, the collapsed state (intriguingly, one that almost always sanctions intervention according to Rotberg). As for profit, the economic indicators included in failed state analysis are often vague and/or narrowly conceived. Think of the FSI’s consideration of corporate financial filings — I am sure this produced a veritable cornucopia on the subject of Somalia. The World Bank proudly displays no economic data in its assessment of Somalia while the Institute for Security Studies wagers that individual GDP is \$500 despite the fact it cannot generate a figure for Somalia’s overall GDP since at least 1993. Yet the economy certainly continues.

In a remarkable study, *Somalia: Economy without a State*, Peter D. Little has attempted to show how Somalis have survived under statelessness.¹⁸ With no functioning government, no central bank, and no accountable security

system, Somalis have continued to trade (officially, via contracts with transnational corporations [who neglected to include this data for Thomson Dialog], and unofficially, via a large and intricate black market), to move about the country (this is particularly important for roving pastoralists who maintain Somalia’s large livestock industry), and to maintain a semblance of social order (although, as Little affirms, this has not been the case in the main urban areas [at least until the recent emergence of the Islamic Courts — a mitigating factor that receded with the invasion of Ethiopian troops in December 2006 and U.S. air raids in their support]). Little’s research on Somalia of the 1990s underlines that the *sur-vivre* of Somalis has a longer history than the UN Charter. With no governmental administration, Somalis continued to use traditional local institutions to maintain communal and regional viability. These include the principle of the *diya*, a “blood payment” established through an extended family matrix that mitigates need in times of crisis; the *xeer* that functions as a form of social contract; and the *aqil* (renamed the *nabadoon* after the revolution of 1969), who acts as a local mediator among clan elders to resolve disputes. Little does not reject the advantages of the modern state apparatus; his argument is about how a postcolonial population survives when it basically gives the regime of state a vote of no confidence. Western and specifically UN aid remains crucial and is not discounted, but the example of Somalia shows that it is held with such deep suspicion that local communities survive by fending for themselves. This does not mean foreign intervention cannot assert itself: it has in the past and now, with the perception that failed states are breeding grounds for transnational terrorism (unlike autocratic strong states, of course), Somalia has become once again a topic of “strategic interest.” The failed state narrative, however, masks the importance of the geolocal and substitutes instead a compromised calculus that overlooks the substance of what I would term postcolonial duration.

The 2006 FSI top ten included eight African states, all of which have emerged from colonialism since World War II. More significantly, none of the top thirty-five failed states in any year so far has been an independent nation-state beyond the twentieth century. While strong states produce postmodern statelessness and a roving consonant with fictive capital, decolonizing states have often clung or been tied to modernity’s blueprint which, as I have suggested, includes the failed state concept in its inception. Furthermore, when the geopolitical prop of Cold War strategy was replaced by structural adjustment, local economies were offered the shock of instant integration. If one considers each example of failure in its autonomy, as I have begun to do in the case of Somalia, then the lacunae of Marx is not so much filled as reframed. Multiple modes of production are seen to coexist

but not in a manner sufficient enough for them to appear talismanic for capital's primary accumulation strategies. The problem is not extrapolation but interpolation. A taxonomy of transnationalism must bear the weight of failure both in its descriptions and in its abstractions. So far, the world order has blazed away terminologically to confirm that dysfunction in the family of nation-states is, for instance, a pathology of postcoloniality. Meanwhile, conceptual analysis of the state form begins and ends with markers that are often no less narrow than the empiricist projections of Washington think tanks. What then are alternative strategies for making sense of this failure?

If Karatani and others are correct in their reading of *Capital* as evidence that Marx grasped capitalism "beyond a polis (nation-state)," this is, as yet, little solace for the people of the South who sought to re-create sociopolitical systems delinked from imperial and colonial predation yet find these efforts crossed out, reversed by modernity's dead ends. By interpolating rather than extrapolating capitalist globalization from Marx, one finds no easy isomorphism between the failure of states as the failure of a dominant class to hold its own and capital's push to sublate the nation-state as a means to slow the crisis of the rate of profit failure. Certainly in the emergence of a new theorization of the failed state we can discern elements of a familiar Westphalian gambit — to preserve state formations regulating class conflict and provide an economic system porous enough for surplus value to pour out. Yet other factors are quite clearly at work tantamount to a revenge of history on decolonization (accepting individual states harbored classes and rulers who had little problem with this chiasm). Strategic interests within the transnationalism of strong states include a complex reterritorialization of nations that have said "no" and an intense desire to roll back failure when the prospect of hostile non-state actors (real or paranoiacally imagined) peppers the horizon (of course, the world's most predatory non-state actor is capital itself). The antimony, to expunge states whose use value trips too slowly to exchange versus the fear factor as a conduit for the consolidation of strong state power, represents a major challenge to Marxist theories of the state that no longer have to hand-wring over the degree of deformation in workers' states (Trotsky's line). Although the reorganization of the world system into regional economic and political blocs is no less significant, withered states today are not simply excess to that consolidation. Because of the contradictory logic in their designation a more analytical valence in failance has yet to be theorized.

Malcolm Bull, for instance, takes state failure as chiasmatic, but only to the extent that it augurs a reversal of Spinozan global modeling in favor of Hegel's theory of state ("society armed with force," as Bernard Bosanquet puts it).¹⁹ It is the failure in the latter that affords the necessity for new

divisions at or beyond the nation-state as form, otherwise the end of state will be suffused with end-of-history arguments that obfuscate the real foundations of global difference. The promise is of a global civil society rather than the chimera of a global state, and Bull correctly notes that the narrative of failure is actually the West failure, a will to global civilization and statehood that foundered on the contradictions of European imperialism and brutal subjugation, a sequence, as Bull puts it, "more obvious to the colonized than the colonizer."²⁰ Yet, while one must laud Bull's critique of the "dissipative structures of the entropic global state," this narrative is taking millions of decolonized lives to make.²¹ Chomsky's chiasm is also fluently conceived — the nature of reversal requires that the biggest advocates of the failed state diagnosis be accorded a failing grade using only facts, not a theory of the state of course.²² What Chomsky has in mind is U.S. flouting of international law, the suspension of habeas corpus, the promulgation of extraordinary rendition, torture in the pursuit of terror (a rather slippery emotion that can serve all kinds of authoritarianism both in the United States and among its coalition of the willing accessories after the fact), and an emerging democratic deficit in which institutions of democracy are made complicit in acts less than democratic. However much we discern institutional dysfunction in the United States (in health care, welfare, and debt), Chomsky's interpretation of the failed state overlooks the central point in the effulgence of the failed state: its global question about the terms of the nation-state and its sovereignty.

Bull suggests, finally, that the declining fortunes of the global hegemon, the United States, force it into a role that Gramsci once pinned to the dictatorship of the proletariat, the self-annihilating night watchman state. The rhetorical gesture does not quite work, since proletarian being appears at the moment of its sublation and thus is a creative function in a non-proletarian future; the death throes of a hegemon armed to the teeth, however, cannot be said to assume a creative role, at least on recent evidence. Long ago Lenin imagined the complete destruction of bureaucracy and the old state machinery for revolution to proceed. The failed state offers a lesson in destruction but it is as much about a revolution betrayed as a revolution alloyed. In the historical prospects of failure between Westphalian states and postcolonial forms we must interject a new revolutionary cry: "You first."

Notes

¹ Pierre Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza* (Paris: Maspero, 1979).

² Warren Montag, "Who's Afraid of the Multitude? Between the Individual and the State," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104:4 (Fall 2005): 655–73. See also *Bodies, Masses and Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries* (London: Verso, 1999).

³ See Peter Hitchcock, *Imaginary States* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2003); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1986).

⁴ Gerald B. Helman and Steven R. Ratner, "Saving Failed States," *Foreign Policy* 89 (Winter 1993): 3–21.

⁵ The full text of the two treaties can be accessed at <<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/westphal.htm>>.

⁶ John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999).

⁷ Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?" trans. Martin Thom in Homi Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 11.

⁸ Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1988) 100.

⁹ Helman and Ratner, "Saving" 3–4.

¹⁰ Helman and Ratner, "Saving" 9.

¹¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1998).

¹² Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique*, trans. Sabu Kohso (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

¹³ See the following Web site for links to the various tables/calculations used in the designation of the "failed state": <<http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/>>.

¹⁴ Karatani, *Transcritique* 247.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume Three*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1993) 345–46.

¹⁶ Frederick Engels and Karl Marx, *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism*, ed. Peter Byrne, 1997, 6 Nov. 2008 <<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/holy-family/ch05.htm>>.

¹⁷ Robert I. Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (New York: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Peter D. Little, *Somalia: Economy without a State* (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2003).

¹⁹ See Malcolm Bull, "States of Failure," *New Left Review* 40 (July/August 2006): 5–23; Bosanquet qtd. in Bull, "States" 8.

²⁰ Bull, "States" 22.

²¹ Bull, "States" 23.

²² See Noam Chomsky, *Failed States* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

The Political Animal: Species-Being and Bare Life

Laura Hudson

Over the past few decades, the rise of environmentalism, ecology, and the animal rights movement in the United States seems to have hijacked the left much as religious fundamentalism has hijacked the right. In general, Marxism seems to regard this shift with suspicion, as a distraction from the centrality of questions of the mode of production or class conflict. Both environmentalism and animal rights depoliticize struggles for social justice, replacing the goal of restructuring social organization and production to be more democratic and just with the injunction to "Save nature!" or "Save the animals!" Most Marxists are duly skeptical of the ability of either environmentalism or animal rights to go beyond their niche concerns and address human socioeconomic issues. However, with the recent shift away from labor as a category of resistance in the West and toward what we might regard as the peripheral concerns of non-human nature through the rise of the environmental movement and animal rights, it is increasingly necessary that Marxism address the challenge these areas offer if it is to offer a viable alternative. While there has been a recent surge in interest in reconciling Marxism and ecology, the uneasy marriage of Marxism and animal studies is less well represented. Theoretical engagement with these areas often falls into the trap of trying to "rescue" Marx for either ecology or animals, or chastising Marx for historical blindness. But the question of the relationship between Marxism and animals, or Marxism and nature, is not a matter of forcing theories together, hoping they do not contradict one another. Environmentalism and animal rights question what our relationship to the natural world and to animals should be. Their focus on non-human nature represents a utopian desire for a better world, but too often redirects revolutionary effort into reform movements that fail to address the importance of

capitalism in creating crises affecting not only human beings but the very earth that sustains them and the beings with which they share it. Rather than radical critique of the socioeconomic forces that have led to the global domination of capital, such movements tend to focus on particular problems viewed through an ahistorical lens. The problem with environmentalism is that it uses the same structure of thought that allows us to dominate nature while attempting to restructure society; despite its attempts to decenter human interests, all environmentalism (even the purest of deep ecologies) remains anthropocentric and based in the primacy of the individual that structures capitalism. Animal rights accepts the framework of liberal humanism wholesale, only seeking to widen a circle that would continue to have the human, more or less, at its center. Marxism must offer a means of addressing these issues that offers a real alternative, rather than marginalizing them as secondary effects of the mode of production and assuming that they will rectify themselves.

Despite their ever-increasing, very vocal constituencies, neither environmentalism nor animal rights are yet accepted as dominant, mainstream concerns. However, their growing power over political discourse has reached the point of requiring public debate and explicit refutation of their claims to hold them at bay, as demonstrated by Luc Ferry's Prix Medicis de l'Essai-winning book, *The New Ecological Order* (1992). Ferry suggests that ecology, environmentalism, and animal rights are threats to liberal humanist democracy, effectively redirecting public discourse away from human social problems in favor of looking at our relationships with nature and other animals.¹ He argues that the turn toward ecology and animal rights is tied to the post-1960s disillusionment of the left; ecology and animals become bearers of revolutionary meaning that has failed. This failure is tied to the emergence of the theories of post-structuralism, which, in making all values relative, come to identify difference itself as positive. This valuation of difference materially manifests in cultural relativism, animal rights, and the ecological emphasis on diversity, suggesting that different rules apply to different societies, animals, and environments. Human beings, like animals, become rooted in their environments, with duties to maintain the land that stem from natural laws rather than from human rationality. Human cultures become outgrowths of their natural environments, and animals are accorded their own cultural achievements. Ferry thus launches into a critique of the authoritarian impulses of these "anti-humanist" movements by invoking the specter of the Nazis. He notes the troubling way in which this shift echoes the Nazi philosophy of "blood and soil," and the expulsion of those deemed incapable of being assimilated to the "biotic community" as alien species. The echoes of Nazism are loudest in the tenets of deep ecology, where

biocentrism reduces human claims to bare equality with other animals, even other "natural entities" such as streams or ecosystems. Ferry reads this reduction of human claims as a thinly veiled hatred of humanity as such. For Ferry, deep ecology, in its veneration of nature, represents the most extreme example of the collusion of threats to liberal democracy from both the right and the left: "Despite their inherent differences, fascism and communism ... share the same wariness of formal democracy, the same repugnance toward the market and the plutocratic society it naturally engenders, the same concern with producing a new man, the same myth, essentially, of uncompromised and uncompromising purity."² Deep ecology lacks a politics outside its veneration of nature; into the political void enters a strange mixture of romantic nostalgia and progressive egalitarianism. This movement, which views itself as radical, is also deeply reactionary.

Ferry's assessment of deep ecology echoes that of many of the movement's critics on the left. Most critics recognize that the central features of deep ecology are tied to authoritarian rule and that its fantasies of the "new man" living in harmony with nature are just that: fantasies. One key problem is the elusiveness of deep ecology's "return to nature" mantra. There can be no "return" to nature because nature is not merely a thing but also a concept that varies as society does. As Raymond Williams notes in *Keywords*, "Nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language."³ With a variety of meanings that run the gamut from the world in its entirety (Nature with a capital N) to the specific characteristics of an individual (e.g., it is not in her nature), any use of the term is likely to have unintended resonances. For deep ecologists, Nature is a romantic version of the world as it might be if untouched by human hands, a pure Nature that has been polluted by human technological domination and overpopulation. Nature as it should be, according to deep ecology, is located in a mythic past and must be redeemed in a glorious future. It is an essentialist's view of the natural world, presuming to know what Nature really is and what it is that Nature wants, both of which are seen as absolutely separate from human desires. Timothy Luke describes the underlying thrust of deep ecology as a revision of the myth of "man's fall": domination of nature has corrupted the original innocence of "primal" societies, but redemption is possible if we follow the example of the "primitive cultures" that continue to live in harmony with nature. Quoting deep ecologists Bill Devall and George Sessions, Luke notes, "When deep ecologists claim that primal peoples unfailingly used Nature so that a 'richness of ends was achieved with material technology that was elegant, sophisticated, appropriate, and controlled within the context of a traditional society,' red flags must be raised."⁴ The hagiographical accounts of "primal peoples" offered by deep ecology are blind to the real inequalities of such

societies and ignore the difficulties they face. The harsh realities of a world structured by the principle of self-preservation are overlooked. It is hard to believe that the lives of either prehistoric or primal peoples would be marked by the immersion in meditative and contemplative encounters with natural beauty on isolated mountaintops that deep ecologists seem to advocate as “appropriate” to interaction between human beings and the natural world. It is likely that people would have been far more occupied with the daily tasks of survival — finding food, shelter, and water and avoiding predators — than with the contemplation of the aesthetic qualities of the natural world.

Seeing Nature as essentially innocent, deep ecology suggests that humanity is an evolutionary mistake, “a fatal disease of nature” that must be contained.⁵ Deep ecology argues that nature is in need of salvation or recuperation from the insatiable drives of the human world that infect nature’s body like a cancer. But this presupposes that the natural world is whole and complete prior to the introduction of human beings as an alien, destructive force. Nature becomes a romantic illusion when we forget the role that human beings play in shaping the world, or forget that we are a part of the natural world as well as apart from it. Any attempt to “return to nature” is doomed: our concepts concerning the natural world necessarily reflect the social relations of the time when they emerge. We cannot separate the concept of Nature from the social form in which it functions. Nature exists as an “outside” to the modern world because culture and society exist as the claustrophobic “inside”: Nature is not a static object but a dynamic category whose meaning has evolved in intercourse with human beings. The necessity of saving Nature only makes sense in the midst of a period of ecological destruction that threatens not the natural world, which will continue in some form regardless of what we do, but rather our *ideas* about what the natural world *should* be. Nor can our ideas about nature be separated from our ideas about *human* nature. Any time a desire to save the earth, or save the animals, is asserted, what is truly to be saved is *our version* of the earth, or *our concept* of the animals, both of which are deeply implicated in our ideas about *ourselves*. It is because humanity begins to seem like a disease or pathogen that the natural world becomes increasingly innocent and idealized. It is our own salvation, our own human world, our own tainted innocence we want to redeem through projecting it onto the natural world. If we follow deep ecology to its logical conclusion, the salvation of Nature would be best accomplished by the removal of the corrupting force of human beings: “if humans are *the* problem, then killing most of them would be *the* solution.”⁶ Indeed, some of the deepest green of deep ecologists invoke the imagery of the “population bomb” and argue for limiting or massively reducing human population, demonstrating the irony that the salvation of

humanity seems to require the destruction or restriction of a large number of its members. The confusion of deep ecology seems to end up either, as Ferry argues, invoking a thinly veiled fascism where an enlightened few dictate the tenets of appropriate interaction with the natural world, including the potential depopulation of the earth, or emptying itself of any content through according intrinsic value to everything “natural,” making the weighing of decisions or options against one another murky at best. The very idea of intrinsic value depends on concepts of value inculcated by capitalism, even if only in a reactionary way. In valuing the concrete, material world where everything is invested with intrinsic value, deep ecology challenges the abstraction of capitalism where value is only produced through the system of exchange. Yet, if everything has intrinsic, natural value, then what reason is there to value one form of life over another? Why bother trying to save humanity at all?

In many ways, Ferry’s critique of deep ecology rings true: he points out the same logical inconsistencies in deep ecology’s biocentrism, and the same fascist tendencies suggested by its unexplained mechanism of social control, that critics in general recognize. But in exploring the questionable ideological underpinnings of deep ecology, Ferry reveals his own ideological investments. He defends the separation between nature and culture that deep ecology and animal rights both question by asserting the ineffable human quality of freedom. In fact, his defense of liberal humanist democracy and the Enlightenment blurs into a defense of the corresponding economic form of capitalism. Thus, he represents deep ecology’s “love of nature” as hatred of humanity because he regards the human being as “the anti-natural being par excellence.”⁷ For Ferry, the humanness of the human being “resides in his freedom, in the fact that he is undefined, that his nature is to have no nature but to possess the capacity to distance himself from any code within which one may seek to imprison him.”⁸ If human beings are, by definition, anti-natural, then love of nature becomes opposed to human freedom. Nature is the realm of *determinations*, while human beings exist in the realm of *situations*. This distinction causes Ferry some trouble: he is forced to explain why we should care about humans who seem determined by their situation, such as the old, the infirm, the mentally retarded, and, most problematic, the very pre-colonial, pre-industrial peoples after which deep ecology models itself.⁹ The natural codes or instincts that Ferry claims are determinations for animals are the very things from which humanity has triumphantly distanced itself, making room for history and politics. Describing humanness as fluid, essence-less, particularly situated but never universally determined, knowing no boundaries: he might be quoting the passages of Marx’s *Capital* that describe exchange value. Free market capitalism is the backdrop for the kind

of freedom he imagines, masked by his attempt to ground philosophically humanity's moral status in some special capacity other than species membership. Human ability to *break free* from nature pits humanity *against* nature in a battle for mastery; in order to prove our uniqueness, we must resist natural codes, resist being merely use-values for Nature's overarching Subject. Ironically, Ferry suggests that proof of our separation from natural codes lies in our ability to commit suicide: we are so free we can die of our freedom. What might this mean for human society as it enters a period of ecological crisis? Would continuing along a path that seems sure to lead to our destruction as a species be the grandest proof of Ferry's hypothesis, or its ultimate negation? The triumph of capital seems to tend toward achieving universality in death: in death we are all equal. And this is the problem: Ferry's "freedom" is so ill defined that it is difficult to tell exactly what it entails aside from its reactionary resistance to natural codes — how we are to separate natural codes from anti-natural impulses is never explained. So-called human freedom is disconnected from the lived experiences of real human beings for whom exploitation and oppression continue unchecked. Only a select few have the material means to enjoy the full benefits of the system and thus experience full humanity. Basing his understanding of freedom in Kantian philosophy, Ferry's analysis runs into the same problem that plagues Kant. Freedom becomes an abstraction divorced from the unfreedom experienced by human beings through their reification as commodities. He fails to address the actual conditions in which "freedom" is experienced, avoiding sustained discussion of the material, social, and economic conditions that might limit human freedom in ways analogous to natural codes, as a second nature. If deep ecologists err in attempting to make an idealized Nature the arbiter of morality, Ferry commits a similar error in supposing that the market offers a better model. Deep ecology is problematic for Ferry not just because it challenges human autonomy but because it challenges the market by suggesting that some things are not for sale: the anti-modern impulses of deep ecology are also anti-capitalist. His alternative to the restrictions of radical ecology is reform based not in a revision of values but in the ability of the market to adapt.

Reconciled with the State, which gives it its own ministers, with democracy, which offers the possibility of non-violent change, ecology ultimately blends into the market, which naturally adapts to new consumer demands. The forest is threatened by automobile emissions? No problem, we'll build catalytic converters, which are more expensive but less polluting. ... clean industry is developing by leaps

and bounds, creating competition among companies to obtain the "green" label.¹⁰

Where deep ecology argues for a transformation of morality to include the biosphere as a whole, Ferry argues for the wisdom of capitalism in regulating morality along with other human desires. Democratic values are championed only in order to relinquish them to the market, never mind that the market is responsible for the ecological problems that gave rise to the interventions of deep ecology in the first place. If enough people care about the environment or animals, he seems to argue, then reform will occur *naturally* through the infallible forces of supply and demand.¹¹ In asking us to place our fate in the invisible hand of democratizing capitalism, Ferry demonstrates a quasi-religious belief in the inherent justice of the market that compares to the quasi-religious celebration of Nature he decries among deep ecologists. This seems doubly disingenuous as he himself notes a certain dissatisfaction with "the consumerist dynamic": "Without getting too religious, one suspects that man is not on this earth to buy higher and higher performance cars and televisions; though our final destination may remain a mystery, this, certainly, is not the ultimate goal."¹² The final irony is that his screed against deep ecology and its fascist tendencies, highlighted by the extended comparison with the nature worship and animal welfare protections of the Nazis, is motivated by his opposition to the growth of Green Party politics. According to Ferry, the environment does not need its own political party: the appropriate role for ecological concerns is as "a pressure group expressing a sensibility which, though shared by the immense majority, does not have a claim to power in and of itself."¹³ How democratic!

Deep ecology sees capitalism as a system of domination of the natural world but fails to recognize that its concept of a pure Nature is an effect of that domination. It is bound to the Enlightenment conception of the free individual but sees freedom as only achievable within Nature as the freedom of unfettered contemplation of natural beauty and biodiversity. Ferry, however, sees the natural world as a system of domination that is antithetical to freedom and democracy. To submit to the authority of natural codes is to surrender to fascism. Ferry is right to be skeptical of the role of ecology in politics, and not just because Green Party members might be secret eco-Nazis. Deep ecology suggests that we replace the egoistic individualism that the market inspires, and the masked drive toward self-preservation that it engenders, with a reverence for life. Rather than finding meaning in high-performance cars and televisions, we might find meaning in living in accordance with natural laws and in working to preserve not just nature and animals but life in all its forms. Contained within this reverence for life,

Ferry argues, is a politics of fear of the multiple ways we might destroy the planet: the reverence for life fades into fear of death. Since politics is founded on human anti-naturalness and willingness to risk going against natural codes, Ferry argues that we must protect ourselves from the insertion of nature into politics. The political realm marks the distinction between human and non-human life; including life and death as primarily political concerns collapses this distinction.

But the question is whether it is possible to maintain this separation any longer. In *Homo Sacer*, Giorgio Agamben argues that there has been a shift within politics, even that which presents itself under the name of *democracy*, which seeks to bring life itself (and thus nature) more and more directly under administrative control. The nation-state and the capitalist democracy that Ferry argues is up to the task of managing the natural world without interfering in the self-actualization of individuals are relics of the past: nature can no longer act as the “outside” to human politics, in part because it has always been the unacknowledged ground of the inside. According to Agamben, the concept of *sovereignty* is always based on an inclusive exclusion, whether in the figure of the sovereign or the *homo sacer*, both of which are both within and without the law. For Agamben, this state of exception, existing both inside and outside the law, finds its most direct example within the space of the concentration camp, a space where the law of society no longer operates except through its absence. Those within the camps are not subject to the law — guards may punish or kill inmates with impunity — yet it is the law that places them there. Agamben argues that the concentration camp is thus not an anomaly — it is the space where the drive of sovereignty finds its ultimate expression. People, or subjects, are reduced to bodies lacking any significance except through their determinate exclusion from the law. The drive of all sovereignty (for according to this argument both Ferry’s democracy and deep ecology’s latent fascism would tend toward the same goal) is to subject its subjects more directly to political power, to bring *zoē* or “the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)” into the realm of political administration, or *bios*.¹⁴ If we react with horror to the effects of the camps, we should recognize the extent to which the life of all subjects under political power replicates in some degree the state of exception found in the camps.

The rise of environmentalism, deep ecology, and animal rights can be seen as effects of this inability of law, or the Law, to distance the “natural world” as a state outside itself. Natural objects reappear within the political realm not as political actors but as markers of bare life. Sovereignty, in seeking to establish a political life separate from the state of nature, produces

both political life as the life proper to the citizen (the “good life”) and bare life, which occupies a space in between *bios* and *zoē*, evacuated of meaning. The state of nature is not separate from political life but a state that exists alongside political life, as a necessary corollary of its existence. Political life is alienation from an imagined state of nature that we cannot access as human beings because it appears only in shadow form as bare life. The state of exception is that which defines which lives lack value, which lives can be killed without being either murdered or sacrificed. Agamben’s examples of the inextricable link between political and bare life focus on the limit cases of humanity rather than the ideal, providing an analysis of precisely the cases that prove problematic in Ferry’s liberal humanism. The exception, as that which proves the rule, cannot be avoided. It is necessary to look to the figure of the refugee, the body of the “overcomatose” or the severely mentally impaired, and, under the Third Reich, the life of the Jew to see how the law fails in the task Ferry sets for it. These cases demonstrate the zone of indistinction that Agamben elaborates as the zone of “life that does not deserve to live.” The refugee demonstrates the necessity of a link between nation and subject; refugees are no longer citizens and, as such, lack a claim to political rights: “In the system of the nation-state, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man show themselves to lack every protection and reality at the moment in which they can no longer take the form of rights belonging to citizens of a state.”¹⁵ Confronted with the figure of the refugee, human rights are faced with their hidden ground in national origin, where, as Agamben notes, the key term is *birth*: men are *born* free, invoking the natural codes from which law was to separate us. This freedom is, in actuality, a function of citizenship and incorporation in the nation-state rather than a fact of being human: “citizenship names the new status of life as origin and ground of sovereignty and, therefore, literally identifies ... *les membres du souverain*, ‘the members of the sovereign.’”¹⁶ This makes the link between that which is proper to the nation and that which is proper to the citizen the determinant of the zone of sacred life: those who do not fulfill the role of the citizen are no longer guaranteed protection or participation in political life, their so-called human rights void in the absence of national identity. The refugee or refugees as a group have a claim only to bare life, to being kept alive, but have no political voice with which to demand the rights of the citizen. Agamben, while noting the same trend toward politicizing natural life that concerns Ferry, demonstrates that this politicization is already contained within the structure of politics itself. This corresponds to the position of animals in human society: the exemplar of the limit case, they have always existed in the state of exception that founds the political. There is thus a connection between the plight of the refugee and that of the animal:

neither participates directly in the political, though both are absolutely subject to political decisions in which they have no voice. The establishment of a realm outside the political, where lives have no value and thus may be killed, is marked by the difference between the human and the animal.

This link is clarified when we investigate Agamben's analysis of euthanasia and Nazi biopolitics. He does not address the ethical dimension of euthanasia but explores the politics and rhetoric of euthanasia as a policy of the state: "More interesting for our inquiry is the fact that the sovereignty of the living man over his own life has its immediate counterpart in the determination of a threshold beyond which life ceases to have any juridical value and can, therefore, be killed without the commission of a homicide."¹⁷ Justification for euthanasia rests in the determination that life may be devoid of purpose or meaning. This determination may be either a conscious decision by an individual that his or her life is no longer worth living or a decision by proxy, as in the case of individuals lacking the self-awareness to recognize their condition or voice a desire for either life or death. In the second case, it is left to the state to measure the parameters of the life not worth living. This decision of which lives are not worth living does not depend on the desires or potential for pleasure or pain of the individual but on the determination by the state of whether the individual exhibits the kind of life proper to the citizen and the nation. This decision makes life itself political and makes politics the arbiter of life's value. The case of the "overcomatose" demonstrates the way that politics increasingly brings bare life under juridical control. From Agamben's perspective, it matters less what the decision of the courts is than that political and juridical power are increasingly invited to decide the value of life, or that something like "brain death," an example of the bare life he describes, can become an issue debated by experts and legislators. The political necessity of determining which lives are not worth living thus makes the Nazi state into the prime exemplar of a new horizon of biopolitics in which every modern state is implicated. The shift that takes place here is what leaves the state incapable of resolving ecological questions — the state of nature has penetrated politics, making the questions raised by ecology and animal rights central to the determinations of political life.

Agamben's analysis of the Nazi program of euthanasia draws out the interpenetration of bare life and political life. The program of euthanasia morphed into a program of genocide, in part, because the lives of Jews were determined to be lives devoid of political value and, as such, not worth living. The Nazi program of euthanasia against the mentally infirm, Agamben notes, was carried out in spite of its unpopularity and in spite of the burden it imposed on the Nazi war effort. Its importance lay not in the

practical considerations of preventing the incurably ill from reproducing but in cementing the sovereign power of the Nazis and the Führer to determine the value of life, and in confirming the drive of modern sovereignty to make life *immediately* political, without the addition of other values. Those placed in concentration camps were no longer citizens, no longer protected by the laws of the nation. Their deaths were not murders because their lives had already been determined to have no value. Thus, Agamben argues, it was not as a punishment that Jews were to be sent to the camps, nor, within Nazi biopolitics, was their treatment there considered torture: "The truth — which is difficult for the victims to face, but which we must have the courage not cover with sacrificial veils — is that the Jews were exterminated not in a mad and giant holocaust but exactly as Hitler had announced, 'as lice,' which is to say, as bare life."¹⁸ The political separation of human beings from non-human nature thus constructs a code that can all too easily be deployed against other human beings. Nazi politics was not directed against Jews as citizens or even as an ethnic group, but was a politics in which Jews (and others) were no longer considered human. The difficulty confronting modern politics is the inability to distinguish clearly between the biological and the political realms. People are increasingly seen less as citizens invested with political rights than as bodies in need of administration. Not only are they denied the promise of the "good life," they cannot even expect a "good death."

The confusion between life in general and political life for human beings creates a correlating confusion for animals. The political does not include the animal: political life is proper to humans alone. But as political life becomes increasingly indistinguishable from the (animal) life of the body, so are animal lives, once excluded from direct consideration in the political realm, increasingly subjected to political force. Animal cruelty laws, the Endangered Species Act, the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act, the banning of force-feeding: all of these bring the lives of animals under the rule of law as more than mere property at the same time that laws increasingly apply themselves to the administration of human bare life. One of the grand ironies of Nazism is that while initiating genocide, it passed some of the strictest legislation for animal welfare ever seen.¹⁹ The fate of animals is also the fate of the animal bodies of human beings. Thus the increase in animal legislation may be less a cause for celebration of our increased enlightenment than an omen of things to come: *the inclusion of animals in the political realm marks the extent to which human beings have themselves been reduced to bare life*. Agamben suggests that the traditional mechanisms of nation and law that regulated the space of exclusion become increasingly indistinguishable from the concentration camp, "the sign of the system's inability to function

without being transformed into a lethal machine.”²⁰ Spaces of exclusion overwhelm the normal order, and “whether or not atrocities are committed depends not on law but on the civility and ethical sense” of those who temporarily act in the role of the sovereign. In describing our duties toward animals, Ferry suggests that treating them well is a matter of politeness and civility rather than a categorical imperative.²¹ That his argument now seems to apply to human beings who are easily stripped of their “human rights” in rapidly multiplying spaces of detention demonstrates that the collapse of the distinction between human and inhuman nature is not the result of the political pressure from outside, as Ferry suggests is the case with deep ecology, but the unfolding of the logic of sovereignty itself. If we consider the questions raised by deep ecology and animal rights, we must recognize that human life more and more resembles the lives of animals in factory farms. The political realm now focuses on bodies, fingerprints, statistics, or packages of DNA. We become more and more like cattle, tagged and marked and sent out to a freedom that is always already an enclosure, already only a step away from the slaughterhouse or the camp. In trying to ensure a “good death” for animals, activists are simultaneously raising the issue of “good death” in general, and perhaps reacting to the state’s involvement in determining the value of human life.²² Rather than blaming deep ecology or animal rights for muddying the political waters by conflating human and non-human forms of life, we should see them as arising out of the confusion between human and non-human that is central to politics itself: the life worth living depends on existence of the life without value.

Agamben acts as an antidote to Ferry’s liberal humanism. If deep ecology is incoherent in confusing the rights of humans with the rights of animals or nature, Agamben provides reasons to believe that the confusion is part of the structure of society as a whole rather than the ravings of a fringe group. Hidden behind the rhetoric of humanism and liberatory rights is the specter of the concentration camp. Yet, horrific as his analysis seems, Agamben’s bare life is not wholly without a glimmer of hope. If *Homo Sacer* emphasizes the absolute negation of bare life, in *The Open: Man and Animal*, Agamben expands his explanation of bare life in ways that demonstrate its positive potential. If bare life is life excluded from both the natural world (by virtue of its implication in politics) and the political world (as life marked by its lack of political value), it is equally life that is neither precisely human nor animal. Agamben suggests that bare life is produced at the moment that the concept of “the human” is produced through the separation of human from animal within the body of the human being. The original political moment is also the original human one. Biologically, the human being is merely another animal, as animal activists and ecologists are wont to point out. But concep-

tually, the human is something more. Agamben suggests that rather than seeing the human as an animal plus this or that (language, rationality, politics, or anything else), the human emerges from the radical separation of the human as concept from the animal as body.

In our culture, man has always been thought of as the articulation and conjunction of a body and a soul, of a living thing and a *logos*, of a natural (or animal) element and a supernatural or social or divine element. We must learn instead to think of man as what results from the incongruity of these two elements, and investigate not the metaphysical mystery of conjunction, but rather the practical and political mystery of separation.²³

The gulf between the human and the animal is unbridgeable precisely because it does not lie in either biology or conceptuality but in the gap between them, which appears as bare life — a zone of indistinction produced by the conceptual workings of the “anthropological machine” and irreducible to merely one or another of its components. The political realm develops to address the “human” element of this split, leaving the animal body to the private sphere, but as the personal becomes political, politics encroaches on the bare life of the body.

Agamben’s analysis of bare life is of value less for what it reveals about our real relationships with nature and other animals than in revealing the structure of our *concepts* of humanity, nature, and other animals. He is not speaking directly of the plurality of actually existing animals, which is obvious from his repeated use of the singular — *the animal*, not animals. Meanwhile, the specific examples of animal interaction with the environment that he describes depend on the virtually automatic functions of the insect world. Spiders, ticks, and bees stand as representatives of the animal’s essential captivity by its environment rather than mammals, whose behavior seems more similar to our own. The biological continuity between human beings and mammals would blur the conceptual difference between the human and the animal that is central to his argument. By focusing on the simplest forms of animal life, Agamben makes the conceptual difference between the human and the animal evident. The link between the human and the animal is actually a void: for example, the ape-man is a fictional missing link that depends on imagining the human minus some ephemeral quality that makes it human: “In reality, the passage from animal to man, despite the emphasis placed on comparative anatomy and paleontological findings, was produced by subtracting an element that had nothing to do with either one, and that instead was presupposed as the identifying characteristic of the

human: language.”²⁴ The category of the animal can only be imagined as a lack in relation to the human, not as a fullness of being in its own right. There is a rupture that occurs whenever we attempt to imagine the transition from animal to human because what separates the animal from the human does not rest in biology. We can only imagine a biologically human being from which some abstract feature such as language has yet to historically emerge or a humanized animal that has all the features we ascribe to the human being, yet lacks some ineffable quality that would enable the transition to full humanity. In either case, the category of the human is presupposed in the existence of the non-human, the inhuman, or the animal and the mode of the transition remains open, a caesura in our thought. It is this caesura that allows us to lump all animals in their vast complexity into a single category and makes every articulation of the human a political one. The attempt to determine the missing link between the human and the animal can produce only bare life, the man-ape or the ape-man can only be suspended between human and animal while separated and excluded from both.

The categories Agamben explores in *Homo Sacer* reappear in *The Open*, for the refugee, the Jew, the overcomatose, and the werewolf are reduced to animalized humans that nonetheless are marked by the shadow of humanity and thus cannot merely be animals. They represent the missing link, the figure of the not yet or not fully human. It is apparent, for example, that language is not what distinguishes the human from the animal: it matters little what those excluded from the political realm say for they are not *heard*. The refugee, the Jew under the Third Reich, the overcomatose patient, or the slave has as little *political* voice as any animal. Little more than animals in human form, they demonstrate the difference between the speaking and the living being. Yet the human is not merely the speaking being, the political voice, but also the living, animal being. True humanity is not found in rearticulation of a separation of “the human” from “the animal” but in the zone between them which is both and neither. Agamben cites a comment by Walter Benjamin to highlight this possibility of redemption: “[T]echnology is the mastery not of nature but mastery of the relation between nature and humanity.”²⁵ To rephrase, humanity is not mastery of the animal within the human, but mastery of the relation *between* human and animal. It is through this step that Agamben is able to hint at the possibility of redemption through bare life, despite its appearance as absolute destitution in *Homo Sacer*, making this zone of indistinction into a positive alternative to the eternal return of the rupture between human and animal, political life and natural life. Bare life, in revealing the poverty of the concepts of “the human” and “the animal,” gestures toward the possibility of the truly human — a human-

ity that is not so much *reconciled* with nature as excluded from its own exclusion from nature.

Bare life appears as the absence of the human in a horrific void of de-subjectified being. But the redemptive possibilities contained within bare life are surprisingly revealed in Agamben’s discussion of the relationship of the animal to its “disinhibitors,” aspects of its environment that initiate action or response. He investigates Jakob von Uexküll’s experiment with a tick to demonstrate the way the relationship of the animal to its environment is articulated.²⁶ The tick waits in a state of suspended animation until activated by its environment. It has a blindness to the disinhibitors (the temperature of blood, the smell of butyric acid, etc.) that absolutely overcome it but also an intense relationship with its environment that humans lack. The tick does not “know” what its disinhibitors “really” are, thus it can be tricked into latching onto any membrane that is the temperature of mammalian blood. Similarly, Uexküll describes an experiment between a bee and a cup of honey: “If, once it has begun to suck, the bee’s abdomen is cut away, it will continue happily to suck while the honey visibly streams out of its open abdomen.”²⁷ Both the tick and the bee are wholly caught up in a world that is closed to them: they recognize only the triggers that captivate them into interaction with the environment. Human beings have the ability to separate from the intensity of experience; there is a gap between the experience of captivation, of being captivated, and reflection on that captivation, which is represented by the potential for boredom. The tick may exist in suspended animation until activated by its disinhibitor, but so does humanity exist in perpetual distance from its environment based on the self-induced boredom with captivation in nature: though the suspension of the tick between living and nonliving seems like another articulation of the barrenness of bare life, I read this as analogous to the suspension of humanity between the concept of the human and the concept of the animal. If the animal is described as lacking the human openness to the world, the human likewise lacks the ecstatic interaction with the environment that the animal has. It is boredom that inspires humanity to find tasks that approximate the intensity of animal captivation. The distinction between human and animal has been a driving force throughout Western metaphysics, reconstituting the difference in multiple ways throughout history as “the conflict between man and animal, between the open and the not-open” to produce an historical mission for humanity. But now, “The traditional historical potentialities — poetry, religion, philosophy — which ... kept the historico-political destiny of peoples awake, have long since been transformed into cultural spectacles and private experiences, and have lost all historical efficacy.”²⁸ Agamben seems to suggest that it is the logic of sovereignty or humanism that has exhausted these historical potentialities,

yet it is under capitalism that spectacle and private experience replace the search for historical meaning. We become captivated, like animals, by the spectacles of consumer culture; no longer actively seeking meaning for our lives, we passively await the stimulation of our man-made disinhibitors.

Despite the wide historical scope of Agamben's work, he only touches on various epochs to take what he needs, then quickly shifts to a zone of abstraction that empties his work of historical specificity. Ultimately, it is the ahistoricism of Agamben's analysis that leads to the sense of airless doom that stifles the potentially positive implications of the concept of bare life. He claims there is no return to clear-cut distinctions between *bios* and *zoē*; the waters are too irredeemably muddled to dream, as Ferry does, of unpolluted political categories. Yet, there also seems no clear way forward. Even the hope of an eventual redemption is whispered into a timeless, messianic void. It is almost as if history itself had ceased to exist, collapsed into the singular unfolding of the logic of sovereignty or the concept of humanity that was always the hidden ground of any political theory; indeed, its presence is found in the emergence of the sovereign subject itself. All we can hope for is to bring sovereignty and the anthropological machine to a standstill. But what Agamben reads as the force of sovereignty cannot be separated from the social forms in which it is embodied. That is, sovereignty as he imagines it depends on a confluence of politics with technology and the economy that give it its particular form. If sovereignty tends ineluctably toward totalitarian control, then there can be no escape or alternative within politics. Clearly articulating what kind of positive development might come from the analysis of bare life requires an understanding of capitalism as the implicit grounding factor to Agamben's analysis. Focusing with pinpoint accuracy on politics, Agamben seems to have none of his own. It is neither "sovereignty" nor "the anthropological machine" that is to blame for the world's ills, but the extent to which these factors are bound up in the historical development of capitalism itself.

The animalization of the human is not merely the result of an historical drive of sovereignty but the result of the particular forms that political organization has taken in the wake of the expansion of capital. As Ferry's free sovereign subject is a construct of capitalism, the ideal bourgeois individual whose freedom is based in the exploitation of others, so Agamben's sovereignty bears similarities to the structure of capitalism. As a self-moving, totalizing force, sovereignty in Agamben appears as the Subject of history rather than an effect of historical motion. Looking back into history, we may see the roots of our current conception of sovereignty in the Greeks, but to suggest that it has remained essentially unchanged over the

course of thousands of years is to reify the concept, mistaking it for the thing itself. Seeking the origin, we do not see the alternative that might have led away from the particular model of sovereignty we face today. Without a clear conception of history, Agamben's sovereignty becomes deterministic and all-encompassing. In fact, the sovereignty of the modern state and its investment in biopolitics are shaped by capitalism, which seeks to insert itself within the cycle of natural reproduction through patenting seeds, DNA, strains of cancer, viruses, and animals. The insertion of capitalism into the natural realm of reproduction results in confusion over what is proper to human beings in the political sphere and what is proper to nature. Ecologists' concern over genetically modified seeds cannot be reduced to fear of technopollution or anti-modern sentiment, though that is often the form of the rhetoric employed in the debate over genetic modification. They are equally struggling against the totalitarian drive of capital to turn everything into a commodity: what was once offered freely by nature is now shaped into an artifact of capital. Furthermore, even the traditional historical potentialities that have provided meaning to human lives have become commodified and emptied of significance. The only remaining task seems to be the management of life itself through the absolute control of the natural world and the natural body.

Though in Agamben's analysis bare life often seems only negative, an absence or a void, the positive potential in the concept might be more clearly conveyed by placing it in conversation with Marx. In many ways, bare life seems to be the negative iteration of Marx's early definition of species-being and may provide a clearer understanding of what species-being might become. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx distinguishes between human being and mere animal being on the basis of free production: "The animal is immediately identical with its life-activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is its *life-activity*. Man makes his life-activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life-activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life-activity directly distinguishes man from animal life-activity."²⁹ Like Ferry, Marx suggests that self-consciousness allows human beings to separate themselves from the immediacy of instinct. Yet, in contrast to Ferry's anti-natural, rootless, and steadfastly individualistic man, Marx suggests that human beings are likewise "species-beings," characterized by social organization as well as free, conscious production rooted in interaction with nature and with each other. It is because humans can produce freely and consciously, beyond what is immediately necessary for their natural life (the drives of self-preservation and reproduction), that they are different from other animals.³⁰ This conscious activity takes place within the realm of the

natural world, for humans act on and transform nature. Species-being is not merely another name for human nature, nor does it simply indicate the biological characteristics that make any animal a member of a species. Humans are species-beings because they not only produce what is necessary for their own existence but also because they understand themselves *as* members of a species, enabling them to produce socially, in concert with one another. They produce not only goods but concepts: species do not “exist” in nature but in the human imagination. That the human being is a species-being is important, because it is clear that the cost of species-being is alienation from nature; the ability to look on nature as the raw material for human creative expression allows for a level of freedom, but it also isolates humanity from the longed-for harmonious unity with the Nature of deep ecology. Alienation from nature is a rupture that cannot be wholeheartedly celebrated; but the result, at least potentially, is the full development of human capacities for creative production beyond the satisfaction of individual needs.³¹ As in Agamben, Marx suggests that the harmony of the human animal with nature is lost, but in its place is the potential for the universality and fellow feeling of species-being.³² Species-being thus both describes what the human *is* by definition as a member of the species *Homo sapiens* and describes the human potential to be something *more*: a true humanity based in the whole of human society rather than merely its particulars as nations or individuals, and including both the natural and the conceptual life of human beings.

This potential is shaped by social forms. Under capitalism, human beings are alienated not only from nature but from the potential to reconcile with nature that is the foundation of species-being. Commodities confront us as alien forces rather than as expressions of human creative potential. In producing commodities, the worker also produces the social relations of commodification, under which labor itself is a commodity. The free, creative production that would allow us to become true species-beings becomes the force under which we must labor in order to live — that which frees us from the unconscious life-activity of the animal world becomes that which enslaves us. Alienated labor under capitalism requires human beings to produce in order to maintain and reproduce themselves, like animals. The alienation from nature that provides the basis for human freedom is shaped into a second nature that creates a new realm of necessity and self-preservation. Human beings are pitted against one another in the struggle for survival, producing competition and antagonism rather than universal freedom. That which is to have distinguished us from animals is obliterated: “For the starving man, it is not the human form of food that exists, but only its abstract being as food; it could just as well be there in its crudest form, and it would be impossible to say wherein this feeding-activity differs from that of

animals.”³³ We are again captivated by our environment, failing to see it for what it is: a product of human social and economic organization rather than an immutable force. It is capitalism that blurs these boundaries rather than sovereignty. But the reduction of human potential to animal needs is not the worst that faces workers.

Man returns to living in a cave, which is now, however, contaminated with the mephitic breath of plague given off by civilization, and which he continues to occupy only *precariouly*, it being for him an alien habitation which can be withdrawn from him any day — a place from which, if he does not pay, he can be thrown out any day. For this mortuary he has to *pay*. ... Light, air, etc. — the simplest *animal* cleanliness — ceases to be a need for man.³⁴

Marx suggests that capitalism does not merely strip human beings of the capabilities that make them unique in the animal world but denies them even the basic dignity of other animals. At the same time that humans produce commodities and the social conditions of the exchange economy, they produce concepts that bolster these conditions. Human rights granted by contract with the nation become abstract concepts that have little bearing on the material lives of unfree citizens. The civil liberties promised by the nation are a fiction; stripping them away is a mere formality when the worker is already little more than bare life. This state of affairs is an inversion of his previous position; it is now ironically the animal in nature that is *more* free than the human in “free” society. The formal freedom granted to human beings under liberal democracy leaves them destitute, lacking any recourse to lord or law, and entraps them in a second nature just as driven by the needs of self-preservation as the natural world of animals.

In his discussion of religion, Marx argues that the recognition of religion as the alienated self-consciousness of human beings allows humans to “know” themselves: “I therefore know my own self, the self-consciousness that belongs to its very nature, confirmed not in *religion* but rather in *annihilated* and *superseded* religion.”³⁵ Marx argues that Hegel’s negation of the negation, which is to lead in a positive progression toward the Absolute, is actually the negation of pseudo-essence, not true essence: “A peculiar role, therefore, is played by the act of superseding in which denial and preservation — denial and affirmation — are bound together.”³⁶ Religion is the misrecognized, abstract, and alienated form of human self-consciousness. In recognizing this, and in superseding it, a better understanding of human self-consciousness and potentiality is revealed. Rather than waiting for reward in the next life, we must change our lives in the material world. Religion is a

human construct, not a force from outside. Humanism appears as the annulment of religion, but it, too, remains an abstraction until brought into relation with the natural world. Extrapolating from Marx here, we might say that the concept of “the human” occupies the same space in our conceptual framework as religion does: The supersession of the concept of the human as an essence based in a political identity, or even an anti-naturalism, requires that we recognize that the concept is the result of the alienation of human beings from their sensual, living selves: the concept of “the human” is not the thing-in-itself. Nature as presented in Hegel was only the alienated form of the Absolute and, as such, remained an abstraction of thought. Marx argues that we must come to recognize the sensual reality of nature and the supersession of the abstract thought-entity. As elements of nature ourselves, we must move beyond the abstract forms through which we recognize ourselves and come to terms with the fact that we are natural, sensual beings, animals who may be captivated, who may also be processed, objectified, reified things as well as transcendent beings. In bare life, perhaps, we find the first moment of this supersession: Under modern capitalist sovereignty, we are all equally abandoned by the law we have created to free us from nature. We are all equally reduced to mere specimens of human biology, mute and uncomprehending of the world in which we are thrown. Species-being, or “humanity as a species,” may require this recognition to move beyond the pseudo-essence of the religion of humanism. Recognizing that what we call “the human” is an abstraction that fails to fully describe what we are, we may come to find a new way of understanding humanity that recuperates the natural without domination.

The bare life that results from expulsion from the law removes even the illusion of freedom. Regardless of one’s location in production, the threat of losing even the fiction of citizenship and freedom affects everyone. This may create new means of organizing resistance across the particular divisions of society. Furthermore, the concept of bare life allows us to gesture toward a more detailed, concrete idea of what species-being may look like. Agamben hints that in the recognition of this fact, that in our essence we are all animals, that we are all living dead, might reside the possibility of a kind of redemption. Rather than the mystical horizon of a future community, the passage to species-being may be experienced as a deprivation, a loss of identity. Species-being is not merely a positive result of the development of history; it is equally the absence of many of the features of “humanity” through which we have learned to make sense of our world. It is an absence of the kind of individuality and atomism that structure our world under capitalism and underlie liberal democracy, and which continue to inform the tenets of deep ecology. The development of species-being requires the

collapse of the distinction between human and animal in order to change the shape of our relationships with the natural world. A true species-being depends on a sort of reconciliation between our “human” and “animal” selves, a breakdown of the distinction between the two both within ourselves and in nature in general. Bare life would then represent not only expulsion from the law but the possibility of its overcoming. Positioned in the zone of indistinction, no longer a subject of the law but still subjected to it through absence, what we equivocally call “the human” in general becomes virtually indistinguishable from the animal or nature. But through this expulsion and absence, we may see not only the law but the system of capitalism that shapes it from a position no longer blinded or captivated by its spell. The structure of the law is revealed as always suspect in the false division between natural and political life, which are never truly separable. Though clearly the situation is not yet as dire as Agamben’s invocation of the Holocaust suggests, we are all, as citizens, under the threat of the state of exception. With the decline of the nation as a form of social organization, the whittling away of civil liberties and, with them, the state’s promise of “the good life” (or “the good death”) even in the most developed nations, with the weakening of labor as the bearer of resistance to exploitation, how are we to envision the future of politics and society?

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno suggest that Enlightenment has always been totalitarian in its drive to disenchant the natural world: “Humans believe themselves free of fear when there is no longer anything unknown. This has determined the path of demythologization, of enlightenment, which equates the living with the nonliving as myth had equated the nonliving with the living.”³⁷ Enlightenment assimilates the living world to nonliving concept, seeing everywhere the same “chaotic stuff of mere classification.”³⁸ Even the living existence of the individual is obliterated in its relegation to the realm of the concept. This process transforms subjects from ends in themselves to the means to an end: the control and disenchantment of the natural world. Instrumental reason incorporates humanity into its calculations as surely as it does nature. The antithesis of nature and history (as enlightenment) is most clearly revealed in the antithesis between animal and human being. No longer seen as gods, animals become part of nonliving nature, part of “the mass of things and creatures in the external world” from which the logos of the human has split off.³⁹ The human being becomes separated from nature, and from sympathy with the dominated earth. In the process, reason becomes self-preservation run wild; to save ourselves from domination by nature, we must dominate it in turn. From the perspective of enlightenment, to do otherwise is to be marked as anti-human and anti-progress — vide Ferry’s stigmatizing of deep

ecologists and animal rights advocates.⁴⁰ Domination by nature or domination by human nature: the choice is no choice as both depend on mere self-preservation. If we are no longer captivated by nature, we are captivated by our own domination of nature.

It seems we are at an impasse; there appears no way to escape from the logic of domination. Yet in *Negative Dialectics* Adorno suggests the possibility of a new categorical imperative based neither in reason nor in nature but somewhere in between. The (non)concept of the addendum he introduces seems to stem from the very suspension between human and animal that Agamben calls bare life. The addendum is beyond conceptual, identitarian thinking: it occupies the space of the nonidentity of conceptual thought. The addendum is both a somatic impulse and a reflective moment that acts as “a flash of light between the poles of something long past, something grown all but unrecognizable, and that which some day might come to be” and which offers “the phantasm of reconciling nature and the mind.”⁴¹ Neither instinct nor concept, the addendum bridges the gap between mind and nature, refusing to be laid open to the probings of reason alone. This nonconceptual concept appears as a flash of an almost forgotten alternative to the dominating drive of instrumental reason, based not in logic but in the bodily experience of compassion. The addendum is a moral impulse stemming from the recognition of the double horror of the experience of the concentration camps: “the new imperative gives us a bodily sensation of the moral addendum — bodily, because it is now the practical abhorrence of the unbearable physical agony to which individuals are exposed even with individuality about to vanish as a form of mental reflection.”⁴² The horror of Auschwitz is not merely a conceptual horror. Reason, rationality, and language are insufficient to express the revulsion inspired by the camps. Something physical or somatic initiates a response that thought cannot exhaust. This impulse is more than instinct: *it occupies the space between the concepts of human and animal, stemming from the gap between them.* The addendum is more than the abstract categorical imperative of Kant, which derives morality from reason alone: it is an immediate response that connects the physical abhorrence of suffering to the horror of the liquidation of the individual from its material body even before death. This individual liquidation is not limited to the camps but is a core feature of social organization under capitalism. Adorno suggests that we might base morality upon this addendum rather than on a dominating reason that is merely a mask for the natural drive to self-preservation. Valuing this impulse rather than reason alone, we might find the basis for a new form of society, one that builds on the impulses of compassion rather than domination. The addendum seems to come from the same rupture between human and animal that reveals bare

life: it represents the positive impulse that speaks across this void, and the possibility that we may finally realize a humanity that is a community of the whole, recognizing the dignity of each member of our socialized human species (or species-being) without recourse to reason, to rights, or to sovereignty.

A liberal humanism still based in the efficient administration of the earth, such as Ferry proposes, wants to turn back the clock on the revolution of thought implied by bare life. But he misrecognizes radical ecology’s threat to democracy as a return to barbarism rather than an extension of the barbarism we have carried with us through history. We have not yet succeeded in eradicating the modes of thought that result in the domination of animals and nature, and that finds its most perfect expression in the reduction of life to the specimen in the lab, the factory farm, or the concentration camp. The inclusion of animals and nature as subjects within the law appears as monstrous to the existing order. The flaws of deep ecology, or animal rights, or right to life movements, or other radical inclusions of the inhuman within the human should not just be seen as movements that distract from the necessity of revolution in the means of production but also as moments that highlight the necessity for a revolution in thought as well. However poorly articulated or potentially reactionary such movements are, they share a common thread of compassion for other beings. This compassion seems to serve no purpose — of what practical use is consideration for animals or trees? Thus it might restructure the way we understand our place in the world. I do not want to celebrate the horror of the abandonment that reveals bare life, nor merely incorporate it into a positive idealism that would see progress in regression. But what appears as progress is itself all too often horrific: “No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb.”⁴³ The Holocaust itself is too often seen as an anomaly in the history of progress and Enlightenment, but as long as we see the Holocaust as the exception, then there is no call for change. The Holocaust did not fundamentally restructure morality or society as Adorno seemed to hope it could, in part because it seemed to fit too seamlessly into a narrative about anti-Semitism as a residual barbarism that could be expunged with the defeat of the Nazis. Believing it to be expunged, we carry its principle with us into the future.

Natural life can no longer exist outside politics. But this realization must be tempered by the recognition that what we may be losing was never of much value compared to what we might gain. A split and reified consciousness that sees the human only in contradistinction to the animal and a system of law that is always preparing us to be banned and excluded are not to be mourned. Overcoming this split opens the possibility that we might unify

humanity through common compassion rather than reveal human unity as specimens, the kind of unity that leads to Auschwitz: the pure identity of death, and the unity of interchangeability that makes any life commensurable with another rather than particular and unique. Questions of labor cannot be separated from questions of environmental justice, nor can animal welfare or rights be separated from worker health and safety. The rise of environmentalism and the need for politics to address environmental questions merely in order to sustain human existence proves that there is no easy way back to a pure politics. But such pure politics also never existed — it was always haunted by that which was excluded. Neither is there a return to nature because the state of human being is always already alienation from nature. Capitalism, in alienating us from our fellows, takes from us not only our identities as human beings but also our potential to realize a global humanity that would include animals, rocks, and trees not in a primordial animism but as necessary parts of an anthropomorphic, humanized, and reenchanting nature. Problematic as the rhetoric employed by ecology and animal rights may be, the questions posed are thus *not* peripheral but central to coming to a new understanding of the relationship between humanity and nature, and thus coming to understand humanity itself. In seeking to save what appears outside human society, both ecology and animal rights enter into that zone of indistinction that may, once fully revealed, provide a means to fundamentally alter socioeconomic relations. Rather than seeing ecological and animal rights movements as misanthropic distractions from the real need for human liberation, we might begin to see them as fruitful places to begin to shape a resistance to a capitalist order that denies us our ability to be what we have never yet been: human.

Notes

¹ A prolonged discussion of the incompatible differences among environmentalism, deep ecology, and animal rights would be misplaced here. Environmentalism usually functions as a blanket term encompassing a wide variety of positions from conservation to eco-feminism but is generally conceived as a lighter shade of green because proponents accept a human-centered approach to environmental problems. Because deep ecology presents the most radical challenge to humanism, it receives the most attention and critique (in this essay as well as in general discourse). The animal rights position is non-anthropocentric, but in seeking to “widen the circle” of human rights to include non-human animals, it accepts the rhetoric of human rights. Because this means affirming the value of individual animals rather than just species,

animal rights frequently conflicts with both environmentalism and deep ecology. If all animal lives are of value, what our duties to wild animals might look like is difficult to say. Tom Regan goes so far as to call radical ecology “environmental fascism” because it impinges on the rights of individual animals. (Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, 2nd ed. [Berkeley: U of California P, 2004] 362.) The conflict between the needs of species as groups of animals in the wild and our duties toward them as individuals remains an undertheorized area of animal rights.

² Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, trans. Carol Volk (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) xxvii.

³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1983) 219. Williams suggests three headings under which most uses of “nature” fall: “(i) the essential quality and character of something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings” (219). The flexibility of the word is such that all three usages are commonly employed, and sometimes contradict one another.

⁴ Timothy W. Luke, *Ecocritique* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997) 11.

⁵ See Matt Cartmill’s *A View to a Death in the Morning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993) for a discussion of the roots of this idea in postwar thought. The events of World War II led many to believe that humanity was doomed to destroy itself through the use of the atom bomb. Deep ecology echoes this despair with its distaste for technology, though the actual means of destruction shifts — the population “bomb” being as dangerous as any weapon.

⁶ Luke, *Ecocritique* 42.

⁷ Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* xxviii.

⁸ Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* 5.

⁹ The distinction between a *determination* and a *situation* is largely unsupportable, though Ferry tries to make it work. He is hard-pressed to account for the humanness of primitive peoples, or “people without history,” since according to his argument, they would be little more than animals and deserving of the same treatment. He finesses the point by arguing that cultural differences are inessential. Quoting Robert Musil he notes that a “cannibal taken from the cradle to a European setting will no doubt become a good European and that the delicate Rainer Maria Rilke would have become a good cannibal had destiny, to our great loss, cast him at a tender age among the sailors of the South Seas” (14). It is hard to see how this resolves the situation/determination bind, however, as it would equally apply to other animals. Most domestic animals, for instance, behave quite differently in given situations than they would if their essence were truly as fixed as Ferry would like to pretend. That animals can be trained to go against their own natures indicates their openness to cultural transmission. What Ferry seems to be addressing is the remarkable adaptability of human beings, something we share particularly with other omnivores but to some extent with many other animals as well. In speaking of animals’ strict adherence to natural codes, he overstates the case.

¹⁰ Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* 145–46.

¹¹ The inverse is also true: if not enough people care about nature or animals, then nothing will be done. Ferry is right to suggest that ethical models drawn from nature or science are always suspect, but why the market should be better is unclear.

¹² Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* 128.

¹³ Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* 146.

¹⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1998) 1.

¹⁵ Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 126.

¹⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 129.

¹⁷ Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 139.

¹⁸ Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 113.

¹⁹ For an in-depth discussion of Nazi animal protection legislation, see Boria Sax, *Animals in the Third Reich: Pets, Scapegoats, and the Holocaust* (New York: Continuum, 2000) and Arnold Arluke and Clinton Sanders, *Regarding Animals* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1996).

²⁰ Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 175.

²¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 174.

²² Animal rights is often forced to confront the question of euthanasia precisely because its focus on the limit cases of humanity (the severely retarded, the very old, the very young, etc.) cuts both ways. If some people display capacities significantly less than those of the more intelligent animals then attempts to widen the circle may look very like closing it. Peter Singer, credited with launching the modern animal rights movement, has openly stated his support for euthanasia and even suggested that there isn't much wrong with killing very young infants. He has been prevented from speaking at conferences in Germany because of these disturbing echoes of Nazism in his work. Emphasizing the distance between animal rights and deep ecology, Singer claims we have no duties toward nature, but as our own preferences are advanced by its maintenance, we have an interest in keeping it in good order.

²³ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2004) 16.

²⁴ Agamben, *The Open* 34.

²⁵ Walter Benjamin to Florens Christian Rang, qtd. in Agamben, *The Open* 83. Benjamin's quote refers to the technological ideal rather than to how technology is actually employed. Full quote:

The mastery of nature (so the imperialists teach) is the sense of all technology. But who would trust a cane wielder who proclaimed the mastery of children by adults to be the sense of education? Is not education, above all, the indispensable ordering of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery (if we are to use this term) of that relationship and not of children? And likewise technology is the mastery not of nature but mastery of the relation between

nature and humanity. It is true that men as a species completed their evolution thousands of years ago; but humanity as species is just beginning its.

This suggests that the Cartesian model (of the master and possessor of nature) is not the only possible way in which our alienation from nature may be understood. Rather than a relationship of domination, there is a mutuality of mastering. Both nature and human beings are mastered by one another and held suspended in a between space that is not a dialectical overcoming.

²⁶ Von Uexküll's work influenced Heidegger's analysis of the animal's poverty in the world.

²⁷ Agamben, *The Open* 52.

²⁸ Agamben, *The Open* 76–77.

²⁹ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1988) 76.

³⁰ This does not discount the possibility that other animals may, at some point, become species-beings themselves. Should other animals develop the capacities Marx describes, one would assume they would have to be considered species-beings as well.

³¹ This separation from nature is not absolute. Elsewhere Marx describes nature as "man's inorganic body," highlighting the necessary relation to nature that further separates his position from that of the anti-natural man. Human beings are explicitly natural beings in Marx: "the first object of man — man — is nature, sensuousness; and the particular human sensuous essential powers can only find their self knowledge in the science of the natural world in general, since they can find their objective realization in natural objects only" (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* 111).

³² Of course, harmony with nature is not something that can be experienced. To be in harmony with nature is to be unaware. The loss of harmony with nature can only be imagined.

³³ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* 109.

³⁴ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* 117.

³⁵ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* 158.

³⁶ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* 159.

³⁷ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2002) 11.

³⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 6.

³⁹ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 5.

⁴⁰ In an extended section from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s "Notes and Sketches," Horkheimer and Adorno describe the very connection Ferry seeks to make between Nazism and animal rights.

In this world liberated from appearance — in which human beings, having forfeited reflection, have become once more the cleverest animals, which subjugate the rest of the universe when they happen not to be tearing themselves apart — to show concern for animals is considered no longer merely sentimental but a betrayal of progress. In the best reactionary tradition Göring linked animal protection to racial hatred, the Lutheran-Germanic joys of the happy murderer with the genteel fair play of the aristocratic hunter. The fronts are clearly drawn; anyone who opposes Hearst and Göring is on the side of Pavlov and vivisection; anyone who hesitates between the two is fair game for both. (211)

To care about animals is to be linked to the totalitarian forces of Nature, something the Nazis tapped into as the source of their power. To reject the Nazis, however, is to accept that vivisection and torture of animals is part of progress, and that to align oneself with the totalitarian drive of enlightenment as a second nature. There is no escape, and one must choose a side.

⁴¹ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton. (New York: Continuum, 2003) 229.

⁴² Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 365.

⁴³ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 320.

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Black Power and the New Left: The Dialectics of Liberation, 1967

Brian Thill

The formulation of a viable leftist position has always been a dialectical process, its specific character most immediately differentiated from its past and future variants by the pressing social crises of its historical moment. This was the case with the heterogeneous New Left, and remains the case today. At the same time, every committed leftist is necessarily interested in the genealogy of leftism: its key figures and concepts; its historical traditions of protest, revolution, and liberation; and its accounts of the complex relationship between theory and praxis. While there are many positive attributes of this archaeological dimension of leftist thought, there is also a very real danger involved. Particularly in times of great political crisis, the legacies of leftist history can be transformed from meaningful engagements with the real conditions of existence to a small collection of precious shopworn artifacts, familiar touchstones that come to stand in for the far richer and more complex legacy of leftist efforts at social action and commitment. As major anniversaries lead us to more and more encounters with reflections on the historical legacies of the New Left (sometimes now even more narrowly identified by the increasingly burdened signifier of "1968"), the impulse can be to fall prey to figuration, converting historical realities into occasions for leftist nostalgia and simplification. Part of the project of left history should be to seek out those moments and scrutinize the social and political forces that brought that figuration and simplification into

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being so that we are perhaps less likely to fall prey to those same impulses in our current moment of danger.

In the summer of 1967, the Congress of the Dialectics of Liberation brought together in London critical theorists, political activists, poets, Marxists, anarchists, existential psychiatrists, and a broad spectrum of other leftist and countercultural figures, among them C. L. R. James, Paul Goodman, Allen Ginsberg, Angela Davis, Lucien Goldmann, and Gregory Bateson. Organized by David Cooper and R. D. Laing, both of whom were prominent figures in the 1960s anti-psychiatry movement that counted Foucault and Deleuze among its most recognizable adherents, the conference was devoted to a wide-ranging engagement with a diverse range of leftist issues, including debates on the future of capitalism, the role of violence in modern dissent, the possibility of revolution and liberation, and nascent forms of radical ecology and environmentalism. The intended purpose of the conference was to bring together leading leftist figures in an effort to create, as its organizers hoped, “a genuine revolutionary consciousness by fusing ideology and action on the levels of the individual and of mass society.”¹

In what follows, I want to examine one particularly rich example by focusing on the rhetorical paths of thought of two important figures of the New Left, both of whom participated in the Congress in 1967: Stokely Carmichael, honorary prime minister of the Black Panther Party, and Frankfurt School theorist and philosopher Herbert Marcuse. For all of their particular theoretical and political differences — differences that are representative of the ideological range of the conference itself — the Black nationalist and the German theorist shared, in their contributions to the conference and elsewhere, an abiding interest in looking to the historical crisis of chattel slavery, as well as its most prominent critic in the nineteenth century, Frederick Douglass, as one of the means by which to understand and articulate a critical political position in the era of the New Left. What specific functions did historical chattel slavery, the rhetorical figure of “the slave,” and Frederick Douglass in particular serve for these prominent figures of the New Left at this crucial moment in history? What accounts for this particular similarity in their symbolic imaginaries, and how does this matter for us today? For all of their faults, the legacies of Carmichael’s Black Power movement and Marcuse’s call for liberation from the affluent society could still conceivably serve as potential sources for a renewal of the left, which at the moment often works from several problematic premises: that racial politics are either a deviation from the real economic and class crises that drive forms of global oppression or an atavistic remnant of a time before civil rights movements had by and large “solved” the most egregious problems of racism in the United States and elsewhere; and that the Marcusean “Great

Refusal” is theoretically naïve, an embarrassing relic of 1960s counterculture rather than a systemic rejection of actually existing conditions.

But these accounts don’t quite suffice. As is evident in their contributions to the Dialectics of Liberation conference and elsewhere, both Carmichael and Marcuse are committed to exposing the forms of oppression endemic to the institutionalized norms and practices of white, Western, or “advanced” nations. In addition to criticizing the many naked displays of racism and violence, for example, Carmichael is also extremely critical of the ideology of white liberalism, which he characterizes as “sympathetic [to the cause of black struggle] in an empty sense,” missing the big picture of the institutional forms to which its adherents contribute, despite their “good intentions.” Sympathetic white liberals may hold radically different views on race than those held by whites who are openly racist or discriminatory, but in Carmichael’s view this does not automatically absolve them of their complicity with more insidious institutional forms of oppression — practices that also persist because of inaction or apathy on the part of “sympathetic souls” and not merely because of the existence of a small minority of openly racist citizens. Marcuse, in like fashion, is critical of the ideals of what he calls “pure tolerance,” which can also serve to further entrench institutional forms of oppression.² Both men see the emerging postcolonial movements in the Third World as powerful social and political forces capable of taking up the mantle of the revolutionary cause, given their unique position as the primary casualty of Western “civilization,” which both men likewise expose for *its* barbarism. As both men recognize, the subjection of colonial peoples is the very thing that has allowed contemporary Western society to blossom into its current affluent and hegemonic forms, which are thus incapable of creating structures free from the forms of exploitation that brought them to global dominance. And in some of their most withering critiques of contemporary socioeconomic developments, both Carmichael and Marcuse note how blacks and other minorities have traditionally been actively excluded from any significant access to “resource control,” or what Marcuse identifies as “the productive process” — in other words, access to capital.³

Carmichael in particular is more engaged with economic and structural issues than accounts of the Black Power movement generally allow, and his putatively inflammatory rhetoric is often as hesitant and ambivalent as it is angry and forceful. For all of his charged language about the potentially explosive political power of black America and the countless oppressed peoples of the post-colonial Third World (with whom black Americans could clearly identify), Carmichael, in his speech on “Black Power” at the conference, is at the same time dismissive of any utopian conceptions of historical progress in any strictly Hegelian or Marxist sense. Instead, his arguments are

peppered with the language of active resistance as a fundamental aspect of the revolutionary call to arms against the privileged caste of white America. While the radical program for black empowerment that he espouses is certainly intended to improve the lives of black Americans and other racial minorities around the globe, there is never any indication in his argument that such transformations will constitute “progress” from the standpoint of human history, insofar as Carmichael insists that human nature contains such poisonous elements as racism as part of its very being. What Carmichael calls the inherited subconscious racism of whites is a major factor in his skepticism.

In *Black Power*, published the same year, Carmichael would expand on the themes outlined in his speech at the London conference, and would identify one of the most devastating primary effects of the economic forms of institutionalized racism. As he notes, with more than a little anger, “Nowhere are people so expendable in the forward march of corporate power as the ghetto.”⁴ This is an indictment of far more than a handful of lynch mobs; it is, instead, a scathing criticism of an entire national socioeconomic apparatus and the subconscious racism that allows it to persist. As he argued in his speech at the conference, America’s history of slavery and oppression “laid the base and framework for the racism which has become institutionalized in white American society”; as such, he insists that “our analysis of U.S. and international capitalism begins in race.”⁵ If the logic of racism has become institutionalized on a subconscious level, even the most radical transformations in the status of blacks will always have to be understood as provisional and contingent at best. From Carmichael’s point of view, “Black Power” is not only a revolutionary slogan meant to empower minority populations by arguing for active revolt against the system, but a warning that white America can and will do everything in its power to undercut whatever gains minority populations attempt to make. This means that material forms of progress will always and only be contingent gains, given current social arrangements rather than enduring utopian ones. As such, the struggle will in all likelihood need to continue indefinitely. “Progress” in this sense would not describe the achievement of anything like a post-racist utopia of pure social equality and opportunity but a far more restricted (and yet no less necessary) material difference in the arrangement of rights and opportunities within the prevailing social system — an always tenuous transformation in social relations and the conditions of existence for black Americans. This overwhelming sense of the radical provisionality of the movement and its goals can be seen as both the blessing and the curse of the Black Power movement and its related phenomena. Unlike other movements, it is capable of identifying possibilities for revolutionary action, but acknowledges at the

same time the likely consequences of the exercise of those possibilities as well. This is the operative context within which Frederick Douglass comes to occupy a central position in Carmichael’s thought, not only in terms of his status as an exemplary figure in African American intellectual history (which we might expect as part of a project of black nationalist historiography), but more immediately in terms of Douglass’s profound understanding of the radical provisionality of the entire project of liberation itself. As Carmichael noted,

Frederick Douglas [*sic*], the great black leader of the 1800s, said that when a slave stops obeying a master, then and only then does he seek his liberation. Camus said the same thing 100 years later on the first page of *The Rebel*, when he said that when a slave stops accepting definitions imposed upon him by his master, then and only then does he begin to move and create a life for himself. That’s very important, because what the people of the Third World are going to have to do today is to stop accepting the definitions imposed on them by the West.⁶

This is not simply a philosophical stance or a polite expression of the necessity of one’s movement into autonomy and freedom. For Carmichael, the power relations inherent in the condition of slavery in fact depend on a systematic use of violence and the exercise of force as the primary method of perpetuating the slave economy and maintaining its delicate power relationships between slaves and masters. To stop obeying, as Douglass insists, is therefore to initiate something far more dramatic than a merely rhetorical act. Such a method of seeking one’s liberation immediately summons the threat of violence as the only likely response to the slave’s decision to attempt to disrupt (even if only for a moment) the delicate balance of racialized power. While Carmichael’s turn to Douglass invokes “a refusal of definitions” as the definitive act, what is implicit here is that doing so introduces yet again the specter of violence to the master-slave relationship, this time through the force required to defend one’s refusal, and with it, in turn, the renewed show of force from those who aim to keep the slave in the subservient place they would like him to occupy without question.⁷ Douglass’s rhetorical act thus carries in its wake the return to violence, without any guarantees as to who, in the end, will come away from that refusal with his hard-won liberation and who will be struck down.

Carmichael understands these stakes. He recognizes that the way out from under the yoke of slavery (or, in 1967, the way out from systematic oppression and racism) requires just such a dangerous commitment. This is

why he is able to find in Douglass not merely a historical model but what he identifies as a “new language” for protest in society. If persistent and pervasive racism, discrimination, and oppression are not new, what is new in the Black Power movement is the degree to which nationalist militancy and the openness to the employment of violence informed this renewed call for equality, dignity, and freedom. As Carmichael, developing his position in opposition to other civil rights spokesmen of the period, says, “Rather we suggest a more meaningful language — that of Frederick Douglas [*sic*], a great black man who understood the nature of protest in society.” Carmichael quotes at length Douglass’s famous speech in which he argued that “power concedes nothing without demands.”⁸ For Carmichael, Douglass’s forceful and eloquent argument (originally delivered as part of an 1857 speech on the emancipation of the West Indies)⁹ perfectly encapsulates not only the condition of slavery in the centuries leading up to its eventual abolition in the nineteenth century but also the contemporary situation of oppressed minorities in the era of the New Left. The desire that undergirds the Black Power movement can therefore find much in Douglass that is useful to understanding the historical condition of chattel slavery and the conditions of race relations alike: the figure of Douglass now better understood as radical political contemporary, rather than distant ideological forefather.

Douglass understood from bitter experience that the social position of the slave — even the “freed” slave — is inherently tenuous and provisional. This is the link that helps us understand why Douglass as a rhetorical figure mattered so much in 1967: namely, because the radical provisionality of racial uplift, generations later, would be as pressing an issue in the 1960s as it was in Douglass’s time. Though slavery had long since been abolished, the larger institutional forms of racism, the restrictions on social, economic, legal, and political opportunity, and the ever-present dangers of latent forms of racism still persisted. The black man was still being subjected to the hateful power of the white gaze, his gains still insufficient to bring about a wholesale transformation in race relations that would render those gains permanent and unassailable.

It should be noted that Carmichael and others in the Black Power movement had often dismissed the work of Herbert Marcuse and others for its “Europeanness” and its theoretical, bourgeois intellectualism. But given the vicious closed loop that characterized the situation for black Americans in 1967, it should not surprise us to discover that Marcuse, like Carmichael, also believes that in the face of such an oppressive social totality, there is indeed a place for violence in the revolt against the system. The refusal to take violence completely off the table as a political strategy gives us just one

part of the answer to why Douglass serves as such a particularly attractive model for revolutionary action for the black nationalist and the utopian socialist alike.

First impressions would suggest that Marcuse’s intellectual and political project was radically different from Carmichael’s. In his contribution to the Dialectics of Liberation conference, “Liberation from the Affluent Society,”¹⁰ as well as in many of his most important theoretical works, Marcuse would envision some form of socialist utopia as a possibility or, rather, as a *necessity*, given that the ultimate horizon of the forms of liberation he champions is the full liberation of humankind: now master rather than servant of technology, systems of oppression, and false consciousness. As he argues,

If today these integral features, these truly radical features which make a socialist society a definite negation of the existing societies, if this qualitative difference today appears as Utopian, as idealistic, as metaphysical, this is precisely the form in which these radical features must appear if they are really to be a definite negation of the established society: if socialism is indeed the rupture of history, the radical break, the leap into the realm of freedom — a total rupture.¹¹

But if the liberation Marcuse imagines is ostensibly universal, the affluence that serves as one of the chief obstacles to that liberation certainly is not. If “Liberation from the Affluent Society” is the goal for Marcuse, Carmichael’s speech could be renamed “Liberation from the White Society,” inasmuch as the very affluence that Marcuse speaks of — particularly the affluence evident among a certain segment of society in the United States — is clearly racialized and has been from the moment the colonies imported their first shipment of African slaves to drive the engines of colonial expansion. When Marcuse implies that it is not liberation from naked violence, oppression, and discrimination that is at issue so much as liberation from a society that develops, for the most part, the material and cultural needs of its people — “a society which ... delivers the goods to an ever larger part of the population” — he may be in danger of radically oversimplifying the racially divided society that serves as Carmichael’s primary source of anger and inspiration.¹²

Furthermore, accepting and acting on Marcuse’s notion of liberation first requires one to see past or underneath socially prescribed forms of affluence and “happiness,” and as such this element of his ideas presents a special challenge to those who would seek potentially revolutionary transformations. This is one of the primary obstacles his theory faces: convincing a “happy” and relatively well-off population that it needs to refuse its submission to the

dictates of technological rationality (whereas for Carmichael and the proponents of black radicalism generally, what is most difficult about beginning the transformation of the system is precisely *not* seeing racism, segregation, and oppression everywhere). Where Marcuse must somehow convince an affluent and happily adjusted populace to refuse its “freedom in servitude,” Carmichael has no such burden: the oppression of racial minorities in the United States and throughout the world, rather than being concealed, is absolutely everywhere.

As Carmichael’s *Black Power* fleshes out the central ideas in his conference speech, so too does Marcuse’s *An Essay on Liberation* expand on his ideas from the conference in 1967. And it is here that other substantive points of connection between the two thinkers become clearer. Marcuse develops a more systematic theory of the potential revolutionary power of the black radical movements and their relationship to the prevailing socioeconomic order from which they spring. As he argues, aside from the deep class divisions within black life and its “marginal social function,” the majority of the black population “does not occupy a decisive position in the process of production,” and as a result, he concludes, “in the cynical terms of the system, a large part of this population is *expendable*.” The correspondences with Carmichael here are unmistakable and striking. Because the black population has been kept out of the systems of production and control, Marcuse adds, they can thus more easily be seen (by the very people and institutions that exclude and disempower them!) as making no essential contribution to the productivity of the system. The ultimate consequence of this tautological racial logic, he concludes, is that those in power “may not hesitate to apply extreme measures of suppression if the [black radical] movement becomes dangerous” in working to achieve some measure of the opportunities afforded to others in contemporary society.¹³

At the Dialectics of Liberation conference, Marcuse turned to the broader subjects of global forms of oppression and exploitation in an effort to articulate what is at stake in this particular formulation of the concept of liberation. Having asserted the need for a wholesale transformation of the forms of existing society at large, even those many of us would consider “progressive” or “liberatory,” he says,

Now the question we must raise is: why do we need liberation from such a society if it is capable — perhaps in the distant future, but apparently capable — of conquering poverty to a greater degree than ever before, of reducing the toil of labour and the time of labour, and of raising the standard of living? If the price for all goods delivered, the price for this comfortable servitude, for all these achievements, is

exacted from people far away from the metropolis and far away from its affluence? If the affluent society itself hardly notices what it is doing, how it is spreading terror and enslavement, how it is fighting liberation in all corners of the globe?¹⁴

For all its simple attractions, the “affluent society” — and for Marcuse, the United States serves as the paradigmatic example in this regard — is not satisfying the legitimate and most profound needs of human life. Terror, enslavement, and the perpetual battle against genuine liberation in the rush to “liberate” peoples and societies within a framework that best serves the interests of those in power, is a constitutive feature of what he calls “the syndrome of late capitalism.”¹⁵ The long histories of slavery, imperial expansion, colonialism, and the exploitive productive processes of an ever-expanding advanced industrial capitalism would thus be anathema to true freedom, despite the arguments made by their defenders in the name of progress, civilization, or the brands of “freedom” bestowed by submission to and untroubled participation in the globalized capitalist economy. Reading between the lines, we could say that, in material terms, the people “far away from the metropolis” would in this sense include black Americans as well as the oppressed populations of the Third World — the very groups Carmichael placed front and center in the emerging movements for political recognition and power.

Writing to express his solidarity with his former student, Angela Davis (who had recently been charged, but ultimately acquitted, for her alleged involvement with a kidnapping and shooting), Marcuse would reassert these sentiments in a way that brings his line of inquiry back once more into meaningful contact with those of Carmichael and the Black Power movement. As he says,

I felt uneasy when I was asked to introduce the publication of the first two lectures on Frederick Douglass which you delivered at UCLA in October 1969. ... [T]hey deal with a world to which I am still an outsider — can I say anything about it in an authentic manner? And lastly, you were my student in philosophy, and I taught philosophy; your thesis was to be on a problem in Kant: what does your life for the liberation of the black people, what does your present plight have to do with the philosophy of German Idealism?¹⁶

For some black nationalists (including, most likely, Carmichael himself), the immediate answer to Marcuse’s question might be: *nothing*. Or rather, there might not appear to be anything in the German philosophical tradition that

expressly speaks to the real situation of racist violence and institutional oppression on the ground in 1960s America, where churches were being bombed, public spaces were segregated, and lynchings and murders of blacks continued unabated. But Marcuse has framed his question as a rhetorical one, as he immediately identifies the substantive link between the philosophical tradition central to his intellectual development and the cause of Black Power by reminding Davis of her own philosophical lineage. It had been Kant, he argues, who had, years before, provided Davis with the notion that force can serve as a link between the theory and practice of freedom. The concept of liberation developed in the theoretical and activist dimensions of the lives of Douglass, Carmichael, Davis, and the broader black nationalist movement, Marcuse realizes, is very much in dialogue with the theoretical concepts of freedom at the heart of Kant, Marx, and an entire German intellectual tradition.

But Marcuse's assertions about Davis's "philosophical lineage" in fact reveals less about Davis's intellectual path than they do about Marcuse's. Looking at Davis's political and intellectual life, Marcuse is able to see more clearly than before that his own theories of liberation are indebted to concepts much more similar to those of black nationalist ideology than he at first might have believed. He contrasts these beliefs with Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of liberation, in which, regardless of the material circumstances or actual suffering, violence, and oppression involved, an inviolable space always remains preserved for the individual's inalienable freedom to refuse psychological submission. But for Marcuse, this "choice" between slavery and death or imprisonment — and for Marcuse, that is precisely what Sartre's concept leads us toward — is not a truly free choice. In fact, he insists that such a notion of liberation makes a mockery of human freedom.¹⁷ In its place, Marcuse recognizes the centrality of Douglass to his own understanding of the true stakes of genuine liberation. Not some moment of philosophical clarity or intellectual profundity, but the moment the slave fights back, the moment he actively resists his oppression — *this* is the moment when liberation truly begins. As he notes,

Frederick Douglass one day hits back. He fights the slave-breaker with all his force, and the slave-breaker does not hit back, he stands trembling; he calls other slaves to help, and they refuse. The abstract philosophical concept of a freedom which can never be taken away suddenly comes to life and reveals its very concrete truth: freedom is not only the goal of liberation, it *begins* with liberation; it is there to be practiced. This, I confess, I learned from you! Strange? I don't think so.¹⁸

For Marcuse, Davis's lectures on Douglass accomplish something profound. Enlightening as it is, the centrality of the "philosophical idea" to the intellectual tradition Marcuse so admired has now revealed its limit when set alongside the figure of Douglass. Unless the idea was a lie, Marcuse recognizes, it "must be translated into reality," compelling one to leave the campus and the classroom and help "the others, your own people to whom you still belong" (50). This is what Davis had done, and what Douglass long before her had done, by bringing the idea of liberation into a form of action — translating into reality the liberatory demand of all who are enslaved. "In this sense," Marcuse concludes, hailing the student who has gone on to wed theory to action so forcefully, "your cause is our cause."¹⁹ In short, Marcuse suggests that the cause of Black Power and its abolitionist antecedents should not be disaggregated from the philosophical project of German idealism and its relationship to emerging movements within the New Left. In this respect, as in many others, Marcuse establishes his radical difference from many of his Frankfurt School compatriots, most of whom would, by 1967, look askance at the emerging political movements — not just Black Power but also certain elements of the student, anti-war, anti-colonial, and countercultural movements with which Marcuse sympathized, seeing them as a perversion of more properly socialist or Marxist form of ideology critique.²⁰ For Marcuse, then, his admiration for Douglass (and, by extension, his sympathies with the broader political program of black nationalism) is in part an earnest response to the seductive power of the revolutionary act itself, exemplified for him in Douglass's revolutionary gesture and in New Left political demands taking shape in the late 1960s.

But there is yet another, more properly symbolic or rhetorical, function served by the repeated turns to Douglass in these New Left discourses. From the perspective of the 1960s, as well as from our own moment, the "peculiar institution" of chattel slavery occupies a privileged space in our historical consciousness inasmuch as its vast scope and undeniable horrors come down to us as precisely the sort of horrific, widespread, oppressive social system that we committed leftists could immediately and unproblematically recognize as a pure display of evil — as the absolute antithesis of the project of human freedom and dignity. Even more so than the long histories of warfare, material deprivation, suffering, false consciousness, discrimination, the struggle between labor and capital, institutional injustices, and the colonization of the inner life of the individual in industrial society (the list could be extended indefinitely), the institution of chattel slavery presents itself to us as sufficiently distinct from our own contemporary practices and so destructive of human life that its radical difference from present-day society makes it impossible (thankfully, we might wish to add) to find

anything that even approximates its nightmarish conditions. Slavery can appear, then, to even the most anti-utopian and anti-progressivist among us as evidence that no matter what problems exist in modern life, they are surely not remotely comparable to the destructiveness and cruelty of the slave trade — much as, following Adorno, we might be inclined to let “Auschwitz” serve a symbolic or synecdochal function beyond its literal ones: it is the special case, the low-water mark of man’s unbridled inhumanity to man.

In this respect, Frederick Douglass can serve simultaneously as a revolutionary figure for the black nationalist and the German émigré alike. The undeniable power and wisdom of Douglass’s ideas aside, there is something else fundamental that compels two such distinctly different figures of the New Left to locate meaningful antecedents to their individual brands of rebellion in the same historical personage. The complicated character of key elements of the discourse of New Left theory and practice — at once beleaguered and frustrated, bold and utopian in its aims, ever seeking to find greater political traction (whether from the be-ins to the march on the Pentagon, from outbreaks of violence in the inner cities to a massive and frustrated anti-war coalition) — should remind us that what we are witnessing in this period is not just the development and mobilization of an array of radical political movements but also the simultaneous expression of anger, resentment, confusion, and despair in the face of a social system that seemed to find ever new ways to co-opt, subvert, and undermine the power and effectiveness of these movements at every turn. The universal, revolutionary act of negation — the central Marcusean imperative — has effectively been rendered impotent within the advanced capitalist order.

Given these conditions, Douglass can symbolize for a multifaceted New Left the indissoluble unity of the individual agent acting upon and against a system that must be brought down brick by brick. More so than any other historical phenomenon — whether the exploitation of wage labor, nebulous but omnipresent forms of institutionalized discrimination, systemic abuses of human rights and civil liberties, or an array of other injustices — the fact of historical chattel slavery itself casts in bold relief (quite literally, in a divide between black and white on the level of the physical and psychological organization of bodies) the much subtler and yet equally damaging forms of oppression for which the New Left was still struggling to find a sufficiently rich and striking vocabulary. Because there is nothing resembling a forceful rhetorical analogue to “the slave” in the contemporary capitalist order, “the slave” can therefore come to figure as a rhetorical trope or, more subtly, as an allegorical figure for the forms of oppression that the committed anti-capitalists, anti-imperialists, and anti-racists of the polyglot New Left are experiencing without ever quite being able to name or understand in a

sufficiently striking fashion. Even today, from a rhetorical point of view, the “rupture of history” called for by Marcuse, as well as the demand for racial equality and opportunity by any means necessary through the slogan of “Black Power” offered by Carmichael, pale in comparison to the image of the slave who dares to speak, the slave who achieves his liberation.

If this is the case, and Douglass (and the abolitionist cause that his rhetoric and his decisive act represent) is in fact performing significant figural work within Carmichael and Marcuse’s analyses, this raises another issue relevant to a fuller understanding of the complicated legacies of the New Left. For alongside this analysis of the use of “the slave” as a rhetorical figure, there should be a certain element of critical disquiet. For it would not do to document certain New Left rhetorical strategies and offer these arguments as to their putative purpose if we did not at the same time scrutinize more carefully this valorization of Douglass and the figure of the slave. What actually happens to “the slave” and the historical fact and memory of slavery in this process of figuration, resurrected as a vehicle for New Leftist self-fashioning and political identification? Even if we read Marcuse and Carmichael’s individual deployments of Douglass and the condition of slavery in the most charitable fashion — recognizing that they are speaking, perhaps, of rough analogies with contemporary situations of uneven power relations, rather than drawing strict parallels between the historical condition of the slave and those who oppose the West’s global imperium — it is still worth considering what this might say about their relationship to the historical facts of slavery. In “Hegel and Haiti,” Susan Buck-Morss offers a productive critique of Enlightenment discourses of slavery and liberation that conveniently elided the problem of actually existing slavery by conceptualizing “slavery” in largely metaphorical or allegorical (rather than material and historical) terms.²¹ For Buck-Morss, Locke’s criticism of “slavery,” for example, has nothing to do with the real conditions of enslaved Africans but becomes instead “a metaphor for legal tyranny,”²² much as Hegel ignored or suppressed consideration of actually existing slavery to craft his dialectic of lordship and bondage in order to develop a definition of “slavery” as a more broadly philosophical obstacle to the free and full development of individual sensibility. This tendency to speak of “slavery” while ignoring real-world slavery itself, she adds, is likewise evident in later Marxist appropriations of Hegel’s dialectic. As she argues, beginning with Marx and continuing through Lukacs, Kojève, and others (including, notably, Herbert Marcuse), “the struggle between the master and the slave has been abstracted from literal reference and read once again as a metaphor — this time for class struggle.”²³ These are strong criticisms, and Buck-Morss’s palpable frustration with received histories of

Hegel invites us to reexamine certain fundamental elements of the social construction of Enlightenment philosophy, as well as of a broader Hegelian-Marxist tradition that has often fallen prey to reconstituting as class dramas certain social antagonisms that cannot be understood apart from the racial dynamics that inform them in powerful ways.

But I want to close by suggesting something else about the potential dangers of transforming historical crises to tropes and figures for understanding contemporary crises. It would be easy to fault Marcuse and Carmichael for their recourse to the ideological shorthand of slavery or the totemic figure of Douglass. But what we are confronted with in our present moment, four decades after the *Dialectics of Liberation* conference and now exactly four decades since the flashpoint of “1968,” is the possibility of repeating that very gesture, only now with the New Left or “1968” on the receiving end of this form of figuration. What remains to be reckoned with right now is the allure and attraction of the familiar totemic images of the New Left and the specter of 1968. From our present moment of apathy and crisis, the evidence suggests that we are being seduced into the same kinds of dangerous transferences that beset the figures of the New Left themselves. Like Frederick Douglass and the figure of the slave in decades past, “1968” and its satellite figures now seem to tempt many of us to the same kinds of figuration and synecdoche. While commemoration is important, we could be seeing in this new century the first signs of a dangerous form of intellectual ossification, reducing the New Left and its multifaceted legacy to manageable parameters for easier hagiography, while simultaneously bearing silent witness to (or indeed actively taking part in) the inward or reflective turn that claims to be made in service of the present moment but can in fact serve as a distraction from it. Is the New Left and the spirit of 1968 part of a new and damaging metaphor, a new destructive figure of nostalgia? We need to be thinking much more about this question, as well as the consequences of not confronting it with sufficient rigor and commitment.

When the conveners of the *Dialectics of Liberation* conference planned their event, they were driven to do so by an array of contemporary crises. Millions of people worldwide were suffering and dying because they were unable to meet their basic material needs; the decimation and commodification of the environment was proceeding with increasing haste in the relentless drive for the globalization of industry and consumption; anti-colonial efforts were being met with the full force of state violence. And, of course, the United States was engaged in an extremely unpopular and unwinnable imperialist war. If this sounds at all familiar to those of living in 2008, it may serve us well to resist the impulse to draw parallels, since points

of connection, when not read critically, can all too often turn us toward reflection rather than revolution.

Notes

¹ Selections from the conference were subsequently published as *The Dialectics of Liberation* (1968), edited by David Cooper. The opening quotation is taken from this volume’s jacket copy.

² For a full account of this aspect of his theory of liberation see Marcuse’s *Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

³ Stokely Carmichael and Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)*, (New York: Scribner, 2002) 160, 165.

⁴ Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage, 1967) 149.

⁵ Carmichael, “Black Power” 163-164.

⁶ Carmichael, “Black Power” 153.

⁷ “Refusal,” we should remember, is perhaps the single most crucial keyword, and the single most important psychological and political concept, in Marcuse’s oeuvre.

⁸ Carmichael, “Black Power” 171-72. This passion for the figure of Douglass extended well beyond Carmichael’s presentation at the conference. To give some sense of its importance to Carmichael, it’s worth noting that this same quote from Douglass, and Carmichael’s similar framing of it in terms that separate his arguments from those of gradualists and advocates of other civil rights positions, is reproduced verbatim in the book-length version of his argument as well. See Carmichael, *Black Power* x.

⁹ See Frederick Douglass, “The Significance of Emancipation in the West Indies” (1857), reprinted in *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) 183-208.

¹⁰ Herbert Marcuse, “Liberation from the Affluent Society,” *The Dialectics of Liberation*, ed. David Cooper (Baltimore: Penguin, 1968) 175-92.

¹¹ Marcuse, “Affluent Society” 177.

¹² For a much more nuanced account of the relationship of racial minorities to the “affluent society” he describes, see Marcuse, “The Problem of Violence and the Radical Opposition,” *The New Left and the 1960s*, ed. Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 2005) 57-75. Unlike his speech at the *Dialectics of Liberation* conference, this text — originally presented as a lecture at the Free University of Berlin that same summer — engages more fully with the problem of race and its relationship to the uneven status of the very “affluent society” Marcuse hopes to dismantle. Had Marcuse presented this material at the London conference instead, it is possible that Carmichael may not have been quite as dismissive of the “heavily

‘theoretical’” intellectuals and academics who made up the majority of speakers at the Congress. For Carmichael’s largely skeptical impressions of the conference as a whole, see chapter 24 of Stokely Carmichael and Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)* (New York: Scribner, 2002). Marcuse’s most succinct and accurate account of this relationship is found in “Art and Liberation,” first published in *Partisan Review* in 1972.

But what holds true for the notion of revolutionary art with respect to the working classes in the advanced capitalist countries *does not apply* to the situation of the racial minorities in these countries, and the majorities in the Third World. . . . What is at stake in the situation of the oppressed minority is the most general of all needs: the very existence of the individual and his group as human beings.

See Marcuse, “Art and Liberation,” *Art and Liberation*, ed. Douglas Kellner, (London: Routledge, 2007) 177.

¹³ Marcuse, “Violence” 58.

¹⁴ Marcuse, “Affluent Society” 181.

¹⁵ Marcuse, “Affluent Society” 180.

¹⁶ Herbert Marcuse, “Dear Angela,” *The New Left and the 1960s*, ed. Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 2005) 49.

¹⁷ Sartre, of course, will modify this view in *Between Existentialism and Marxism*. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism* (London: Verso, 2008).

¹⁸ Marcuse, “Dear Angela” 49.

¹⁹ Marcuse, “Dear Angela” 50. I would like to thank Corey Capers for highlighting the importance of this dialogue between Marcuse and Davis as being one that works both ways: not merely with Marcuse as teacher but now, in the wake of Davis’s growing political activism and her intellectual development, with her role as teacher to Marcuse.

²⁰ See, for example, Marcuse’s exchanges with Adorno, some of which were published in “Correspondence on the German Student Movement,” *New Left Review* 1:233 (Jan./Feb. 1999) 123-136.

²¹ Susan Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti,” *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Summer 2000): 821–65.

²² Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti” 826.

²³ Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti” 850.

**From Provinces to National Television:
Celebrity Culture and Collective Recognition in the New Spain**

Pablo Castagno

Spain's economy today is strong, with a dynamic of progress that opens great horizons to wider strata of its population.

King Don Juan Carlos I de Borbón,
Madrid, Christmas 2000

The bourgeoisie has always had its ways of making a spectacle out of the exploitation of labor and culture. When I moved to Spain in 2000, I was shocked by the ways in which the Spanish bourgeoisie was persuading Spaniards to move forward with what *The Economist* called a "new Spain."¹ Listening to the stories of my Ourense roommates about their need to "make the grade," their nostalgia for Galicia, and their new *guay* forms of consumption, I was struck by the way the bourgeoisie and its various institutions were not only disciplining labor but also reorganizing sociocultural relations within the national space in ways that were consonant with its dream of a New Spain, a modern nation-state successfully located within the circuits of world capitalism, "global culture," and state power.

Early versions of this essay were presented at the 3rd Cultural Studies Association Meeting, University of Arizona, 2005; at the Globalization and Representation Conference, University of Brighton, 2005; and at the MLG Institute on Culture and Society, Georgetown University, 2005. I am grateful to anonymous reviewers for their comments on a previous version of this essay. I am also grateful to Emilic Sauri, the editorial manager of *Mediations*; Robert Carley; and Sezin Rajandran for their questions, comments, and editing. I dedicate this essay to my friends in Spain.

My goal in this essay is to explain a phenomenon that allows the Spanish bourgeoisie to legitimate its control of the working class: the use of spectacle and fame as a mechanism of cultural regulation by the Madrid-based television industry. In the first section, I discuss discourses concerning the spectacle that have emerged in the media since the appearance of new private television channels in the early 1990s, and I relate the expansion of those discourses to material shifts in the Spanish social structure. In the second and third sections, I narrow the analysis to the practices of mediation in reality television.² I explain how the production of the spectacle carried out by the reality television industry is based on the exploitation of labor and culture from the different regions of Spain. Finally, I describe how fame is utilized as a mechanism of cultural regulation and collective recognition that allows the bourgeoisie to sustain its discourse of a New Spain replete with freedom, prosperity, and welfare for all Spaniards.

Television in Contemporary Spain: Between Democracy at the Multinational Level and a Culture of the Spectacle Anchored in Madrid

During the Franco dictatorship (1939–75), which constituted a mix of nationalist-Catholic authoritarianism and state-controlled capitalist modernization, the Spanish media system was controlled by the state. The state broadcast corporation, Radio Television Española (RTVE), had two national television networks, a centralized national radio network, and a network of locally and regionally oriented radio stations. The television network, Television Española (TVE), had two channels and no competitors. According to Richard Maxwell, TVE “was highly centralized and tightly controlled by the dictatorship, more so than any other medium,” intended to function as a main institution of ideological persuasion for the regime.³ With the end of the dictatorship, the Spanish media system changed entirely. Spanish television passed from absolute state control to a regulated and competitive system of national and regional networks comprised of private and public companies.

From 1982 to 1990, the government approved the creation of eleven autonomous broadcast organizations. These organizations created a network of public broadcasters, the Federation of Autonomous Radio and Television Organizations (FORTA), to rival RTVE.⁴ As Maxwell observes, this reform “was meant to cause controlled denationalization of television by creating channels that responded to the plurality of cultures, languages, and communities within the Spanish territory, a multinationalism suppressed since the end of the civil war.”⁵ But in addition to these reforms, the government gave television licenses to three new private television channels in 1989; the media companies responsible for these channels became the main players in

the national system: Telecinco (controlled by Italian tycoon Silvio Berlusconi), Antena 3 (controlled then by Spanish newspapers groups), and Canal Plus (a cable channel controlled by Prisa and Canal Plus France).

By 1991, Telecinco and Antena 3 controlled a substantial part of the television market: TVE stations registered 55.4 percent of market share, Telecinco registered 17 percent, and Antena 3 registered 10.8 percent. FORTA companies received 15.4 percent.⁶ Since then, these trends have continued: TVE went on to receive 21 percent of the market share, while Telecinco and Antena 3 together received 38 percent. From 2004 to the present Telecinco became the most viewed television station and Antena 3 came in second. Satellite television, cable, and new digital television networks (Canal Cuatro, La Sexta) all went on to receive around 24 percent of national audiences by 2007.⁷

Private television stations became the central agents in the formation of a culture of the spectacle. As corporate agents in search of market profits, these television stations needed to create audiences in the most effective and cheapest way. Indeed, they changed the dominant discursive framework to gain a foothold in the television system. Antena 3 and Telecinco appealed to the market discourses of spectacle, entertainment, and popularity to persuade Spaniards to consume cultural commodities. Of the two television stations, Telecinco brought about the most decisive change in production and so I will focus my analysis there. An early Telecinco advertisement in 1990, aired on TVE1, interpellated Spaniards in the following way.

It is in your TV remote control. Turn on Telecinco if you want to experience television differently. Turn on a spectacular, entertaining, joyful, and alluring television that everybody likes because it is a complete channel. Turn on Telecinco: the spectacle in your home.

Telecinco called on Spaniards to join the world of the spectacle and promised to bring that world into their homes. Telecinco stressed that it was “friendly television” and that in game shows like *VIP* (1990) “ordinary people” were going to “play with popular stars.”⁸ “Together at Last” was Telecinco’s slogan for its opening gala in 1990. The television station appealed to “ordinary people,” to their languages, tastes, and bodies. It constantly reinforced the proximity between the network and the people, identifying Spaniards as “the audience” or “the public.” According to Maja, a fifty-one-year-old state administrative worker, “Telecinco was much less stiff than TVE” since its inception.⁹ In Telecinco contests like *VIP*, *Entre platos anda el juego* (1991), and *La ruleta de la fortuna* (1993), “ordinary people” played with celebrities and television hosts. Telecinco’s incorpora-

tion of people's tastes and of "ordinary" participants into television programs became the spectacle itself. Moreover, according to Kiko, a communications student,

Telecinco changed Spanish TV. It introduced *Tutti Frutti*, popular humorists, the Italian style, beautiful girls. In the show *Las noches de tal y tal*, a television host responded to questions about society while lounging in a jacuzzi.¹⁰

Las noches de tal y tal: Gil Superstar was conducted by Jesús Gil y Gil, the mayor of Marbella and president of the popular football club Atlético de Madrid. Accompanied by *telenovela* celebrity Jeannette Rodríguez as well as the Chin-Chin girls,¹¹ Gil interviewed stars and answered general questions posed by the public from the jacuzzi in his home. Like a Spanish Berlusconi, Gil represented what people supposedly wanted to become in life; and Telecinco tried to associate the world of celebrity culture with "the world of businessmen and politicians."¹² Furthermore, with these shows and new television magazines,¹³ Telecinco introduced the values sacred to consumption in a burgeoning market economy, including success, money, youth, beauty, and fame. These values became the myths of the New Spain when the economy boomed from 1995 to 2007 after the slump of the early 1990s.

As Hugh O'Donnell has observed, Telecinco was "the most 'down-market' of Spain's new commercial channels, ... though it made considerable efforts to present itself as the preferred channel of the new middle classes."¹⁴ In my view, O'Donnell's observation in fact reveals not a change in the social sector the channel was targeting but rather the cultural logic instrumentalized by Telecinco: its appeal stemmed from the social mobility it promised in the shows and in catchy slogans like "ordinary people will play with popular stars." First, Telecinco portrayed new forms of social distinction and taste embodied in the figure of celebrities, television hosts, Hollywood films, and the aesthetic dynamism of the channel. Second, in Telecinco's lottery contests, television hosts would interpellate the audience and participants in the following way: "Which celebrity would Spanish girls like to be?" "Maria participated in a beauty contest," or "Can you believe it? He doesn't want to win the money and return home, he wants to stay on television!"

Legitimizing a new taste for the spectacle as a marker of social distinction that it had a hand in creating, Telecinco, in turn, legitimized its monopoly on the cultural production of the spectacle. Telecinco hosts interviewed famous celebrities, *los famosos*, and engaged ordinary people in games and talk shows. Telecinco, as Maja indicated, was a "modern

channel." Its shows and games were the mechanisms through which it could plug non-ownership classes into the new dreams of the wealth and glamour of New Spain. In turn, Telecinco's mobilization of the popular belief in social mobility was increasingly credible because it was interlaced with shifts in the material existence of the working-class and popular cultures, that is, with a change in the conditions of the reception of television discourse.¹⁵

Transformations in the condition of various social classes were produced by capitalist reforms introduced by the "socialist" government of Felipe González (1982-1996) and especially by the new forms of capitalist growth in the mid-1990s, which changed the structure of social classes in economic, cultural, and political terms. Gonzalez's policies not only reorganized the structure of capitalist production — for example, through the privatization of state companies and industrial restructuring — but also created labor conditions consonant with Spanish capitalism's need to increase relative and absolute labor exploitation. As a result of the macroeconomic attack on labor with the currency devaluations between 1991 and 1993 and in 1995, the new labor laws of temporary employment,¹⁶ the requirement that trade unions collaborate to increase labor productivity, and the new flows of capital that entered the economy with the consolidation of the European Monetary Union, the Spanish economy boomed. With the return of growth, the stratum of marginal social sectors, produced by the overall capitalist restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s, was reduced, while the GDP grew annually an average of 3.7 percent between 1995 and 2007.¹⁷

Unemployment decreased from 24 percent in 1995 to 8.2 percent in 2007;¹⁸ these new jobs were created in the construction and service industries. The service industry went from employing 31 percent of the workforce in 1960 to employing 62 percent of the workforce by the end of the 1990s.¹⁹ The new jobs were based on temporary contracts, which represented 32.5 percent of employment in Spain, and 53 percent of youth employment.²⁰ With the growth of the economy and the expansion of credit, new means of consumption were socialized. For example, during the first half of the new economic cycle, the number of housing mortgages rose from 412,000 in 1996 to 763,000 in 2003,²¹ car sales rose from 834,000 units in 1995 to the record of 1.43 million in 2001 (75 percent on credit),²² home appliance sales rose 30 percent between 1996 and 2000, color TV set sales rose 54 percent, and cellular phone sales rose 2,432 percent between 1995 and 1999.²³ These trends continued until the slowdown of late 2007.²⁴ Cell phones, new cars, and new apartments had become symbols of social identity and integration into New Spain.

New social aspirations, discourses, and forms of exploitation impacted

the working class (including the large stratum of self-employed service owners). On one hand, working-class consumption intensified and the working class was subjected to the dominant class's view that Spain had been transformed into a middle-class country.²⁵ On the other hand, the working class was required to raise its productivity and was disciplined through the expansion of temporary contracts as well as through the establishment of low minimum wages.²⁶ In turn, the formerly small middle class tended to dissolve as its "winning" factions intertwined with a reduced Spanish bourgeoisie (including the provincial landlord classes), the *pijos* as they are called in everyday life, and its lower strata intertwined with the working classes.

The institutions at the center of Spanish society (the Spanish Crown, the main political parties, the agents of capital, state institutions, the media) interpellated Spaniards into a New Spain portrayed as a nation of freedom, prosperity, and social progress that was economically and culturally "modernizing." For Spanish dominant institutions, New Spain is a democratic nation without class divisions. It is a nation in which people work hard for a happiness that is based on consumption and family life. It is also a plural Spain in which regional differences are integrated into a form of diversity regulated by Madrid. But, above all, New Spain is like a "big family," formed by simple and straightforward citizens, like every "neighbor," "brother," "husband," or "daughter." In this sense, the principal cultural icons of New Spain have been the successful sportsmen that represent the nation in global competitions, like Rafa Nadal or Pau Gasol, who are similar to every Spaniard but who are also superstars.²⁷

On the ground, the core of the new society is made up of a working-class generation of *mileuristas* (58 percent of the workforce):²⁸ workers earning less than €1,100 per month and employed primarily in the service sectors.²⁹ *Mileuristas* are constrained by mortgage indebtedness; they have to work hard to validate their educational, labor, and cultural qualifications (e.g., modernize their lifestyle, learn English) and to be part of the Spanish dream, consuming more media and leisure commodities than have previous generations.³⁰ This entire process created the necessary conditions for the reception of reality TV discourse in the new century.

From Towns to the National Television Stage: Reality TV, the Appropriation of Culture, and the Circulation of Spanish Celebrities

What is characteristic of myth? To transform a meaning into form. In other words, myth is always a language-robbery.

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957)³¹

Despite private television's early success, it took a while for it to obtain substantial profits. It was only after the Spanish economy started a new cycle of growth that Telecinco began to show better fiscal numbers.³² Telecinco's revenues and profits rose dramatically with the broadcasting of reality television. In 2000, the reality television show *Big Brother* was aired on Telecinco and net profits rose 40 percent that year. At the time, Telecinco's president attributed the large profit margins to "cost efficiencies, a more popular demo and a growth in ads."³³ With the broadcasting of reality television, Telecinco became one of the most profitable European TV stations. The first season of *Big Brother* had a market share of 53.4 percent (reaching around 10 million people out of a total population of 44.7 million), but it peaked at 70 percent during the central moments of the show.³⁴ *Big Brother* is a form of cultural production filled with "conflicts, tensions, alliances, hate, love, and emotions"³⁵ that arise from the relationships among fifteen "ordinary participants" who are locked in a house for one hundred days and whose lives are constantly recorded by cameras.

While countless scholars have attributed the emergence of reality television to market competition,³⁶ for which the reduction of "labor costs" and the increased sale of cheaper commodities is an obligation, this explains the factor that had motivated the change but it does not describe the economic problem that this change in capitalist structures sought to resolve. The importance of reality television is that it allows the industry to regulate the growth of constant capital (fixed capital) in relation to variable capital (living labor), which is a consequence of firms' need to introduce cost-reducing innovations to survive in the market.³⁷ As Karl Marx demonstrated, this is the key factor behind the tendency of the rate of profit to fall: as the organic composition of capital grows (i.e., more technology is used in production), less living labor is exploited per commodity and mass of commodities, so in relative terms profits tend to fall.³⁸ Surplus value and profits, in Marx's account, are a direct result of the exploitation of human labor. Reality television fundamentally counteracts the tendency of the rate of profit to fall because it optimizes the use of constant capital (through technological

change),³⁹ intensifies the exploitation of labor, both in relative and absolute terms,⁴⁰ reduces wages, and creates new associations of production. In short, for the media industry, *Big Brother* and reality television in general appeared as an ideal capitalist process of production because it could combine a technological revolution with a substantial amount of cheap living-labor exploitation.⁴¹

In reality television, successive groups of media workers, called “participants” (and the corresponding TV crews),⁴² produce surplus sentiment value twenty-four hours a day (since cameras and microphones constantly record them) for three months without any compensation thereafter. Participants renounce any legal action against the company for physical or moral damage. The production company holds all property rights, meaning that contestants must accept that the recorded material, including private information, can be exploited in any form. The contestants are only allowed to appear in the press if they are authorized, and for eighteen months thereafter they cannot sign contracts without the express permission of the corporation.⁴³ Participants increase their relative production of surplus sentiment value when they have to perform certain tasks, behave in specific situations arranged by the production team, communicate with the television host, or nominate two housemates for “eviction,” leaving the public to decide which “contestants” deserve to remain in the house. Next, the public votes by placing telephone calls, from which Telecinco and the television production company⁴⁴ make a good deal of money, in addition to the revenue generated by advertisements, in exchange for the “popularity” generated by the participants-contestants.

This is the basic economic mechanism of reality television⁴⁵ and the regulatory templates against which there are ongoing labor demands worldwide from former participants and production assistants, who feel exploited.⁴⁶ As a participant in an online forum on Spanish reality television put it, “[T]he machine just uses and discards you; its only goal is to feed the beast.”⁴⁷ However, the exploitation of culture in reality television is equally dramatic. Understanding this form of exploitation is fundamental to our understanding of the cultural meaning of reality shows.

To elaborate my argument on the connection between economic exploitation and cultural appropriation I will first discuss a comment made by Annette Hill and Gareth Palmer about the worldwide phenomenon *Big Brother*. According to the authors, “Cultural commentators miss a great deal when they seek to speak for ‘the people’ when it is clear from the contestants, press profiles, and audience research that all those taking part understood this to be an evolving competition.”⁴⁸

Contrary to what Hill and Palmer claim, I argue that in order to understand the cultural meaning of *Big Brother* we must first look into the

relationship between both dimensions of the phenomenon Hill and Palmer mention: the relationship between the popular discourse — of, in, and around the show — and the conditions of production. The necessity of this step is observed by Mark Andrejevic, who, in the conclusion of his study, *Reality TV*, claims “that a critique of the notion of participation becomes central” for social theory, by John Corner, who calls for a dialogue between “popular culture perspectives” and “political economy accounts,” and by Mike Wayne, who argues that is vital to analyze the mediations between the capitalist mode of production, the media institutional formations, and the “cultural forms” elaborated.⁴⁹ From my position, this process of mediation within the social space includes the appropriation and transformation of cultural materials in the elaboration of commodities as well as practices of transaction, negotiation, and mediated contestation among various social agents (e.g., media managers, cultural intermediaries, citizens).

In fact, a historical perspective on reality television demonstrates that the phenomenon is not as new as we might think it is. The media has always engaged us in live national events, such as royal weddings, and has historically taken cultural forms from social life, transforming them into symbolic goods to be recognized by the public as popular products.⁵⁰ Regulating those mediations not only allows the media to claim authority as the symbolic center of society but also allows media elites to come together with dominant classes in the formation of political cultures. With reality television, those processes of mediation have been far more rationalized. We are sold not just melodramas and football culture but supposedly “the real” and “authenticity” as such. The process is part of a general reorganization of contemporary capitalism: to extract raw materials from labor, culture, and nature more directly and quickly.⁵¹ In the media, this process is veiled under notions like “surveillance.”⁵² However, in order to understand the processes of mediation, why should we take the categories provided by the culture industry and used to entertain us as categories of research practice? Why do no other programs, with the exception of football, have as many viewers as reality television shows such as *Big Brother* or *Fame Academy*?

This last question helps me grasp the cultural meaning of *Big Brother*. Leaving the issue of surveillance for a moment, it is noteworthy that for Spaniards reality television entailed a shift within the field of the production of “popular entertainment.” As Machaquito, a sixty-two-year-old bullfighting fan and library periodicals employee in Sevilla, has told me: “In the past the popular people were the football players, bullfighters, and singers. Now they have been replaced by the celebrities.”⁵³ Furthermore, the majority of participants, with the exception of some *pijos*, belong to the working class as popular singers have in the past. They are junior workers in the service

industry (office workers, commercial employees, cultural services workers), public-sector administrative workers, self-employed owners of services (e.g., taxi drivers), and students.

In their *Big Brother* introduction videos, participants show their families, friends, neighborhoods, towns, and cities. The videos broadcast participants hanging out with “their people,” eating family food, celebrating with their friends, and showing how proud they are of the house they live in, of their neighborhoods, or of their towns. Sometimes the participants talk about their dreams, including paying off a mortgage, bringing their daughters from abroad (in the case of immigrants), paying for medical operations, having a wedding like that of El Farruquito (a famous flamenco dancer), working in television, and so on. Special participants not only embody the dream of working in the media industry but also demonstrate the ways in which participants might “help their people.” In turn, family and friends defend participants in the TV studio and they send cards, kisses, cakes, or videos of the family celebrations participants miss, like birthdays. The participants’ families ensure that their friends and their communities vote for “their guys and girls.” They circulate ballots to the community announcing the telephone number for voting. Families and friends of participants excitedly cheer on them as popular football stars, as “champions.”

In addition, working-class viewers always stress the origins of the participants in their comments to the show, a key marker of their social identity. They remember them according to their cities and towns of origin, like Zamora or Salau. In discussing which participant they liked most, two of my interviewees, Maja and Chiquita, both library periodicals employees in their fifties, asked each other whether “Mozito⁵⁴ was from La Coruña or Orense? Was Pato from Sevilla or Granada?” and whether “Mucho had a Catalan accent or was from La Rioja?” Maja told me proudly that she liked Salto and voted for him because he was from the same province as she was. In turn, the *Big Brother* host constantly refers to the cities or towns of the participants, asking, “What do you think the people of Salau are going to say? Ehh, tell me!” According to Maja and Chiquita, *Big Brother* “is like life itself.” They identify with the stories of the participants because they “bear difficulties similar” to their own. Talking to me about *Big Brother* and helping me find news in the press, Maja laughed and sang the tango song *Perdóname* by David Civera, which was sung by the participants in the house.⁵⁵

I live chained to misery
For having given free rein to my ambition
I did not know how to calm this heart
That has driven me blind into unconsciousness

I wanted more and more, I compare myself to God
And now I am lost without reason
Forgive me!
Life has already hit me.⁵⁶

Working-class agents refer to the personal solidarities that develop in *Big Brother*, pointing to the conflicts between several participants and the *pijos*. According to Lauri, a twenty-two-year-old student and daughter of an industrial worker, in *Big Brother* “certain human values that you would like to have sometimes appear, like when the boyfriend of a girl was evicted and she left the house with him.” The struggles for respect and the dramas involving personal recognition and appreciation of friends for one another, of lovers for one another, and of the group for each of its members are important in the everyday life of people. Lauri said, “we like to have good and bad guys,” “we always look for good and bad guys,” “we like to see struggles between the good and the bad guys and we want the bad guys to be thrown out.” Who are the bad guys? According to her and other informants, the *mamporreros*, or bad seeds, who are evicted. *Mamporreros* are the guys that abuse authority, lead good people to act indecently, and “only want to have many presents under the Christmas tree without caring how.”⁵⁷

Informants who do not like the show, like Federico — an actor and history student whose father is a university teacher — also connected reality television with Spanish preferences for popular celebrations, like the *ferias* of Cáceres and of Sevilla.⁵⁸ In addition, Federico believes that Franco tried to suppress conflicts between social classes by appealing to the Spanish people. Spaniards, he believes, still tend to behave in accordance with “a politics of bread and circus” managed by the dominant classes. He observes a continuation between the monarchy, Franco’s attempts to discipline the people, and the forms of popular culture constructed by the market. According to Federico, the expressions of *Big Brother* contestants are always repeated “by the media like fashionable phrases. Repeated by humorists, journalists, TV hosts. They do songs, jokes. And, of course, the Spanish people integrate them as new popular jargon in parties, social gatherings, celebrations.”⁵⁹

Big Brother constantly uses popular words, colloquial expressions, popular sayings and proverbs, anecdotes, and humorous stories from the participants in the house. These are then commodified and circulated in the media realm as the “mythic phrases” and “gems” of *Big Brother*.⁶⁰ Lalo and Kiko, communication students from Jérez and Granada, quickly recalled these catchphrases in group discussions. Lalo and Kiko remembered Buenillo’s popular expression in *Big Brother I*: “¿Quién me pone la pierna

encima para que no levante la cabeza?” Other tags that circulated in *Big Brother* were the *muletilla* of Enganche, “Pa chulo, chulo ... mi pirulo,” and even Canaria’s comment to Oski, “Lo que te cansa es el concurso, no la casa!”⁶¹

Lalo and Kiko remembered that *Big Brother* was much more popular in the beginning because it was “more spontaneous,” “people had more expectations,” and “it was a party.” Federico recalled that “during the eviction of Majo all of Spain was watching, as though they were watching football ... there was total silence throughout the neighborhood and suddenly she was evicted and people shouted out of their windows and the floor of the apartment above us was trembling.”⁶² Kiko told me that this was the year he got his mom to vote for a “candidate” he liked but was very disappointed with the results. Finally, Lalo, who stressed that he defines himself as a leftist Republican, recalled that in 2000 he especially liked the *pisha*⁶³ Rubio because “he was a man of the people” (*el pueblo*): “He was a no-nonsense guy. He sang and danced. I saw him as really belonging to the people. He was a popular guy, a *chiringota* guy. He was sincere, honest, of the people. He went to the end of the world with that other friend of his in the house. But then he changed, he betrayed his friend.”⁶⁴

Unlike Federico, Lalo focuses not on what the culture industry does with the people but on what of the people remains in the industry of cultural productions. That perspective appears in press reports as well. For instance, one reporter stressed that when Rubio left the house to celebrate in the television staging area, outside the house, his friends shouted, “Pisha, Pisha, Pisha, you are the best! El más grande!” while his grandmother exclaimed, “My little boy, my little boy, I have missed you so much!”⁶⁵ The press also reported that Rubio’s “triumph” was widely celebrated in Cádiz. He was a “new hero.” The bakeries of the city baked cakes with Rubio’s face, the *chiquillos* (men) dyed their hair blond like Rubio’s hair, and T-shirt sales for the Cádiz SAD football club, Rubio’s beloved team, boomed. In turn, the Cádiz football players locked themselves in the club’s locker room to demand a raise, and the city’s mayor strolled by Rubio’s popular neighborhood to see if he could get a piece of the celebrity cake.⁶⁶

On one hand, there is a popular appropriation of the show, as in the case of the Cádiz football players.⁶⁷ On the other hand, the appropriation and circulation of Spanish culture that takes place in the show is clearly planned by the program since it can present itself as a popular product for the people because of the possession and display of these cultural codes. In addition, the host constantly reinforces media “populism,” for instance, by declaring that she is “sick of classism,” stressing that certain participants “have represented the feelings of all of us” or by asking the audience, “Who do you think is the

most popular in *Big Brother*?” Furthermore, according to Lista, another informant who is an experienced journalist in Spanish media, “When ratings fall, the *Big Brother* production company sends reporters to the neighborhoods and asks people what they want to have happen in the house. People love to see conflicts.”⁶⁸ Kiko, a *Big Brother* viewer, also noted that “in general the results in *Big Brother* coincide with the rumors that are circulating ... ehh, they are going to throw this guy away.”⁶⁹

Big Brother is then a machine for producing “popular representatives” feeding off working-class social experiences and popular cultures. The formal mechanism of the program is intended to produce “popular representatives.” In all *Big Brother* shows in Spain a common pattern of elimination has been repeated: the dominant figures in the house, the supposed *mamporreros*, are evicted, and those who were dominated in the house become the “winners.”⁷⁰ This can be grasped by observing the patterns of nominations and expulsions; sometime between weeks six and nine a strong participant inside the house and his/her allies are eliminated, and this constitutes the climax of the show around which its cultural logic is organized. The popular representative belongs to the working classes, especially temporary workers in the service industry, students, and self-employed service owners (e.g., a taxi driver, an owner of a bar).⁷¹ The participants of “high standing” are never chosen by either the program or the public to become the “winners” of the show.⁷²

The public esteems the sincerity, spontaneity, honesty, and goodness of the popular people in the house. The host applauds how the (wo)man with a good heart has defeated the “malicious contestants” and stresses that all the taxi drivers in Alicante or all the women in Salau “are going to be very proud” of them.⁷³ Indeed, “all of Spain will be proud.” The host compares the behavior of the representative in the house to that of popular cultural figures in the national space: “Do you know that Fiorito in Madrid has succeeded in putting all the bulls in the corral, well ... you would have done the same!”⁷⁴ *Big Brother* broadcasts images and stories that subtly blame the strong participants in the house, who are usually called the “game players,” for their machinations against the good guys, “the poor victims,” those with whom the largest part of the Spanish audience identifies. With the help of scriptwriters, participants reinforce their positions with declarations of national fidelity to the public.

The audience has wanted Juan Manuel Valor to be in *Big Brother*, so I’m going to be here for them. For you I will be here.

[To the other participants:] You don't give a damn about all the support Spain is sending me!⁷⁵

The chosen representatives become credible gifts of exchange in the culture. Through them the communities are recognized and they, in turn, recognize the representative through their telephone votes. The show turns representatives into "special" guys and girls that "represent Spain" and embody "the best" of their places of origin. All the winners of the Spanish version of *Big Brother*, with the exception of one, have been from the different provinces of Spain. Moreover, representatives embody the realization of dreams constitutive of particular social aspirations. Their status is elevated, as when male participants are seconded by "beautiful" female participants. Indeed, the representatives become living national myths for a short while.

For example, in *Big Brother VI*, Juanma was compared to Fiorito and described as an epic Don Quijote de la Mancha, who resisted the attacks of other contestants.⁷⁶ In addition, as a chosen national representative, he was the one in charge of incorporating the foreign housemates into the successful national culture. Asked why he decided to save the foreign housemate from Argentina from elimination, he said he would have done the same for Bailarina because, as an immigrant, "she was also beginning to make her way in Spain." In turn, the host and gossip journalists justified Bailarina's behavior because "she was escaping" from Cuba. Next, the host applauded Juanma because he explained the European Union constitutional treaty to a Polish participant.⁷⁷ Moreover, since the show serves as a platform for other national productions (e.g., the four hundredth anniversary of *Don Quijote*, the Formula 1 grand prix broadcast by Telecinco, the Christmas lottery), the elaboration of the representative as a mythic national figure is connected to those productions as well.

For example, in *Big Brother VI*, while promoting the book *El Quijote*, the program witnessed the unfolding love story between Juanma/Don Quijote and Di/Dulcinea, the female character of *El Quijote* that in Spanish culture represents ideal love. The host of *Big Brother* and gossip columnists announced that Juanma had fallen in love with Di, a "model" from Barcelona portrayed as the "sweet" and "beautiful" girl of the house. Juanma, in fact, named Di "Dulcinea." *Big Brother* thus broadcast a small melodrama that perfectly matched the collective representations dominant in Spanish society. The melodrama successfully sublimated the following social and sexual relations: the noble man as the head of the family and of the nation, heterosexual love as the leitmotif of Catholic marriage, and the synthesis of both as the guarantee of the Spanish nation's perpetuation. Juanma became

like Prince Felipe, who got his beautiful princess: Letizia Ortiz, a journalist, and of the Spanish people.

Furthermore, *Big Brother* tries to provide these fictions with a form of credibility through the use of realistic effects. For instance, in the following passage, the host did the impossible by making Di "confess" that she loved Juanma. This was just after Di declared she "was more attracted to Juanma than to Conan," an American participant.

J: I have a theory that you have treated Juanma as your brother. You offended him as you can offend your brother, yes? Ah! But there is also another story here, eh!?

D: What kind of story?

J: We all have that question, Di. ...I don't know. ...it is like... like, like he... you withdrew from him, he withdrew from himself... then, when he had withdrawn from it all. ...you have gone on saying, "No, no, don't go forever." ...Is there something like that going on here?

D: Yes, because in the house... we were together... he was my support and when I was feeling bad, I was terrible to him, God!

J: You haven't found so many guys like him, have you? He is very special. ...

D: He is a person who has something!

J: Something and a lot of faults. ...You have said everything about him!! Is he really that bad?

D: No... but I adore him, the positive aspects win out...

J: The secret is that you fell in love inside the house, but you haven't dared to confess... just like Fresita.⁷⁸

The secret of the *Big Brother* house, as they put it, is that through practices of mediation — including the management of social divisions (popular representatives versus "game players") and of discourses — the cultural materials and sentiments are taken from participants who come from specific locations to elaborate stories that connect directly to and ultimately succeed in seducing the public. Cultural producers, in this case the bourgeoisie,

appropriate culture from the people to present stories that are recognizable to the people. However, those stories do something else as well: they put the chosen representatives, the winners, on a level of distinction and differentiation. In this way, representatives are elaborated in such a way that they come to embody dreams of upward social mobility and collective recognition for all Spaniards. The former neighbors and brothers become popular Spanish celebrities.

As winners, these representatives become “special” gentlemen and ladies who are “rewarded with a moment to enjoy the house alone.” The host waits for them on the TV stage and they have to hurry to reach her. Then they are driven from the house to the studio in a Mercedes Benz, or flown in a helicopter, or ride upon camels. Representatives are accompanied by their scriptwriters, while their friends and family cheer them on from the sidelines. They walk down the red carpet of Telecinco. Once onstage, they become central figures, stars, on which the cameras are focused. They “sit comfortably to chat” with the host, while they cannot help but look condescendingly at the “losers” that have been cast out and are now silenced by the host. Representatives are stylized. They may wear a T-shirt with the logo of Spain or a suit similar to that of the most popular and fashionable singer at the time, all varying according to the current discursive framework of style. In turn, the host asks them to let her “arrange” their suits or dresses. “Freaky” hats are thrown away by the host, and representatives’ hair is set free and removed from their eyes.⁷⁹ Representatives are thus differentiated, distinguished, and distanced from their cultures as the ones “who have won *Big Brother*,” becoming those “who have achieved what they wanted.” In turn, the representatives can now participate as celebrities in VIP reality shows or appear in magazines. The industry feeds on the working-class and popular cultures and gives them, in return, fantastical products: stylized agents who seemingly represent dreams of upward social mobility to others through the production of specular recognition, which is the only way through which the fraction of the bourgeoisie who are the cultural producers — the taste traders — can legitimize their monopoly on the means of cultural production.

The point I wish to emphasize here is that what is hidden in reality TV is the social relation between the working class and the bourgeoisie. Certainly, as Nick Couldry argues, economic modes of social control on labor (e.g., the “individualization” of “players”) are enacted in reality TV as “play,” as economic norms have always been reproduced in media productions.⁸⁰ However, the reproduction of those norms, which is visible, does not explain the cultural and ideological characters of the phenomenon. Who are the ones playing in reality television programs after all? With what are they playing?

From my position, it is crucial to examine the social relations between the working class and the bourgeoisie in the production, circulation, and consumption of television celebrities, as well as to consider the specific cultural politics of the media.

The phenomenon of reality television as a total social fact, in the words of Marcel Mauss, is understood best when the following process and relations have been examined.⁸¹ First, it is necessary to investigate the capitalist dynamic behind reality television, the mechanisms utilized to accelerate the production of “popular products,” and their regulatory templates (participants, contestants, authority, election). This capitalist process is the “economic basis” of reality television and a product of class relations. Second, it is essential to clarify the mediations between the reality industry and the working class, including popular cultures. This cultural production is the “popular discourse” of reality TV, including the circulation of “popular representatives.” Third, it is critical to uncover the ideological relations established by the reality industry between the economic basis and the popular discourse: that is, the use of fame as a cultural mechanism to legitimate the bourgeois control of the means of cultural production. It is the discovery of this relation that I believe explains the ideological character of reality television. Fourth, it is vital to explain the interconnections between the kinds of fame produced by the reality culture industry, the field of power (e.g., state institutions), and the transformation of civic culture. What determines the ideological and cultural significance of reality television as a total social fact is the bourgeoisie’s use of fame as a mechanism of cultural regulation of the working class and the national space.

Fame as a Mechanism of Cultural Regulation and the Spanish Nation-State

I got more in me and you can set it free
 I can catch the moon in my hands
 Don’t you know who I am?
 Remember my name (Fame)
 I’m gonna live forever
 I’m gonna learn how to fly (High)
 I feel it coming together
 People will see me and cry (Fame)
 I’m gonna make it to heaven
 Light up the sky like a flame (Fame)
 I’m gonna live forever
 Baby remember my name

Fame, performed by all singers in *Operación Triunfo* 2001

What, then, is fame? It is a mechanism of cultural regulation that permits the culture industry to appropriate the labor, characters, and meanings of the working class and of popular cultures because it legitimizes the constant renovation of “popular products” that the industry requires to reproduce its capitalist mode of the production of cultural commodities.⁸² It is the cultural mechanism that legitimizes the bourgeois processes of appropriation, differentiation, and stylization, which transform the cultural labor of the working class and popular cultures into the elaboration of cultural commodities through which the cultural labor of the working class and popular cultures, *opus proprium*, are sold to them by the culture industry as a spectacle, *opus alienum*. It is the historical product of the dominant pole in the field of cultural production; a field, moreover, in which what is condensed is the need of the bourgeoisie as cultural producers to reproduce. Reality TV is a product that stems from the culture industry’s economic predominance in the field of culture and which serves the culture industry to sustain that predominance. The belief in fame, then, is the ideological effect that the culture industry must sustain in order to reproduce itself. It is the ideological device that allows the industry to introduce regimes of cultural competition into its productions. This belief is dependent on the function of and belief in social distinction, the cultural propriety and property of the bourgeoisie.⁸³ Further, fame may appear in different forms, including success.

The problem with *Big Brother* everywhere for certain parts of the bourgeoisie is not that the show produces celebrities but that it broadcasts conflicts and intimate life to produce celebrities more quickly. This is profitable for producers, but for the bourgeoisie at large it remains a problem, since the widespread appearance of conflicts in the house, in the streets, or on the screen has always constituted a problem for the bourgeoisie. In Spain, then, it was a relief for the bourgeoisie when, in 2001, TVE1 began to broadcast the reality music contest *Operación Triunfo* (Fame Academy), created by Gestmusic Endemol. The show was a success, peaking sometimes above 80 percent of market share during prime time and selling up to 400,000 copies of CDs per week. In *Operación Triunfo*, sixteen participants live in a performing arts academy. Classes are aired on television and a weekly concert is broadcast every Sunday night.

Of course, the fact that *Operación Triunfo* does not broadcast personal conflicts that might arise between contestants had little to do with moralism but reflected the industry’s need to sustain the belief in preserving an image of the singers as special talents. *Operación Triunfo* is about young singers who, coming from different regions of Spain, now find themselves on the road to success. According to its producers, *Operación Triunfo* is an oppor-

tunity for singers to realize their dreams of success. In contrast to *Big Brother*, in *Operación Triunfo* a jury sentences performers to be either saved or rejected by the public, which casts its vote by telephone. In turn, the public tends to identify with performers who have been rejected by the tough member of the jury (one member of the jury is always a “tough” and “bad” guy), so the rationalization of the mechanisms that mediate people’s tastes through the production of social divisions, as I analyzed above, is reproduced here by other means. The public saves “those that need to be saved” and who represent their tastes and feelings.

Performers come from the working class and, on many occasions, from small towns in the Spanish provinces. They are temporary workers in the larger field of entertainment (e.g., casino singers, discotheque singers, flamenco singers). “We are humble people,” Hermosillo said while struggling to be selected for the show, accompanied by his family.⁸⁴ Managers look for “contestants able to communicate the feelings to the people,” and the belief in success is supported by the appearances of music celebrities at the academy and the Sunday gala.⁸⁵ Celebrities affirm that “there is only one train in life, and *triunfitos* — the singers — have to take it.”⁸⁶ In short, managers legitimize their exploitation of singers by controlling the means of producing legitimate music taste, that is, by controlling the means of stylization that open the doors to success.

In the casting calls, singers are asked if they would perform in a mini-skirt, dye their hair, lose weight, or sing in English. *Operación Triunfo* claims to reject singers based on the “quality” of their voices and “their problems of style.” Once in the academy, singers are not so much trained to sing but rather to “perform.” Teachers, usually trained in the stylish Spanish city of Barcelona, “arrange” the voices of the singers and teach them how to have a “presence” on the stage, to sing in English, to perform, and to “arrange” their bodies through makeup. There are also fitness and aerobic instructors, as well as a Zen relaxation instructor who seeks to introduce the *chavales* to the “integral health of happiness.”⁸⁷ On the stage, everything from the Spanish regions appears transformed: a *guapa* appears as a “venus,” a *guapo* performs as a “Latino,” love masquerades as “desire,” force is cloaked as “energy,” the performers’ friends and families become spectators, and *alegrías* become dance music.⁸⁸

On the whole, *Operación Triunfo* superseded *Big Brother* in that it formally articulated the cultural axes installed by the bourgeoisie to control Spanish social formation in more efficient ways. It interlaced music fame with songs of global distinction, educational training, “hard work,” and “positive” community values, including the support of Spanish families for the young singers. As a result, *Operación Triunfo* (youth success) became the

distinctive value that, circulating in the national space, could link and unify the nation-state into a common dream of upward social mobility and collective recognition; a value, moreover, whereby a “middle-class” nation could attain global recognition.

The bourgeoisie at large praised the show. Mayors from Spanish cities recognized talented singers with “gold medals.” The conservative Popular Party, then in power, claimed that *Operación Triunfo* “defended the same values of the party,” celebrated the youths’ efforts to “reach their dreams,” affirmed that the show could take young people away from alcohol and drugs, and compared the exigencies of *Operación Triunfo* to new state regulations implemented in order to “validate” qualifications in the field of education.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the show created a belief in fame through which economic norms could be socialized. For example, in the attempt to instill the values of business acumen in teenagers, the economic minister portrayed the kids of *Operación Triunfo* “as examples of entrepreneurial spirit.”⁹⁰ As a result, *Operación Triunfo* fully achieved what *Big Brother* only partially accomplished: to become an instance and instrument of cultural representation and regulation for the Spanish nation.

For the nation, the kids of *Operación Triunfo* represented the ideal realization of New Spain, a Spain that would go on to compete globally for nation-state distinction. For example, in 2002, when the mortgage interest rates were still at 2 percent and the cultural climate was positive, the kids of *Operación Triunfo* embodied the dreams of the nation-state in recordings and broadcasts, performing at Real Madrid’s football stadium the song “Vivimos la Selección.”⁹¹ This song was the Spanish Football Association’s anthem for the 2002 World Cup, in which all of the “illusions,” “emotions,” and “dreams” of a Spanish society that sought “to be number one” were put on display.

Later, the most charismatic voice of *Operación Triunfo I*, Rosa de España, accompanied by her former classmates, represented Spain in the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest in Tallin, Estonia. In the year of the euro, Rosa from Las Alpujarras sang the song “Europe’s Living a Celebration,” while the images of her transformation from a community singer to a slender national pop star were shown on screens that appeared behind her on the stage.⁹²

All together we are going to sing
“Europe’s Living a Celebration”
Our dream became truth
Now time has changed us
And it will be for forever.⁹³

Conclusion

I want to think I can keep on singing with or without them. I have my voice, and this is what matters.

Braveheart, from Hope Country,
Winner of *Operación Triunfo*

Concealed in reality television productions is the social relation between the working class and the bourgeoisie. The construction of the spectacle and of fame by the television industry centered in Madrid (usually interlinked with production companies from Barcelona) allows it to appropriate and exploit culture and labor, especially from the Spanish provinces. The industry uses fame as a mechanism of cultural regulation to legitimize the constant renovation of “popular products” the industry requires to reproduce its cultural commodities. First, the reality television industry appropriates and mediates labor and people’s culture, integrating the participation of people in the rationalization of its production of “popular representatives.” Next, through the work of stylization, the industry elevates reality television participants to a level of differentiation and distinction. In this way, the cultural labor, meanings, and experiences of the working-class and popular cultures, *opus proprium*, appear to them as a spectacle for everyday consumption, *opus alienum*. Reality celebrities become the national representatives of every neighbor, sister, or friend in Spain. They incarnate dreams of upward social mobility as well as of personal and collective recognition. They become living myths that indeed have represented the national state in global competitions for nation-state prestige.

The television industry’s promotion of celebrity distinction interacts with material shifts in the Spanish social structure and with the bourgeois discourse of a New Spain of prosperity for all Spaniards: if every neighbor can become a celebrity on reality television, all Spaniards can benefit from economic modernization in New Spain. This discourse is useful for the bourgeoisie in order to control the new working-class generations because it interpellates Spaniards as simple and straightforward citizens and consumers who are realizing their dreams, while on the ground Spaniards are more dependent on state power and on capital than in the past; this is a dependency, moreover, rendered all the more apparent by the expansion of mortgage indebtedness and by the overall stagnation of wages.⁹⁴ Whereas the discourse of a New Spain of prosperity constitutes a class project for the bourgeoisie, which remains able to articulate different ideologies, reality television is a cultural and ideological phenomenon that disseminates the

discourse of a New Spain according to the logic of the media field. This phenomenon — along with other forms of cultural productions — allows the dominant class to utilize success, the requisite of personal and national distinction, as a mechanism of cultural regulation. Taking advantage of the prestige of media fame, dominant agents circulate social norms of national integration and competition that permit the bourgeoisie to attempt to control the working class and organize the cultural sense of Spain.

Notes

¹ “The Second Transition: A Survey of Spain,” *The Economist*, 26 June 2004, 1–18.

² By mediation I mean the cultural process conducted by the culture industry, which includes not only the production, circulation, and consumption of cultural commodities but also the appropriation of cultural materials and their transformation, as well as practices of transaction, negotiation, and contestation within the social formation and among various social agents (e.g., media managers, specialists, cultural intermediaries, cultural workers, citizens). On mediation, for example, see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Jesús Martín-Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations* (London: Sage Publications, 1993); Rosalía Winocur, *Ciudadanos Mediáticos: La Construcción de lo Público en la Radio* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2002).

³ Richard Maxwell, *Spectacle of Democracy: Spanish Television, Nationalism, and Political Transition* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994) 5.

⁴ Maxwell, *Spectacle*. Participating in FORTA are regional corporations from the Basque Country, Catalonia, Andalusia, Galicia, Valencia, Madrid, and Murcia. In 2006 five new autonomous regional channels were approved: Canal Extremadura, IB3 (TV Balear), TV del Principado de Asturias, Aragón Televisión, and 7 Región de Murcia.

⁵ Maxwell, *Spectacle* 22.

⁶ Maxwell, *Spectacle* 24.

⁷ Corporación Multimedia, <<http://www.multimedia.es>>.

⁸ Opening gala of Telecinco and Telecinco advertisement, 1990.

⁹ Interview with Maja, Sevilla, February 2005.

¹⁰ Interview with Kiko, Sevilla, February 2005.

¹¹ In the early 1990s *telenovelas* were a success in Spain and were broadcast by the regional networks.

¹² Opening gala of Telecinco, 1990.

¹³ Magazines and talk shows occupy 26 percent of the broadcasting time of the

channel. Corporación Multimedia,

<http://www.corporacionmultimedia.es/menu_principal.html?>.

¹⁴ Hugh O'Donnell, “Media Pleasures: Reading the Telenovela,” in *Contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies*, ed. Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan-Tomasunas (London: Arnold, 2000) 302.

¹⁵ For other accounts of the expansion of the culture of the spectacle into other cultural registers during the 1980s and 1990s, see the collection of essays in Eduardo Subirats, ed., *Intransiciones* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2002). I am aware of the problems in using the category of “popular culture.” However, in certain social spaces such as Spain, the category permits us to grasp cultural matrices that underlie the everyday. Take, for example, the culture of flamenco or the religious processions in Andalucía. From my perspective, popular cultures are characterized not only by their positions of inequality within the social structure but also by their strong capacity to re-elaborate their conditions of existence. The category grasps a social area of conflict and negotiation, intermixed with the class structure. For a similar position in Spain, see Isidoro Moreno, *La Globalización y Andalucía: Entre El Mercado y La Identidad* (Sevilla: Mergablum, 2002).

¹⁶ Felipe González's government implemented new labor legislation that introduced temporary labor contracts, reduced payroll taxes, and facilitated the lay-off of workers by firms. Labor reforms were approved in 1984 and 1992–94, and complemented by José María Aznar's government (1996–2004) in 1997. Aznar's labor reforms focused on facilitating the laid-off workers by firms. See Gemma García, “Mercado De Trabajo: El Problema Del Paro,” *España, Economía: Ante El Siglo XXI*, ed. José Luis García Delgado (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1999) 327–53.

¹⁷ *World Economic Outlook*, International Monetary Fund, <<http://www.imf.org>>.

¹⁸ Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (INE), <<http://www.ine.es/>>.

¹⁹ Juan R. Cuadrado Roma, “Sector Servicios: Una Visión De Conjunto,” *España, Economía: Ante El Siglo XXI*, ed. José Luis García Delgado (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1999) 179.

²⁰ “El trabajador temporal es joven y del sur,” *El País*, 1 May 2005, 58.

²¹ Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (INE), <<http://www.ine.es/>>.

²² “La venta de coches bate un récord en 2001,” *El Mundo*, 9 January 2002.

²³ Manuel Sánchez Pérez, “Distribución del consumo de electrodomésticos en España,” *Distribución y Consumo* Nro. 67, February 2003, <<http://www.mercasa.es/>>.

²⁴ My analysis focuses on the cultural, political, and economic cycle from 1995 to 2007. Even before the current crisis, Spain was predicted to fall into a slump, with the IMF predicting a GDP growth of just 1.2 percent for 2009. “El único gran recorte de las previsiones de crecimiento del FMI para 2009 es el de España,” *El Mundo*, 17 July 2008.

²⁵ Media and political discourse effaced the term “working class.” On this question, see the comments of Vicenç Navarro, “¿Existe la Clase Trabajadora?” *El Periódico de Catalunya*, 28 October 2001.

²⁶ For example, minimum wage was set at €512 in 2005. Moreover, contemporary Spain has the lowest ratio of minimum to median wages in OECD countries: 30 percent in 2002. OECD, *OECD Employment Outlook* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007) 86. According to Vicenç Navarro, contemporary economic growth in Spain has been based on the exploitation of low-cost labor rather than on the rise of productivity. See Navarro, *Bienestar Insuficiente, Democracia Incompleta: Sobre Lo Que No Se Habla En Nuestro País* (Madrid: Anagrama, 2002).

²⁷ My interpretation is based on an analysis of Don Juan Carlos Christmas’s discourses during the last decade and of everyday discourses in television news.

²⁸ “Casi el 60% de los asalariados españoles son ‘mileurista,’” *El País*, 9 October 2007.

²⁹ *Mileuristas* designates, in economic and cultural terms, the generation of Spaniards born between 1965 and 1985.

³⁰ For example, the average national consumption of television rose from 183 minutes in 1990 to 223 minutes in 2007. Corporación Multimedia <<http://www.corporacionaudiovisual.es>>.

³¹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) 113.

³² Enrique Bustamante and J. M. Alvarez Monzoncillo, “España: La Producción Audiovisual En El Umbral Digital,” *ZER Revista de Estudios de Comunicación*, no. 7 (1999), <<http://www.ehu.es/zet/>>.

³³ “Telecinco Tops European Rivals,” *Daily Variety*, 8 March 2001.

³⁴ “Telecinco revalida su liderazgo de audiencia gracias a ‘Gran Hermano,’” *El País*, 2 August 2000. As of 2008 *Big Brother* is still being aired, with an average market share of 25–30 percent.

³⁵ Telecinco, <<http://www.telecinco.es/granhermano/>>.

³⁶ See, for example, Colin Sparks, “Reality TV: The Big Brother Phenomenon,” *International Socialism: A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Theory*, no. 114 (2007), <<http://www.isj.org.uk/>>, and Chad Raphael, “Political Economy of Reality TV,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 41 (1997), <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/>>. All the authors mentioned in this essay in connection with reality TV have analyzed the phenomenon in the United Kingdom and the United States.

³⁷ For example, according to Telecinco’s CEO, *Big Brother* “costs 8 million euro, but if we take into account that it is broadcasted six days a week, several times a day, its cost per minute is below the biggest of television productions.” “‘Gran Hermano’ cuesta 1.380 millones: Normal, para un programa excepcional,” *El País*, 10 May

2000, 40.

³⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1991) 317–75.

³⁹ For example: fewer television sets and filming locations, lower production costs, less equipment, digital technology, new filming and recording techniques, and less imports of films and television serials.

⁴⁰ In reality television, workers produce value twenty-four hours a day, a form of production that intensifies in particular moments.

⁴¹ In other words, as Alex Callinicos observes on capitalist crises, the case of reality television shows that it is a mistake to see the economy’s tendency to increase productivity by relying to an ever greater extent on fixed capital to direct labor as leading inexorably to a fall in the rate of profit. See Callinicos, “Capitalism, Competition, and Profits: A Critique of Robert Brenner’s Theory of Crisis,” *Historical Materialism* 4:1 (1999): 13.

⁴² According to a study by Ramón Reig, ninety people work on the Spanish version of *Big Brother*. Reig, ed., “Mensaje y Audiencias: El Programa Gran Hermano, El Sueño De Orwell,” *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, no. 43 (2001), <<http://www.ull.es/publicaciones/latina/>>.

⁴³ “El ‘Gran Hermano’ francés desata la polémica por los contratos abusivos a sus participantes,” *El País*, 7 May 2001.

⁴⁴ The television production company Zeppelin TV is owned by Endemol. Endemol, moreover, was formerly owned by Telefonica International. Endemol is now owned by a consortium consisting of Goldman Sachs Capital Partners, Mediaset Group, and Cyte Group. <<http://www.endemol.com>>.

⁴⁵ For other accounts of economic exploitation in reality TV, see Mike Wayne, “Surveillance and Class in Big Brother,” *Radical Philosophy*, no. 117 (2003): 34–42; Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004); Sparks, “Reality TV.”

⁴⁶ “In Reality, TV Contestants Turn Up Losers,” *International Herald Tribune*, 11 May 2008.

⁴⁷ Online commentary provided by “Elia” in “Sin fama no eres nada,” *El País*, 20 April 2008.

⁴⁸ Annette Hill and Gareth Palmer, “Editorial: Big Brother,” *Television & New Media* 3:3 (2002): 252.

⁴⁹ Andrejevic, *Reality TV* 218; John Corner, foreword to *Big Brother International: Formats, Critics & Publics*, ed. Ernest Mathijs and Janet Jones (London: Wallflower Press, 2004) xii–xvii; Wayne, “Surveillance and Class in Big Brother” 37. Despite his emphasis on mediation, for Wayne the “world of *Big Brother* is very similar in many ways to the world of work: along with the instrumental calculation of performing for colleagues and superiors, there is the tension between cooperation

and competition, the rules and conditions already imposed, the futile tasks, and the boredom” (40).

⁵⁰ See Martín-Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony*, and Néstor García Canclini, “Popular, Popularidad: De la Representación Política a la Teatral,” in *Culturas Híbridas: Estrategias Para Entrar y Salir de la Modernidad* (Avellaneda: Paidós, 2001) 237–58.

⁵¹ On the acceleration of contemporary capitalism, see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

⁵² For different perspectives on surveillance, see, for example, Gareth Palmer, “Big Brother: An Experiment in Governance,” *Television & New Media* 3:3 (2002): 295–310; Wayne, “Surveillance and Class in Big Brother”; Andrejevic, *Reality TV*.

⁵³ Interview with Machaquito, Sevilla, February 2005. I conducted research interviews in Sevilla with old workers, students entering the labor market, housewives, and TV professionals. The research was based on a “snowball” sample. People interviewed were from different Spanish regions and half of them were women.

⁵⁴ I use fictional names for all reality TV participants mentioned in this essay.

⁵⁵ Interviews with Maja and Chiquita, Sevilla, February 2005.

⁵⁶ David Civera, *Perdónname*, my translation.

⁵⁷ Interview with Lauri, Sevilla, February 2005.

⁵⁸ Created in the nineteenth century, *ferias* were originally trade fairs. Later they became festive social gatherings in which the entire population of a given city participates.

⁵⁹ Interview with Federico, Sevilla, February 2005.

⁶⁰ Telecinco, May 2008, <<http://www.telecinco.es/granhermano/detail/detail261.shtml>>.

⁶¹ The participants often utter these kinds of phrases to intervene in conflicts in the show. However, the show appropriates and commodifies them as colorful “comic” and “mythic” expressions without substance. For example, Buenillo’s phrase originally meant that somebody was unjustly keeping him from doing what he wanted and needed to do. Enganche’s phrase was a quip directed to a cocky and lazy participant. *Chulo* also means pimp and the word, as in Enganche’s phrase, is used by popular sectors against those who want to take advantage of everything without doing any kind of work: “for *chulo chulo* . . . my penis.” However, the show commodified Enganche’s *gracia* as a “vulgar” one. Finally, Canaria’s comment was aimed at making Oski and others realize that the conflicts in the house were a consequence of the television contest and not a consequence of interpersonal conflicts among participants.

⁶² Group discussion with Lalo, Kiko, and Federico, Sevilla, February 2005.

⁶³ A friendly name used to call male persons from Cádiz.

⁶⁴ Interview with Lalo, Sevilla, February 2005. *Chiringotas* are Cádiz carnival performances.

⁶⁵ “¡Pisha, pisha, pisha! ¡Eres el más grande!” *El País*, 22 July 2000.

⁶⁶ “El Glamour de Ismael,” *El País*, 22 July 2000.

⁶⁷ During the 2006 World Cup, the popular football commentator Andrés Montes also drew an analogy to *Big Brother*, claiming that football commentators lived locked-up in the stadium and overworked without actually enjoying the football matches.

⁶⁸ Interview with Lista, Sevilla, February 2008.

⁶⁹ Interview with Kiko, Sevilla, February 2005.

⁷⁰ In my research of the 2007 *Big Brother* shows in Argentina I arrived at similar conclusions on the international format of the show.

⁷¹ Sociological socio-professional categories do not coincide with the show’s classifications. For example, *Big Brother* portrays self-employed service owners as “businessmen.”

⁷² This was true of Rubi, a financial worker who in *Big Brother VI* was accused of trying to “control the nominations” with “his group of the suite.”

⁷³ *Big Brother V* and *VI*.

⁷⁴ *Big Brother VI*.

⁷⁵ *Big Brother VI*.

⁷⁶ Don Quijote, the character of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra’s *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, is a symbol of Spanish national identity. In the first part of the novel, Don Quijote, a knight-errant, fights with traders.

⁷⁷ In *Big Brother VI* the Spanish government agreed with Telecinco to promote the European Union constitution in the show. According to the press, government sources stated that “anything that helps to promote the constitution amongst the Spaniards is a good thing”; “Gran Hermano servirá para divulgar las bases de la Constitución Europea,” *El Mundo*, 26 November 2004.

⁷⁸ *Big Brother VI*.

⁷⁹ See, for example, the final gala of *Big Brother VIII*.

⁸⁰ Nick Couldry, “Reality TV, or the Secret Theater of Neoliberalism,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 30:1 (2008): 3–13.

⁸¹ Marcel Mauss, *Sociología y Antropología* (Madrid: Tecnos, 1971).

⁸² This mechanism of cultural regulation includes professional media practices, discourses, and formal proceedings.

⁸³ On the reproduction of class relations in consumption, see, for example, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002).

⁸⁴ *Operación Triunfo VI*.

⁸⁵ *Operación Triunfo I* and *VI*.

⁸⁶ *Operación Triunfo VI* and <<http://www.telecinco.es/operaciontriunfo/>>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ A *guapa* is a beautiful woman, a *guapo* a handsome man. *Alegrías* is a festive type of flamenco music. Certainly, the process of appropriation of popular culture is not a new phenomenon. For a historical and anthropological study of the commercialization and political disputes around flamenco music, see William Washabaugh, *Flamenco: Passion, Politics and Popular Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 1996). For other historical perspectives on the appropriation and transformation of popular culture into “mass culture” as a step in the process of hegemonic nation building, see, for example, Robin D. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920–1940* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1997) and Matt Karush, “National Identity in the Sport Pages: Football and the Mass Media in 1920s Buenos Aires,” *The Americas* 60:1 (2003): 11–32.

⁸⁹ “Operación Triunfo impulsa los mismos valores que el PP,” *El Mundo*, 12 February 2002.

⁹⁰ “Cómo ser un espíritu emprendedor según el ‘profesor’ Rato,” *El Mundo*, 25 September 2003.

⁹¹ Real Madrid is the most important football club in Spain along with FC Barcelona. The title of the song can be translated as, “We Live the National Team.”

⁹² The year 2002 was an optimistic one for the European Union, of which Spain is a member. On 1 January, the new community currency, the euro, introduced to financial markets in 1999, was launched as physical coins and banknotes.

⁹³ “Europe’s Living a Celebration” (title in English in the original), my translation.

⁹⁴ According to the Asociación Hipotecaria Española (Spanish Mortgage Association), while in 1990 the average period of payment of a mortgage was twelve years, in 2004 it was twenty-four years. Moreover, half of workers’ wages is destined to pay off mortgage. “Condenados a la hipoteca perpetua,” *El País*, Domingo, 20 March 2005, 6. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the average annual growth rate of real average wages in Spain from 1995 to 2005 was -0.4 percent. OECD, *OECD Employment Outlook*.

"Only in Exceptional Cases": The Steel Workers Organizing Committee Remembers the Homestead Strike

Joel Woller

In *Capital*, Marx writes that

The organization of the capitalist process of production, once it is fully developed, breaks down all resistance. ... The silent compulsion of economic relations sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker. Direct extra-economic force is still of course used, but only in exceptional cases.¹

This essay is about one of these exceptional cases, the Homestead Lockout and Strike of 1892. This essay is about the significance of extra-economic compulsion and the memory of it — in particular, the collective public memory of employer and state violence — in working class culture, social movements, and politics. Accepting the premise that the hegemonic bloc must from time to time resort to arms in order to enforce the economic laws of capital accumulation, via a narrative of the labor movement's commemoration of one such event I will suggest that public collective memory of these exceptional moments of overt violence can play a role in the maintenance, reconstitution, or *overthrow* of a hegemonic regime.

This paper is drawn from my dissertation in progress, tentatively titled *Labor's Alamo: The Homestead Strike in Cultural Memory*. Research for this essay was supported in part by a Spring 2007 Carlow University Scholarship Time Grant. Participants in the 2007 Summer Institute of the Marxist Literary Group in Chicago heard and responded to portions of this paper, as did participants in the Working-Class Studies Association conference in St. Paul, Minnesota earlier that summer. Thanks also to Patricia Dunmire and Jeffrey Williams, who read drafts of this essay.

The Homestead Lockout and Strike of 1892 is among the most significant and well-remembered labor actions in history. Despite the extraordinary support of the local community and some solidarity from the labor movement at large, in Homestead the power of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers (also known as “the Amalgamated”) was destroyed by Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, and the Pennsylvania militia, thus transforming a union town into a company-controlled town. This dramatic course of events in 1892 showed that even the mightiest craft union could be smashed by the combined power of a determined employer and a compliant state. The exceptional case of Homestead, moreover, exposed weaknesses in the anarchist movement of the nineteenth century and signaled the decline of the ideology of labor republicanism, opening the door for the emergence of the pure and simple business unionism of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the social movement industrial syndicalism of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and the political activities of the Socialist Party.²

Of particular importance here is the role the Strike has played in working class activist culture. At several moments — for instance, during the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the 1930s and early 1940s, and again during the fight against the shutdowns in the 1970s and 1980s — collective public memory of the Homestead Strike of 1892 has informed and motivated labor activism. One of these moments, the Great Depression, is the focus of this essay, which intends to set the stage for discussion of why labor’s great defeat has loomed so large in working class cultural memory.

Damming Memory

For over four decades following the Homestead Strike, long after Carnegie’s mill became part of “The Corporation,” as US Steel was known, the Homestead works remained an open shop. Steelworker and community morale reflected what organizer William Foster called “a generation of defeat.” Foster dated the history of Homestead in terms of the Amalgamated Union’s victory during the strike of 1889 and the decline that followed its defeat in 1892. As he put it in 1919, “Official pessimism, bred of thirty years of trade-union failure in the steel industry, hung like a mill-stone about the neck of the movement in all its stages.”³

But what sustained the pessimism observed by Foster? Along with the sheer magnitude of the task of organizing such a large enterprise, company surveillance and punishment also took its toll on workers’ ability to organize the Homestead works. The actual extent of the Corporation’s surveillance of — and reprisals against — its union-minded employees is still not known for certain, as the files remain closed. However, even a very skeptical observer

of the effectiveness of the Corporation’s efforts to control its workforce admits that, in the period 1896-1910 alone, US Steel fired hundreds of workers in its six mills as a result of intelligence gathered from its informers.⁴

Corporate espionage had a discernible subversive effect on the conditions for solidarity within the working-class community of Homestead, as visitors reported a palpable sense of intimidation and fear in the decades following the 1892 strike. Charles Spahr, who spent several weeks in Homestead in 1900, found that, “Some of them men were afraid to talk; even the Catholic priest — to whose class I am accustomed to go for fair statements of the relations of men to their employers — was unwilling to make any statement.”⁵ In the Pittsburgh Survey, sociologists John Fitch and Margaret Byington made similar observations. “I doubt whether you could find a more suspicious body of men than the employees of the United States Steel Corporation. They are suspicious of one another, of their neighbors, and of their friends,” stated Fitch in 1910.⁶ Byington likewise reported that “One phrase current in town is: ‘If you want to talk in Homestead, you talk to yourself.’”⁷

Thus, public demonstrations of memories of the events of 1892 were rare in Homestead in the decades following the Strike. Memory of the extra-economic force deployed in the “special case” of 1892, when coupled with the ongoing extra-economic force made possible by the employer’s victory in 1892, tended to relegate memories of the Strike to a private, rather than public, realm. That is, sustained corporate repression reinforced depressing memories of the workers’ defeat in 1892 and isolated those memories from the public realm, where they might be transformed into an impetus for hopeful collective action.

Opening the Floodgates

The repressive atmosphere in Homestead, which was maintained by local government as well as by The Corporation, prevailed until the 1930s. Homestead’s chief executive from 1922-1938, Republican burgess John Cavanaugh, epitomized the collaboration between the party machine and US Steel. Eventually indicted for corruption, Cavanaugh, a coroner and police officer, was by the summer of 1933 preoccupied with the Steel and Metal Workers International Union (SMWIU). He accurately described the SMWIU as

a widespread communistic movement that has been gaining momentum for months past. I have known every move they have been

making lately, and I have been able to break up the organization in Homestead, but other districts are not so fortunate.⁸

In line with this policy, when Secretary of Labor Francis Perkins visited Homestead in July of 1933, Cavanaugh prevented her from meeting in Frick Park with those he called “undesirable reds.” Refusing to yield to the man she would soon dub “the nervous burgess,” Perkins, representing the New Deal Democratic administration of Franklin Roosevelt, met with 20 or 30 men at the Post Office. “I was an officer of the federal government and I must have some rights there” she later recalled.⁹ During the non-union era, free speech in Homestead could apparently be exercised only on Federal property, and only by Federal officials.

Although Perkins had successfully challenged the atmosphere of repression in Homestead, the floodgates of collective public memory did not open until the day between US Independence Day and the 44th anniversary of the Battle with the Pinkertons — Sunday, July 5, 1936. Declared “Steel Workers’ Independence Day” by the Steel Workers’ Organizing Committee (SWOC), this event — a project established by the CIO less than a month earlier — united a commemoration of the Homestead Strike with the public inauguration of SWOC’s campaign to organize steelworkers in Homestead. Drawn by an appeal to demonstrate that had been initially issued by Steve Bordich, a Homestead steelworker, as many as four thousand gathered at the 17th Street playground. Under the watchful eye of the Homestead police and an assistant general superintendent of the Homestead works, the crowd listened with excitement to speeches by young maverick judge Michael Musmanno and Lieutenant Governor Kennedy, a New Deal Democrat. “We are going to see that the workers are granted their rights under the Constitution,” Kennedy announced; “The captains of steel can’t get away with the stuff they got away with before.”¹⁰

Next came music: as described by Edward Levinson, a miners’ band from Morgantown, Pennsylvania played “first a dirge for the Homestead martyrs, then strident marching airs.”¹¹ Charles Sharbo, steelworker and president of an Amalgamated Association lodge, then concluded the meeting by reading the “Steel Workers’ Declaration of Independence.” This statement, drafted by the Pittsburgh union organizer Tom Shane, stands in a tradition which identifies — or at least associates — the struggle for workers’ rights with patriotism.

We steel workers do today solemnly publish and declare our independence. We say to the world: “We are Americans.” We shall

exercise our inalienable right to organize into a great industrial union, banded together with all our fellow steel workers.¹²

Though conservative to the extent that class issues are subsumed by questions of nationality (and also male-centered in its emphasis on wage-workers rather than on working-class communities), this tradition of equating labor rights with “Americanism” nevertheless advances radical propositions. “Today we find the political liberty for which our forefathers fought is made meaningless by economic inequality. ... The lords of steel try to rule over us as did the royalists against whom our forefathers rebelled,” announced Sharbo on behalf of the SWOC. Locally and in print, this tradition had in the past already been appealed to repeatedly with respect to the Homestead Strike.¹³ Now, SWOC proclaimed, “Together with our union brothers in other industries, we shall abolish industrial despotism. We shall make real the dreams of the pioneers who pictured America as a land where all might live in comfort and happiness.”¹⁴

Much in the manner of the 1848 Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Convention’s “Declaration of Sentiments,” the “Steel Workers’ Declaration of Independence” makes its case for revolution by modeling itself on the form of the Second Continental Congress’ Declaration of 1776.¹⁵ Relying on the familiarity with and cultural standing of the Declaration of Independence in American collective memory, the steelworkers’ grievances against the lords of steel echo the colonists’ grievances against King George III:

They have interfered in every way with our right to organize in independent unions, discharging many who have joined them.

They have set up company unions, forcing employees to vote in their so-called elections.

They have sent among us swarms of stool pigeons ... even in our homes.

They have kept among us armies of company gunmen, with stores of machine guns, gas bombs, and other weapons of warfare.¹⁶

As with the colonists’ Declaration of Independence, which repeatedly implicates the King via its use of the pronoun “He,” the Steelworkers’ Declaration of 1936 employs a repetition of the pronoun “they” to create a monotonous, oppressive effect, while clearly naming the source of injustice, the “lords of steel.” The conclusion of the steelworkers’ resolution is like-

wise parallel in form and content to that of the “founding fathers” revolutionary Declaration of 1776: “In support of this declaration we mutually pledge to each other our steadfast purpose as union men, our honor, and our very lives.”¹⁷ By so boldly and clearly claiming the legacy of the revolutionary founders of the nation, SWOC calls not just for patriotism or Americanism, but also for a new American Revolution.

The grievances articulated in the Steelworkers’ Declaration of Independence were, if anything, understated. On October 5, 1933, near the company town of Aliquippa, Pennsylvania (just upriver from Pittsburgh on the Ohio), a private army in the service of Jones and Laughlin Steel had shot 21 men, killing one. This was not an isolated incident: within a year of Steel Workers Independence Day, during a 1937 Memorial Day demonstration in Chicago, ten Republic Steel strikers were fatally shot in the back, and many more wounded. But if the Steelworkers’ 1936 Declaration proved prophetic, its references to violence and sacrifice grappled at the same time with memories of 1892.

This memory of 1892 became explicit at the conclusion of SWOC rally. After the Steelworkers’ Declaration had been promulgated, the crowd marched up the hill to the Franklin Cemetery in Munhall. Steelworker Emmet Patrick Cush, a Communist and president of the SMWIU, led the way. Cush remembered where six of the seven strikers who had been shot dead nearly 44 years earlier were interred — five in unmarked graves. As he led the crowd to each grave, Cush, whose father, Dennis, had served on the Amalgamated’s Advisory Committee during the Strike of 1892, recalled particulars about the lives of the martyrs: “Silas Wain was a member of the strike committee. He had a wife and two young children. They went away after he was killed and nobody ever heard of them again.”¹⁸ After locating the burial sites, the crowd solemnly memorialized each of them by laying flowers at the burial places; the five unmarked graves were given headstones. SWOC organizer Patrick Fagan, president of District 5 of the UMW and son of an 1892 strike leader, delivered the eulogies for Peter Fares, John Morris, Joseph Sotak, Henry Striegel, Silas Wain, and William Foy.¹⁹

“William Foy,” said Fagan, “we have come to renew the struggle for which you gave your life.”²⁰ “Let the blood of those labor pioneers who were massacred here be the seed of this new organization in 1937,” he concluded, “And may the souls of the martyrs rest in peace.”²¹ Here the slain strikers are represented as something other than, or more than, noble victims: they are *martyrs*, powerful, sanctified figures capable of likewise blessing and empowering the activities of those who act in their name.

The Depression period was by no means the first time that the 1892 strike had been commemorated in public, or had been voiced in connection

with contemporary labor activism. Mother Jones and William Foster, for instance, had appealed to memories of 1892 in their comments on the 1919 Steel Strike.²² During the 1930s, however, there is something different about the ways in which collective memory of the Homestead Strike, to borrow Walter Benjamin’s striking phrase, “flashes up in moment of danger.”²³ Three features distinguish the memories of 1892, which found public expression during the early years of the CIO, from earlier public articulations of the meaning of the Homestead Strike.

First, the 1936 demonstration was part of a mass movement rooted in part in memories of 1892. The extent and significance of steelworker self-activity in the 1930s and early 1940s must not be underestimated. The CIO was certainly a top-down organization, and Homestead workers were initially mistrustful of Lewis’ leadership after the enthusiastic July 1936 demonstration, even more so than in other steel towns; their guarded, wary attitude can be attributed in part to bitter memories of 1892.²⁴ But steelworkers, in Homestead and elsewhere, by no means stood by passively awaiting their saviors. Grassroots steelworker union organizing preceded the CIO drives; indeed, it was the success of local steelworker organizing that catalyzed the initiatives headed by Lewis. Despite inept and lethargic leadership, the Amalgamated underwent a resurgence, the first of its new lodges being founded in Homestead on June 16, 1933.²⁵ The thousand or so steelworkers and their allies who constituted the new organization chose an auspicious name for it: The Spirit of ’92 Lodge.²⁶

The name of the new lodge was of course chosen to memorialize the Amalgamated’s moment of greatest militancy. Moreover, the founders of the new lodge chose to identify with their union’s great defeat. They might have chosen to remind themselves that in the past they had won victories as well as endured losses; they might have named themselves after the militant and successful strike of 1889, for example, in order to rally optimism for their cause. Instead, they chose to identify with the *mission* of their ancestors rather than with their legacy, to cast themselves as *redeemers* of the sacrifices made by martyrs in the past rather than as the successors of yesterday’s heroes. Like the participants in the July 5, 1936 SWOC demonstration in Homestead, the founders of the Spirit of ’92 Lodge of the Amalgamated chose in 1933 to emphasize the bitter unfinished business left by past struggles rather than to recollect past glory.

A second feature which distinguishes the 1936 SWOC rally from previous public representations of the Homestead Strike is this: the 1936 rally and memorial took place amid a widespread explosion of artistic representation of the events of 1892. In 1933, the famous Mexican muralist Diego Rivera had painted a fresco entitled *Portrait of America* for the New Workers

School in New York. One panel, *Labor Fights During the '90s*, featured imagery of the Homestead and Pullman Strikes.²⁷ Also during the period of the rise of the CIO, versions of John Kelly's song "A Fight for Home and Honor" (also known as "The Homestead Strike") were republished in three separate anthologies, *Lost Chords* (1942), *Coal Dust on the Fiddle* (1943), and *Pennsylvania Songs and Legends* (1947). The first verse spells out the issues so urgently remembered in the 1930s:

We are asking one another as we pass the time of day,
Why men must have recourse to arms to get their proper pay;
And why the labor unions now must not be recognized,
While the actions of a syndicate must not be criticized.
The trouble down at Homestead was brought about this way,
When a grasping corporation had the audacity to say;
You must all renounce your unions and forswear your liberty,
And we'll promise you a chance to live and die in slavery.

Later performed and recorded by Pete Seeger, the song had originally been copyrighted on July 16, 1892 by a Chicago steelworker turned minstrel who billed himself as "The Rolling Mill Man."²⁸

The most compelling and influential artistic recollection of the Homestead Strike during the era is Thomas Bell's epic *Out of this Furnace*, published in 1941. Based on the experiences of his own family, the Belaceks, this novel portrays the lives of three generations of Slovak immigrants and Slovak-Americans in the "steel valley" of the Monongahela River. Mainly set in Braddock, Bell's home town, *Out of this Furnace* also contains scenes set in Homestead — including a detailed account of the 1892 strike. Indeed, the Homestead Strike figures prominently in the narrative logic of the novel, which identifies the emergence of the CIO, the Americanization of the immigrant community, and the regeneration of America via a new revolution. Bell exaggerates the distance immigrants kept from the issues of 1892: his protagonist in the first section of the novel, the Slavic immigrant Kracha, sleeps through the battle of July 6, though in reality Slavic Homestead was solidly behind the union during the first months of the strike. Two generations later, his grandson Dobie becomes a union official in the Steelworkers', representing the extent to which Kracha's descendants have been accepted into both union culture and American culture — and at the same time, the extent to which they are actively transforming what unions and America mean. By misleadingly casting Kracha as uninvolved in the union and his grandson Dobie as the complete opposite, Bell underscores the very real changes which have taken place in Homestead between 1892 and

1941.²⁹

In the work of Rivera, Kelly, and Bell, fleeting, furtive memories of Homestead Strike were finally, during this 1933-43 period, becoming part of public culture; in art, literature, and published music, the memories of 1892 were at last being materialized, becoming tangible and communicable. The kind of remembrance of 1892 that was "flashing up" on the streets of Homestead on July 5, 1936 was happening in the arts as well.

The third distinctive aspect of the 1936 demonstration was that the working class community of Homestead chose the period of the rise of the CIO to more or less permanently alter its own built environment. The publishers of Arthur Burgoyne's 1893 account of the strike, Rawsthorne Engraving and Publishing, dedicated 5% of the book's profits toward a monument to the Homestead martyrs. The first edition, *Homestead*, even contains an illustration of the proposed monument — but the intended site of the memorial is not named, and the monument never erected.³⁰ After the initial set of funerals, which happened before the outcome of the strike of 1892 had been decided, Homestead made no further moves to change the landscape of the city in such a way as to honor the lives lost to the Pinkertons. In this context, the marking of the graves in 1936 was significant: the names of all seven martyrs were now finally etched in stone and on public display, albeit in a location available only to those who would seek it out.

The Crest of the Wave

This wave of Homestead Strike commemoration crested in 1941. By this point SWOC was already bargaining with the steel companies; United Steelworkers of America (USWA, now the USW) would be recognized the following year. On Labor Day, 1941 SWOC #1397, ancestor of USWA Local #1397, unveiled its monument to the Homestead martyrs. The four-ton grey granite shaft, about nine feet high, can still be viewed today in Homestead at the town's crossroads, the corner of 8th Avenue and the High Level Bridge (now the "Homestead Grays Bridge"). The ceremony featured a parade; music by high school marching bands; remarks by B. Frank Bell, a survivor of the strike; prayers led by a Roman Catholic priest and a Lutheran minister; a dedication by CIO Regional Director James Thomas; and a speech by CIO President Phil Murray read by David McDonald, secretary-treasurer of SWOC. In attendance were delegates from the mine workers and electrical workers unions and the burgesses of Homestead, West Homestead, and Munhall.³¹ Now the Strike had been commemorated, permanently — not in a remote graveyard, but in the heart of the town.

The generic form of the monument, echoing the design of war memori-

als, implicitly equates the Battle of Homestead with events such as those of the Civil War, lending a conservative sense of dignity, respectability, propriety, and cultural authority to the memorial and the issues it addresses. Yet, simultaneously, the impression that this monument is a kind of war memorial subtly conveys a radical “class warfare” sensibility, making it clear that the term is not always a “mere” metaphor. The image etched into the granite is one of masculinity, pride in work, optimism: a sun rises over a muscular steel puddler, “powerful and fully involved in his labor.”³² The verbal inscription asserts the patriotism of the 1892 strikers, and, by means of the passive voice, avoids clearly identifying the strikers’ antagonists. In this way, the verbal text supplements the form and the image:

ERECTED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE STEEL WORKERS ORGANIZING COMMITTEE LOCAL UNIONS IN MEMORY OF THE IRON AND STEEL WORKERS WHO WERE KILLED IN HOMESTEAD, PA., ON JULY 6, 1892, WHILE STRIKING AGAINST THE CARNEGIE STEEL COMPANY IN DEFENSE OF THEIR AMERICAN RIGHTS.



Like the inscription on the memorial, the naming of the Spirit of ’92 Lodge in 1933, and the SWOC rally of 1936, Murray’s message suggests that the steelworker unionists of the 1930s and 1940s are the redeemers or avengers of the martyrs of 1892. It recognizes the present as much as it does the past. Referring to SWOC, Murray wrote:

The building of this powerful organization in the steel industry, the building of the great Congress of Industrial Organizations, in which most of you at this celebration have had a part — this work will erase the tragedy of 1892: and from now on Homestead will symbolize — not the home of non-unionism, but the citadel of true unionism.³³

Murray’s proclamation by no means denies the unfinished business of 1892, but his emphasis on *erasing* — rather than, or in addition to, avenging — the tragedy of 1892 differs from that of Fagan and the other embittered founders of the Spirit of ’92 lodge. By now the tone of the union message is far more triumphal than it had been half a decade earlier, and in announcing the completion of the mission set forth by the martyrs of 1892, Murray is also clearly attempting to move on, to lay to rest the issues of 1892. Having served its purpose, memory is already, and understandably so, becoming forgetfulness — at least for a while.

Despite Murray’s call for erasure of the tragedy of 1892, the 1941 SWOC monument to the martyrs of 1892 has remained a touchstone for members of the union and their allies, especially in moments of crisis, such as the deindustrialization era of the late 1970s and early 1980s. During this period of the shutdowns, a new generation of steelworkers, often with experience in the New Left, coalesced with older steelworkers who had long been dissatisfied with the union leadership.³⁴ “1397 Rank and File,” as the movement to democratize the union was called in Homestead, published a newsletter which it billed as “The Voice of the *Membership* of USWA Local Union 1397” (my emphasis). The newsletter repeatedly featured images of the SWOC marker — and sometimes also verbal interpretations of its meaning.³⁵ Furthermore, from 1979 through 1985, the Rank and File movement held an annual May Day rally and press conference at the site of the memorial.³⁶

The SWOC memorial still has significance today, though how much and what kind remain arguable. The corner on which it is located no longer encourages pedestrian traffic. Nevertheless, from 2005 to 2007 the Pittsburgh branch of the IWW has organized an annual May Day rally at the SWOC memorial in Homestead. Likewise, in the spring of 2007, the USW and the Battle of Homestead Foundation began discussing proposals for rededicating

the memorial as a public forum, a site for free speech, free association, and labor-community solidarity.³⁷

Ancestral Sources of Liberating Memory

At least two conclusions can be drawn from this story of how the founders of the United Steelworkers remembered the Homestead Strike during the 1930s and 1940s. First, what the exceptional case of 1892 meant to steelworkers in the 1930s and 1940s highlights the power of the past, as mediated by cultural memory, to intervene in the present. It suggests that the inspiration provided by a steelworker community's collective memory played a material role in the establishment of the USW. That matters, because — despite the compromises involved in any actual counter-hegemonic social movement — the establishment of the USW was a revolutionary act.

In *Striking Steel*, a superb book inspired by his ambivalence toward the centennial commemoration of the Homestead Strike,³⁸ Jack Metzgar passionately and aptly sums up the meaning of the USW (and in particular its notoriously “rigid” work rules) to a steelworker family in Johnstown, Pennsylvania:

All the discretion that the foreman and the company were losing was flowing right into our home. There were choices. There were prospects. There were possibilities. Few of these had been there before. Now they were. And because they came slowly, year by year, contract by contract, strike by bitter strike, they gave a lilting, liberating feeling to life — a sense that no matter what was wrong today, it could be changed, it could get better — in fact, by the late 1950s, that it was quite likely that it would get better. Hang in there. Stick with it. These moral injunctions to daily fortitude made so much more sense then when there were so many visible payoffs for doing so. And as my father would find out, my mother, my sister, and I — like nearly everybody else in American society — were learning to tolerate less and less repression from anybody or anything, including him. If what we lived through in the 1950s was not liberation, then liberation never happens in real human lives.³⁹

Metzgar's point is that the emergence and consolidation of the CIO, though not “the” revolution envisioned by labor radicals, was nevertheless a genuine moment of liberation. If *that* was not liberation, he contends, then there is no such thing. While capturing the essence of the CIO revolution (and revealing an intriguing continuity between the New Left and the culture of the 1950s),

Metzgar at the same time concedes that the definition of “liberation,” and its relationship to collective memory, is a contested one.⁴⁰ Metzgar's acknowledgment introduces the second conclusion to be drawn from this story of how the founders of the USW remembered the Homestead Strike: this story suggests that we might need to revise, or perhaps simply expand, our intuitive definition of a liberating (or revolutionary, or counter-hegemonic) memory.

Metzgar's well-researched yet very personal book provides a particularly clear and attractive articulation of the common intuitions which are challenged by the story of what the Homestead strike meant to the founders of the USW. A welcome counterweight to narratives of industrial decline and union corruption, Metzgar issues a call to remember and affirm the historical reality of liberated ancestors. Like Murray, Metzgar does not want to dwell on the tragedy of 1892. Instead, he suggests that we should focus on success stories, not simply for the academic pursuit of disembodied, idealized “truth,” but for strategic reasons.

Success stories, as all Americans know in their heart of hearts, are heartening. They help you believe in struggling on, in delaying gratification in hopes of achieving a future, sometimes hard-to-imagine goal. Remembering the achievements of collective struggle, and all the work that goes into achieving the always fragile unity necessary for such struggle, is particularly important — for everybody, in my view, but particularly for working classes.⁴¹

Nothing succeeds like success. This is American common sense, is it not?

Yet, curiously, and contrary to what Metzgar's theory would suggest, the steelworkers union he so vividly remembers in *Striking Steel* was not founded on such a memory of successful, liberated ancestors. Nor did the founders of the USW particularly emphasize the possibility of liberated grandchildren. Instead, their memory of the Homestead Strike focused, counter-intuitively, on enslaved ancestors — and they cast *themselves* as the liberated grandchildren. Their vision of history seems to be much closer to the perspective of Walter Benjamin, who in 1940 challenged Social Democratic opponents of fascism to see the “state of emergency” — rather than “progress” — as the historical norm.⁴² In particular, with respect to Metzgar's theme of the ancestral sources of liberating memory, Benjamin contends that

Not man or men but the struggling, oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge. In Marx it appears as the last

enslaved class, as the avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden. This conviction, which had a brief resurgence in the Spartacist group [led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg], has always been objectionable to Social Democrats. Within three decades they managed virtually to erase the name of Blanqui, though it had been the rallying sound that had reverberated through the preceding century. Social Democracy thought fit to assign to the working class the role of redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength. This training made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren.⁴³

“Empathy with the victor,” according to Benjamin, “invariably benefits the rulers.”⁴⁴

To be sure, the vision of history relevant to the conditions of 1930s and 1940s is not necessarily pertinent today. Furthermore, we should question whether an emphasis on plural success *stories* entails empathy with “the” victor.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, it is Benjamin, not Metzgar, who better articulates the philosophy of history embodied by the memorial practices of SWOC. It is Benjamin who captures the way in which a memory of ancestors bubbles up from the dark well of the seemingly forgotten to inspire the overthrow of a hegemonic regime. Likewise, it is Benjamin who more clearly indicates how an “exceptional case” such as the Homestead Strike can produce not only successful though despicable winners and hapless though noble victims, but also martyrs.

The story of how SWOC remembered the Homestead Strike during the 1930s and 1940s is important not only for the way in which it highlights the material force of collective memory, but also for the ways in which it challenges our intuitive, common-sense ideas about how collective public memory operates. It invites us to reconsider not only what to remember, but also *how* to remember. It’s a story that encourages us to think about the past, and our contemporary memorial practices regarding the past, in fresh ways. It’s a story that invites us to reflect on Marx’s passing, enigmatic remark in the *Grundrisse*: “the concept of progress is not to be understood in its familiar abstraction.”⁴⁶

Notes

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I, trans. Ben Fowkes (1867; New York: Penguin, 1976) 899.

² For an analysis of the Homestead Strike, see Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh, 1992); David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960); and James Green, *The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America* (Urbana: U of Illinois, 1998) for an account of the aftermath. For a narrative of the strike, see Jeremy Brecker, *Strike!* (Boston: South End, 1997); Joe White, *The Homestead Strike of 1892*, 16 August 2007 <<http://www.pittsburghaficio.org/homestead.htm>>; Charles McColester, *The Point of Pittsburgh: Production and Struggle at the Forks of the Ohio* (Pittsburgh: Battle of Homestead Foundation, 2008) 140-47; and the one-hour documentary video *The River Ran Red*, dir. and prod. Steffi Domike and Nicole Fauteaux, 1993. The Strike is rendered in poetry by Robert Gibb, “The Homestead Lockout & Strike, 1892,” *World Over Water* (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas, 2007) 62-66. Linda Schneider, “The Citizen Striker: Workers’ Ideology in the Homestead Strike of 1892,” *Labor History* 23 (1982): 47-66 focuses on the ideological commitments of the strikers. For annotated primary sources, see David P. Demarest, Jr., ed. “*The River Ran Red: Homestead 1892* (U of Pittsburgh, 1992). Arthur Burgoyne, *The Homestead Strike of 1892* (1893; Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh Press, 1979) provides the definitive account from period.

³ William Z. Foster, *The Great Steel Strike* (1920; New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969) 235.

⁴ Richard Oestreicher, “The Spirit of ’92: Popular Opposition in Homestead’s Politics and Culture, 1892-1937,” *Pittsburgh Surveyed: Social Science and Social Reform in the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. Maurine W. Greenwald and Margo Anderson (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh, 1996) 193.

⁵ William Serrin, *Homestead: The Glory and Tragedy of an American Steel Town* (New York: Random House, 1992) 91.

⁶ John A. Fitch, *The Steelworkers* (1910; Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh, 1989) 214.

⁷ Margaret F. Byington, *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town* (1910; Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh, 1974) 175.

⁸ Serrin, *Homestead* 174-76.

⁹ Demarest, *River* 215; Edward Levinson, *Labor on the March* (New York: University Books, 1956) 188.

¹⁰ Serrin, *Homestead* 189-92; Demarest, *River* 216-17.

¹¹ Levinson, *Labor on the March* 188.

¹² United Steelworkers of America (USWA), “*We Are Americans!*” *The Homestead Workers Issue a Declaration of Independence in 1936*, 16 August 2007 <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/133/>>.

¹³ For example, in 1892, the labor leader (and soon-to-be socialist) Eugene Debs

concluded his essay on the Homestead Strike as follows: "It required Lexington, Concord and Bunker Hill to arouse the colonies to resistance, and the Battle of Homestead should serve to arouse every workingman in America to a series of dangers which surround them." Eugene V. Debs, "Homestead and Ludlow," *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, ed. Jean Y. Tussey (New York: Pathfinder, 1970) 224. In that same year, Samuel Gompers, longtime president of the AFL, made a speech in Homestead in which he addressed the charges of treason that had been lodged against several of the strikers. Referring to the Boston Tea Party of 1773, he asked: "Shall patriotism be measured by the yard-stick of the Carnegie firm or be weighed as their pig iron? Is it because these men in those latter days like those in Boston harbor, declared they had some rights and dared maintain them that they shall be declared traitors?" (qtd. in Burgoyne 217).

¹⁴ USWA, "We Are Americans!"

¹⁵ Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention, "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions," 1848, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony Papers Project*, 16 August 2007 <<http://ecssba.rutgers.edu/docs/seneca.html>>; United States of America, Second Continental Congress, "Declaration of Independence," 1776, *Charters of Freedom*, 15 October 2008 <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html>.

¹⁶ USWA, "We Are Americans!"

¹⁷ USWA, "We Are Americans!"

¹⁸ Levinson, *Labor on the March* 187.

¹⁹ Demarest, *River* 216-17, 219-20; Serrin, 191-92; Levinson, 187-89.

²⁰ Levinson, *Labor on the March* 188.

²¹ Demarest, *River* 219.

²² Foster, *Steel Strike* 59; Mother Jones, "Speech at a convention of the United Mine Workers of America, Indianapolis, Indiana, 16 September 1919," *The Speeches and Writings of Mother Jones* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh, 1988) 203.

²³ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968) 255.

²⁴ Ronald L. Filippelli, "The History is Missing, Almost: Philip Murray, the Steelworkers, and the Historians," *Forging a Union of Steel: Philip Murray, SWOC, and the United Steelworkers*, eds. Paul F. Clark, Peter Gottlieb, and Donald Kenndy (Ithaca, New York: ILR, 1987) 11.

²⁵ Curtis Miner, *Homestead: The Story of a Steel Town* (Pittsburgh: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 1989) 56-58, Staughton Lynd, "The Possibility of Radicalism in the Early 1930s: The Case of Steel," *Living Inside Our Hope: A Steadfast Radical's Thoughts on Rebuilding the Movement* (Ithaca: ILR, 1997) 143.

²⁶ Serrin, *Homestead* 193.

²⁷ The panel was moved to a summer retreat of the International Ladies' Garment Workers in 1941. Although eventually destroyed by fire, photographs remain (Demarest 218).

²⁸ Demarest, *River* 222-23; Nicholas Coles and Janet Zandy, ed., *American Working-Class Literature: An Anthology*, (New York: Oxford UP, 2007) 149, 153; Pete Seeger, "The Homestead Strike," rec. 1991, *Shaped by Steel: Traditional Music and Stories from Southwestern Pennsylvania*, Steel Industry Heritage Corporation, 2005.

²⁹ Thomas Bell, *Out of this Furnace* (1941; Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh, 1976)

³⁰ Burgoyne, *Homestead* 299.

³¹ Few steelworkers were in attendance, "due to the steel mills' decision to keep operating through the holiday for the sake of defense," observed the *Daily Messenger* of Homestead (Demarest 221).

³² James Catano, "Articulating the Values of labor and Laboring: Civic Rhetoric and Heritage Tourism," *Who Says? Working-Class Rhetoric, Class Consciousness and Community*, ed. William DeGenaro (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh, 2007) 15.

³³ Demarest *River Ran Red* 221.

³⁴ Issues included: poor representation of workers at grievance hearings; the policy of approving contracts without benefit of a rank and file vote; concerns about financial accountability of the local union's administration; the long tenure of union officers; and a general sense that the union bureaucracy was complacent and out of touch with the rank and file. See Irwin Marcus, "The Deindustrialization of America: Homestead, A Case Study, 1959-84," *Pennsylvania History* 52: 169.

³⁵ For instance, a photograph of the SWOC monument accompanies 1397 Rank and File president Ron Weisen's "Labor Day Message" in the September 1982 issue of *1397 Rank & File*. "Labor Day, 1982 is no cause for celebration," Weisen writes. He continues: "In 1892, Homestead steelworkers fought and died for the cause of unionism. They fought against a powerful Company and great odds, for the right to earn a decent living, with respect and dignity on the job. Today, 90 years later, we are again under attack by the same greedy Companies. Only this time, instead of using Pinkerton guards to shoot us down with rifles, they use Contract Administrators and Industrial Engineers who silently but just as viciously eliminate our jobs and our futures" (Collection of the United Steel Workers of America Local Union 1397 1950-90, Indiana University of Pennsylvania Labor Archives, Box 62, Series J, Folder 4).

³⁶ Catano, "Articulating Labor" 18.

³⁷ I have been a member of the Battle of Homestead Foundation board since its founding in 1997.

³⁸ "I had planned to write a book about the rise and fall of a steel town — a sad story with a tragic ending," Metzgar writes. "On July 6, 1992, in Homestead, I knew I no longer had the heart for it" (152). What's especially notable about Metzgar's interpretation of the Homestead Strike centennial commemoration is his insistence that "what we were commemorating one hundred years later on that uncomfortably hot July day" was "the one-day victory, not the eventual defeat." Jack Metzgar, *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2000) 150. This despite the fact that he concedes that he "could not get the defeat out of [his] head"

(150). Similarly, Metzgar emphasizes the strikers’ moment of victory despite his admission that the muse of *Striking Steel*, a former steelworker and union activist named Tony Tomko, was moved by a speaker at the centennial commemoration who “intoned the standard messages about honoring those who fought in 1892 by continuing their struggle” (152); in other words, Tomko was moved by a speaker whose message was remarkably similar to that of Pat Fagan in 1936. This speaker did not appeal to Metzgar in the same way, apparently by virtue of his failure to emphasize labor’s successes. For an alternative interpretation of the meaning of the Homestead Strike centenary, consider the homily delivered by Monsignor Charles Owen Rice at the Homestead Centennial Mass: “Here in Homestead we commemorate, not celebrate, because this is the centenary of the defeat of freedom; the waging of a civil war which decided whether money or the people, the workers, would prevail. Money won.” Charles Owen Rice, “Homestead Homily,” *Fighter with a Heart: Pittsburgh Labor Priest*, ed. Charles McCollester (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh, 1996) 222. For Metzgar’s full account of how his change of heart in 1992 led him to write *Striking Steel*, see 149-54.

³⁹ Metzgar, *Striking Steel* 39.

⁴⁰ His topic, the 1959 Steel Strike, is the largest strike in US history when measured in terms of “man hours lost” — 116 days, over 500,000 strikers, or about 1% of the workforce, including his own father. Resolved only via the intervention of President Eisenhower and the Supreme Court, it was the last of the series of post-World War II steel strikes that confirmed the CIO revolution of the 1930s and early 1940s. And yet it has been virtually forgotten. With a passionate sense of what it might take to once again make the labor movement something that large numbers of working-class people might want to join or support, and with a provocative and compelling explanation of why the strike has been sentenced to oblivion, Metzgar makes the strongest possible case (a very compelling one indeed) for the achievements of people such as his father, representatives of the bureaucratic “big labor” in the postwar period. In short, he eloquently describes a world in which history is divided into two eras — before the union, and after the union.

⁴¹ Metzgar, *Striking Steel* 153.

⁴² Benjamin, “Theses” 257.

⁴³ Benjamin, “Theses” 260.

⁴⁴ Benjamin, “Theses” 256.

⁴⁵ Metzgar, for instance, celebrates the USW’s victory in the 1959 Steel Strike, but he does not identify with the apparent prospective victor in the larger meta-narrative of conflict between capital and labor. Despite prescribing that the labor movement remember its success stories, Metzgar’s emphasis (as the subtitle of his book suggests) is really on the importance of remembering *solidarity* rather than *victory*. He concludes *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered* by admitting that the kind of working-class hopefulness characteristic of the 1950s is “not coming back until we have a bigger and stronger labor movement than the one we have now. I took it for

granted once, but now I remember” (229). This is the ending of a success story only with respect to the triumph of memory, not of labor. Though not a tragic conclusion, in the end Metzgar, like Benjamin, emphasizes labor’s contemporary state of emergency, even as he insists that a study of the past shows that labor victories are possible.

⁴⁶ Tom Bottimore, Laurence Harris, V.G. Kiernan, and Ralph Miliband, ed., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1983) 398.

Nicholas Brown. "Marxism and Disability." *Mediations* 23.2 (Spring 2008) 186-193.
www.mediationsjournal.org/marxism-and-disability.

Marxism and Disability

Nicholas Brown

Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation,
by Ato Quayson. New York: Columbia, 2007, 246 pp., US\$25.50,
ISBN 9780231139038.

Marx drew a relationship between physical disability and capitalism, pointing for example to “the victims of industry, whose number increases with the growth of dangerous machinery, of mines, chemical works, etc.”¹ But disability is more generally present in Marx as a trope, a metaphor for the effects of capitalism, particularly of the division of labor. Manufacture “converts the worker into a crippled monstrosity by furthering his particular skill as in a forcing-house, through the suppression of a whole world of productive drives and inclinations.”² This use of disability as metaphorical vehicle for the effects of the capitalist division of labor characterizes an ethical thread in Marxist thought, even among thinkers whose political horizon is decidedly elsewhere: it is a running theme in Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*, beginning with the subtitle “Reflections from Damaged Life”; one hears overtones of it in Jameson’s description of the “epistemologically crippling” experience of our first-world “view from the top”;³ even Lukács does not manage to escape the trope entirely when he wanders near Marx’s own description of industrial work. But the metaphor of modernity — particularly modernity under the aspect of specialization or segmentation — as disability is also part of the inheritance of German Idealism. In the sixth letter of Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, the emerging division of labor turns out to be the source of our “mutilated nature” and therefore of Schiller’s entire problematic: “we see not only individuals, but whole classes of men, developing but one part of their potentialities while of the rest, as in

stunted growths, only vestigial traces remain.”⁴ This metaphor, then, doesn’t necessarily belong specifically to Marxism, and we should probably treat it with skepticism wherever we find it. Even if Marx himself inherits this trope from classical German philosophy, his more substantial inheritance, the dialectical method, points unequivocally to the primordial disunity of the subject and offers no comforting appeal to normative wholeness and health. Certainly there are colder and more useful Marxist analyses of segmentation than such an appeal; the fact that three of them might be placed under the headings Lukács, Adorno, and Jameson might be an index of the vestigial nature of the disability trope itself within Marxism. However difficult it may be to avoid, its imputed other — the ideal of the fully developed personality — is not a particularly political horizon. “Bourgeois individualism” is a tired expression, but nonetheless one would not like to see what it names turn out to be the ethical motive of Marxism itself.

The connection of Ato Quayson’s *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* to Marxism is, then, different from all this. *Aesthetic Nervousness* — a chapter of which was presented by Quayson at the 2007 Institute on Culture and Society — contributes to that problem which goes by the banal term “intersectionality”: given all the ways people can be disadvantaged, oppressed, or exploited, and given the fact that these relationships seem all to exist at the same time, how can one think them together? But “intersectionality” is the name of a problem, not a solution, since the “intersection” is precisely what was to be theorized; if anything the term, implying that the relationship is a mere intersection, insists that it is therefore not to be theorized at all, rather at best quantified and calibrated in accordance with this or that situation. Fredric Jameson’s “*History and Class Consciousness as an Unfinished Project*” (which has been refunctioned for queer theory by Kevin Floyd in his forthcoming book *Reifying Desire: Capital, Sexuality, Dialectic*), raises the startling prospect that an adequate theory of “intersectionality” is not to be achieved by repudiating Lukács’s privileging of class in favor of some more correct and nuanced intersectional account, but rather by repeating it: by producing the gendered body (the queer body, the black body, the colonized body, the disabled body) as a unique fulcrum for understanding the social totality.⁵

It is in this sense, in its commitment to thinking totality through the concept of disability, that *Aesthetic Nervousness* shares Marxism’s project. On Quayson’s (and my) understanding, totality is not a positive term but rather the negative condition of understanding. On the level of the literary text, this means that the text does not constitute a finite totality that can be entirely known in all its possible implications, internal connections, and registers; rather, it means that every apparently positive meaning in the text is

in fact structured by its relation to all of the other elements in the text, an open set of negative entities (i.e. relationships) that structure what then look like positive units of meaning. But this means, then, that in this book “disability” does not stand for a positive concept that we already understand before we get to the literary text, and this is what makes Quayson’s book so different from what it could be, another exercise in “representations of X in Y.” That “X,” disability, is not presumed here to be fixed in advance; in each case it is only intelligible within the system of relationships that constitutes the work of art.

Concretely, then, in each set of readings — Quayson takes on Samuel Beckett, Toni Morrison, Wole Soyinka, and J.M. Coetzee, a list that seems eclectic until one is reminded that they are all (coincidentally, as Quayson tells us, but their canonicity is not accidental) Nobel Prize winners — “disability” means something different, and this is entirely a good thing. One way of reading *Aesthetic Nervousness* is as not being about disability at all as a positive question, but rather as a reconstitution or recentering of each of these texts, forcing them to circulate in a different discourse than they had before and causing these utterly canonical and in varying degrees ossified texts suddenly to appear unfamiliar and strange. Quayson’s book had the unexpected effect of making me curious to read *The Life and Times of Michael K*. The dreary discourse of the unknowability of the other, while it refers to something real, is so banal that one has reason to be suspicious when it is treated as profound — what possibilities are we being distracted from when we are confronted with the silence of the other as though it were a great ethical discovery? — and when Quayson replaces it with a discussion of autism, Michael K. suddenly becomes quite a different kind of figure, even if, by the end of the chapter, Coetzee remains the beautiful soul he ever was.

Once Quayson draws our attention to the trope of disability — and this is another of the great strengths of this book — one suddenly realizes how ubiquitous it is. Just thinking of African drama, a field Quayson and I share an interest in, the examples begin to multiply. In Sembène Ousmane’s *Xala*, we remember that the lumpens who deliver the Hadj’s ultimate humiliation are marked by various disabilities. Similarly with Soyinka’s *Madmen and Specialists*, which opens, as Quayson reminds us, with a group of disabled mendicants playing dice for body parts: here we return to the trope we began with, which equates capitalism — or, in the Old Man’s idiolect in *Madmen and Specialists*, “system” — with maiming. (Of course, this equation, with mendicancy as the mediating term, reminds us immediately of Brecht, which gives some sense of the historical depth of this trope). Or one recalls Athol Fugard’s *Hello and Goodbye*, in which one of the protagonists, an able-

bodied Afrikaner, voluntarily assumes, in what is surely one of the most depressing scenes in theater, the disability of his dead father. In the metaphorical register, we are given to understand that this disability is Afrikaner identity itself, a wounded self-image that is nonetheless a source of pride; but Fugard is careful to let us discover that the father's literal wound, which is a source of pride for the father and becomes one for the son, is gained at the expense of African laborers who, excluded even from the dangerous labor that maimed the father, are left to starve.

The metaphorical vehicle in the last example is that of the crutch, the physical prop (in both meanings of the word) that plays a pivotal role in *Hello and Goodbye*. Disability is meant here to stand in for something else: Afrikaner history and identity as mutilation and crutch. But there is an elementary distinction to be made between disability as trope and disability as disability, and Quayson is admirably clear about this. In the course of this book Quayson teaches us to be suspicious of the oversignification that would ascribe metaphorical meaning to real disabilities, and one surely sees the ethical charge of this suspicion. But something peculiar seems to happen around disability within the literary text: the vehicle itself actually does what it is supposed to do and imputes some quality to the tenor. Like disability (and indeed, like anything else), gender, race, and sexuality can be tropes. But in these cases — and this was the whole point of that dismal genre of “representations of X in Y” criticism — tenor and vehicle are free to oscillate back and forth, the qualities imputed to the tenor reverberating back to confirm the qualities derived from the vehicle. “This old ninny-woman, fate” says something about fate, but also about women. Race is always a trope in Faulkner, of course: but race is also race, and if you don't understand that you're missing something essential about Faulkner. (Achebe made essentially this same point about Conrad). Possibly because disability does not have a stable place in the symbolic order — this is a source of the “aesthetic nervousness” Quayson so persuasively delineates — the metaphor of disability is not always already a confirmation of a stereotype that it presupposes. “History is a wound,” or even “assuming an identity is choosing to be disabled” do not work quite the same way as “fate is a woman”; one doesn't then expect the negative overtones of the metaphor secretly to confirm our ideas about people who use crutches. In something like *Hello and Goodbye*, are we even talking about a representation of disability, or does disability here function purely as a trope? In other words, when we're talking about disability in literature are we necessarily talking about disability — or is it always possible that we are talking about something different?

In fact, this view of the trope of disability plays into one of the strengths of this book: as we said a moment ago, when Quayson is talking about

disability, he *is* always talking about something different. But then, how useful is the category of disability itself? First, how trans-historical is it? Are the kinds of bodily or genetic difference that count for us as “disability” usefully understood under that category in other places and times? One might think of Oedipus's foot, which Lévi-Strauss associated with a myth of autochthony. Is this disability? Quayson endorses a “social model of disability”: it is not the person, but rather society which is disabled. This is a useful dialectical reversal. But it opens up the category to radical relativization. If we take the social model of disability in the broadest sense, we might be led, circuitously, back to Marx, and to identify capitalism with disabled society in a new sense. It is only when social being is equated with labor power, with the ability to perform economically productive work — a relatively recent development and one which even now is not universal — that “disability” can come to mean what it means for us.

Second, how does the tropological understanding of disability interact with disability itself which, if we understand it in the strongest social sense, could be eliminated tomorrow? In a socialist order, if we can still imagine such a thing, all kinds of prejudices might remain, but the idea of disability becomes incoherent: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” (Under Stalin, the final word in Marx's slogan was, symptomatically, altered to “work”).⁶ The social model of disability has, at its core, a Utopian message akin to Marx's. But does an understanding of the trope of disability get us any closer to realizing it?

Quayson ends with a discussion of Ghana's Persons with Disability Act, an important piece of progressive legislation that passed only after a twelve-year struggle. Are we to celebrate this accomplishment with him? Yes, of course. And are we to celebrate books like this one, which refocus our attention by brilliantly outlining the pathways by which a certain set of tropes comes to signify? Yes, of course. But does the second goal have much to do with the first? Quayson himself approaches this question in the final chapter — with admirable honesty and possibly some uneasiness — but that shouldn't prevent us from posing it ourselves. I remain agnostic, but ready to be convinced.

Notes

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1976) 797.

² *Capital* I, 481.

³ Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Age of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 85.

⁴ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*, trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967) 43, 33.

⁵ Fredric Jameson, "History and Class Consciousness as an Unfinished Project," *Rethinking Marxism* 1.1 (1988) 49-72; Kevin Floyd, *Reifying Desire: Capital, Sexuality, Dialectic* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, forthcoming).

⁶ The fuller story: this Utopian slogan is cited from Marx's "Critique of the Gotha Program" (*The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd Edition, ed. Robert C Tucker [New York: Norton, 1978] 531). It is reworked by Lenin, in "The State and Revolution," into the theory of stages: to each according to his needs, yes, that is communism; but for now, socialism: "every worker ... receives from society as much as he has given it" (*Essential Works of Lenin*, ed. Henry M Christman [New York: Bantam, 1966] 341). Fatefully, this branch of the theory of revolution, which we must remember was opened up in a moment of radical historical openness and uncertainty, is then codified in Stalin's 1936 Constitution: "The principle applied in the USSR is that of socialism: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his work'" (Article 12:

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1936/12/05.htm>). Under "socialism" thus understood, disability remains, like so much else, untransfigured.

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