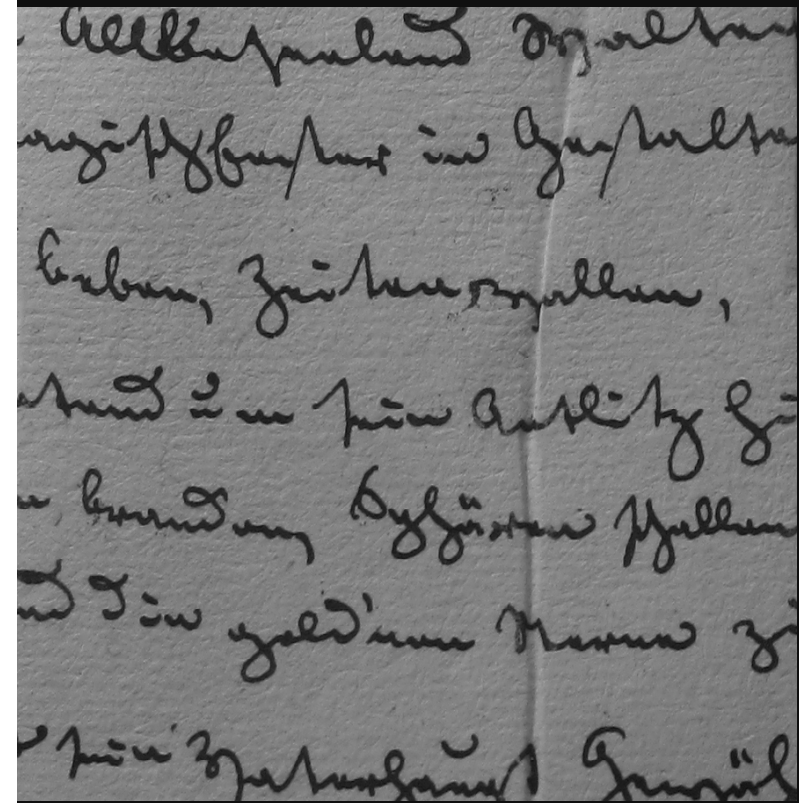




Mediations

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Editors' Note

In the preface to his *Marxism and Form*, Fredric Jameson notes, "The stress Marx laid on individual works of art and the value they had for him (as for Hegel before and Lenin after) were very far from being a matter of personality: in some way, which it is the task of Marxist theory to determine more precisely, literature plays a central role in the dialectical process." The aim of this issue of *Mediations*, as each of the articles that comprise it argues, is not simply to show how Marxist criticism might be understood as an invaluable lens through which one might better understand literature (which it no doubt is), but more importantly to demonstrate how literature, as Jameson here suggests, might be brought to bear on Marxist criticism itself. The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen a widespread revival of literature's and literary criticism's "big questions," a revival frequently connected to a distinct sense of disciplinary crisis. The leading journals in the field have occupied themselves with countless variations on questions such as: what is reading? What is literature? What is theory? Have literature and theory reached a point of exhaustion? If not, what is the role of both in the twenty-first century? In the context of such large-scale disciplinary debates that emerge out of a moment in which literary criticism has allegedly stopped utilizing and further developing its most basic disciplinary tools, we have also witnessed a revival of Marxism. To be sure, nostalgic, one-dimensional idealizations of Marxism must be regarded suspiciously, and a number of essays in this issue do so. Importantly, however, this collection intends to respond to the current moment of crisis by working through its productive contradictions, rather than dwelling upon its paralyzing moments of assumed exhaustion. To this end, this collection brings together a spectrum of established and emerging scholars, all of whom grapple with a wide variety of those big questions and problems the current historical conjuncture raises.

This issue of *Mediations*, then, takes seriously the idea that Marxism can help to endow a discipline in crisis with new energy by confronting that crisis head on. The essays that make up this collection provide methodological, practical, and theoretical reformulations of literary criticism's central principles as well as new categories and models of critique, which together intend to indicate the wide range of potentiality contained in literary study in the twenty-first century.

The essays contained in this issue are dedicated to two simultaneous and interconnected levels of inquiry: 1) examining the ways in which we might define the project and concrete praxis of Marxist literary criticism today and 2) extrapolating methodological and disciplinary conclusions from this particular examination to arrive at general indications regarding major disciplinary concepts. In particular, these essays bring together a wide spectrum of what we consider to be some of the most vibrantly discussed categories today: literariness, (critical) theory, interpretation, reading, form, disciplinarity, creativity, and varieties of material and historical determinations that each of these ever-changing categories mediates. It is via the simultaneous commitment to fundamental disciplinary categories and praxes, and rigorous analyses of the complexity of problems with which the twenty-first century presents us that the authors in this issue try to avoid unproductive and frequently sensationalist proclamations of the end of literature or the exhaustion of theory, and instead formulate future visions of literary critique that courageously embraces its own tradition. It is thus not just the revitalized interest in Marxist critique in order to resolve impasses of the present, but also the characteristic willingness of Marxist critics perpetually and radically to reformulate the very definitions of what constitutes Marxist praxis in order to produce timely methods that endow this issue with a sense of both urgency and necessity. This project consequently grew over the course of the last few years at a variety of conferences, including the Marxist Literary Group's Institute on Culture and Society, from which several of the essays included here are taken. (Information about the 2010 ICS, which will be hosted by St. Francis Xavier University, Canada, can be found at <http://mlg.eserver.org>.) The result of these and other discussions was nothing less than the development of a problematic: if Marxism can help guide the way into future studies of literature, how must Marxism rethink itself radically in the twenty-first century, and how can such a rethinking conserve both disciplinary identity and its relevance in a historical period that too often preoccupies itself primarily with theorizations of the end of our discipline, rather than its future structures?

We begin with Imre Szeman's interview with the political philosopher, journalist, and writer, Gáspár Miklós Tamás, whose reflections on the

development of contemporary politics in Hungary, and Eastern Europe more generally, points to the very historical shift that underlies this reassessment of the relationship between Marxism and literature. As a leading figure of the democratic opposition movement, Tamás was at the forefront of the events that not only culminated in the resignation of János Kádár in 1988, but also marked the collapse of communism in Hungary. Elected to parliament as a member of the liberal party in 1990, Tamás shortly thereafter left professional politics, and has, since then, moved increasingly to the left. Thus, although he, like many Eastern European dissidents, had at one point conceived economic and political integration into a Western-style modernity as a means of securing greater rights and liberties, that same process of integration would eventually prompt Tamás to search for an alternative to a capitalist system that had promised — though nonetheless failed — to produce more democratic forms of governance. What he describes here as his “turn to Marx,” then, offers far-reaching insights into a post-Soviet region in which the general disillusionment that scores of commentators on the right celebrated as having precipitated a political transition in countries like Hungary has given way to a growing disenchantment with the market economy that even most committed of neoliberals have failed to explain. The point, however, is not, as Tamás makes clear, to indulge in a kind of *Ostalgie*, nor even to insist on a return to the Party politics of the past; and indeed, insofar as the fall of the Soviet Union is understood here as part of a more global process underwritten by the “worldwide disintegration of labor,” the construction of a radical — and particularly Marxist — political philosophy requires an awareness of the ways in which this historical conjuncture has rendered certain solutions obsolete. But while this poses new challenges to the Left in Eastern Europe, where the impossibility of hegemony is compounded by the rise of new though no less pernicious forms of ultranationalism, the absence of any viable alternative has, as Tamás suggests, also rendered Marxism all the more relevant, and as such, points to lessons for the Left throughout the globe.

What these challenges might mean for Marxist literary criticism, moreover, is in many ways the focus of this special issue of *Mediations*. And yet, any discussion of what Marxist literary criticism is today, as Szeman's second contribution to this collection suggests, is immediately complicated by the fact that there is no unitary methodology or set of considerations that distinguish a “Marxist” approach to literature from others; according to Szeman, “There is no such thing as a Marxist literary criticism.” The point, nonetheless, is less polemical than it seems, and in fact Marxism, as Szeman demonstrates, has long privileged literature as an object of analysis and critique, even though the reasons for doing so, as well as the ways of going

about it, have widely varied. Szeman subsequently turns to what he identifies as the three primary directions Marxist literary criticism has taken throughout the twentieth century. The first of these approaches is largely methodological in scope, questioning the premises and assumptions that underlie existing forms of literary criticism to reveal the social, and particularly economic, function literature fulfils. Meanwhile, the second approach is primarily concerned with the category of the literary itself, examining literature and literary criticism as institutional practices whose formation is bound up with specific social and economic conditions. But if these twin tendencies are undertaken with an eye to understanding the instrumental role literature and criticism play in the production and reproduction of social and economic domination, a third mode of Marxist criticism builds off and preserves this skepticism, while attempting to lay bare the possibilities and alternatives that inhere within the literary — a utopian content that emerges as both the product and annulment of this very system of domination. Here, one cannot help but think of Fredric Jameson's contributions to Marxist criticism, although Szeman turns to a foundational text like "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" only to underscore the particular impasse in which this third mode is caught, unable to conceive of literature, and culture more generally, in terms of the purely "ideological" or "anti-ideological." And yet, for Szeman, what this impasse points to is a historical shift, which, rather than put an end to Marxist literary criticism altogether, has produced the conditions for a fourth as yet unnamed possibility.

What, then, would this fourth possibility look like? Neil Larsen offers one answer to this question in the form of a proposed method for critical theory that advances beyond the tenets of "ideology-critique." Here, "method" is quickly revealed as another word for Marxism's own recourse to immanent critique, a form of analysis undertaken from the perspective — or *standpoint* — of its object (whether capitalism, literature, or culture), whose immanent contradictions themselves become the point of departure for a dialectical approach that eradicates any notion of that object as a preexistent given. As such, it is a matter of refusing all transhistorical and transcendental authority, so that the general thrust of immanent critique is, in this sense, away from Kant and toward Hegel. Meanwhile, although the demand for immanence in explicitly Left critique finds its origins and most complete expression in Marx's *Capital*, Marxist theory and criticism — to say nothing of "theory" in general — has bothered little with the problem of standpoint in relation to cultural, and, in particular, literary objects (with the notable exceptions of Lukács and Adorno). What follows, therefore, is Larsen's attempt to specify the immanent critical standpoint of literature by way of an inquiry into the problem of teaching literary texts "theoretically." This, in

turn, allows for the articulation of a dialectical critique that dispenses with what he identifies as the "fallacy of application," an expectation that, of necessity, structures "theory" and "text" as antinomies, but which in so doing provides a means toward a more rigorous conceptualization of theoretical objects as "subject/objects." From this perspective, literary texts are not simply objects "out there" that "theory" acts upon, but are instead to be recognized, according to Larsen, as "no less the subjects of their own theorization"; in other words, every text always entails its own theorization. But, to function as the ground for "critique" (as against "interpretation" alone), this method must also provide a means toward understanding the relationship between this "subject/object" and the social totality. To this end, Larsen introduces the category of mimesis as that through which the subject meditates itself *consciously* and in such a way as to recall what Marx had described as the social action of commodities. Thus, whereas "value" in Marx constitutes the objective medium through which society produces and reproduces itself *unconsciously*, Larsen conceives "mimesis" as a similar form of social mediation that nevertheless remains available to consciousness. The standpoint of literature subsequently emerges as none other than "the contradiction between mimesis and value, or between reified and mimetic forms of objectivity," marking, at the same time, the limit of all reifying forms of consciousness.

We next turn to Mathias Nilges's reflections on Marxism and form today, and his critique of what might be described as regressions of the now. The question of form, of course, has underwritten various literary criticisms since at least the nineteenth century, proving no less central to the development of Marxist criticism from Adorno and Lukács, through Jameson and Schwarz, to the emergent mode of Marxian critique underlying Nilges's essay. Meanwhile, although the advent of deconstruction, new historicism, and the "cultural turn" appears to have dealt a death blow to many of the formalisms of the past, much commentary has recently been devoted to revivifying the category of form as a principal concern for literary criticism. And yet, as Nilges illustrates, this "new formalism" and the return to questions about literature, interpretation, and method simply bear witness to anxieties about the disintegration of a disciplinary identity that literary criticism struggles to maintain. Rather than result in a rigorous reassessment of formal analysis in relation to the literary, new formalism attempts to resurrect older concepts and methods of inquiry only to suggest that "[t]he way to fix the problems of the present ... is to move ahead into the past." Marxist criticism is just as surely the object of such nostalgic appropriations, which, "idealizing Adorno's or Lukács's notions of form and formalist methodology," "resurrects Marxist formalism as an antidialectical, a priori

concept.” But insofar as this ahistoricity not only harks back to the antinomies of bourgeois liberalism Lukács discovered in Kant, but also marks a “crisis of futurity on the level of thought” constitutive of neoliberalism today, the nostalgic impulse of contemporary literary criticism here becomes the impetus for a reengagement with Marxist formalism, a mode of formal analysis for which the way out of such conceptual dead ends has always been through history. For Nilges, then, the point is not simply to criticize new formalism as regressive or naive, but rather to grasp the shortcomings of contemporary literary criticism as an index of those mutations within the socioeconomic order that must, at the same time, be brought to bear on Marxist notions of form itself. The result is a critical method that extends and challenges Marxism’s attention to form via the economic model proposed by the regulation school; a method, moreover, that becomes indispensable to any attempt to comprehend the formal investments of contemporary authors like William Gibson and Kim Stanley Robinson. Identifying culture as the mediation between the social dimension and structure of contemporary capitalism, Nilges’s intervention not only “assigns formal change a vital function in the supersession of moments of structural crisis,” but also — and perhaps more importantly — demonstrates that today “culture has no other besides capital.”

Nicholas Brown’s contribution similarly seeks to reanimate the disruptive potential in culture, but does so by way of an extended reflection on the many ends of literature. The first of these “ends,” as Brown explains, is a logical one, constituted by the “contradictions internal to literature,” which “are immanently its end in that their resolution would entail its supersession,” but which “are also the precondition for it functioning.” For Brown, this is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the dialectical relationship between an anti-representational practice (the sublime) and a representational practice (allegory) that forms a dynamic central to literature; to abandon either, and thus supersede the productive impasse between these, necessarily involves doing something other than literature. This logical end, in turn, leads back to the very origins of the institution of literature, whose emergence at the turn of the nineteenth century (and specifically in Schlegel’s *Athenaeum* fragments) bears witness to the birth of not only literature in the modern sense, but also literary theory. But the further elaboration of this dynamic has little to do with defining the literary as such, and much more with demonstrating how literary criticism might be understood best as what Brown calls a “formal materialism,” a mode of analysis that “must be completed every time, and revised in light of, every time, a thing it waits for.” For reasons that become clear, the key to understanding this operation turns out to be none other than Hegel, although, importantly,

not the Hegel of system and stasis but rather the Hegel, who, providing a minimal framework, challenges us to take up the ceaseless labor of the negative. Indeed, to the extent that every object (literary, theoretical, and otherwise) entails its own theory — that is, “immanently contains its own theory” — the impulse toward systematization is everywhere denied. Not surprisingly, this formal materialism immediately finds a ready equivalent in Marxism, for which, Brown insists, it is “always this moment, this crisis, this problem that has to be understood, and not the system as a whole that has to be elaborated.” In this sense, just as there is no one Marxism that speaks to the totality of social relations across space and time, there is no one literary criticism that speaks to every text, which is just to say that insofar as they are formal materialisms, Marxism and literary criticism have no existence independent of their particular objects of analysis. Brown’s essay, then, provides us with some sense of what this might mean for a Marxist literary criticism by turning his attention to another end of literature: postmodernism, or, what at least one version of Marxist criticism has conceived as the real subsumption of (cultural) labor under capital. Reflecting on the mobilization of regulation theory found in the previous essay alongside Bourdieu’s distinction between the “restricted” and “general” art markets, Brown gestures toward an account that turns the ideology of postmodernism, heteronomy, on its head, and in so doing, reveals a logic of autonomy that short-circuits the movement from formal to real subsumption.

In Aisha Karim’s essay, the end of literature takes the form of a crisis of representation in Wole Soyinka’s novel, *Season of Anomy*. For while a number of critics have noted a tendency in Soyinka’s dramas to prioritize an individual will that resonates with the figure of the Yoruba god, Ogun, Karim’s essay argues that *Season of Anomy* marks a clear point of departure from the poetics and politics that underlie Soyinkan practice, producing what it conceives as the conditions of possibility for collective action. Written in the aftermath of the Biafran war of independence (1967-1970), *Season of Anomy* centers on the efforts of its protagonist, Ofeyi, to create a workers’ vanguard, if only to suggest, Karim notes, that it “has done away with ‘mere criticism’ and now seeks solution.” Importantly, this shift is not facilitated by the discovery of a more complete or appropriate image of such action, and in fact, Karim maintains that it is precisely the absence of an adequate figure for the collective — that is, the impossibility of representing some alternative — that opens up a new set of political possibilities in this particular art form. Thus, the agent of social transformation emerges in *Season of Anomy* as two possibilities: on one hand, “mass mobilization led by a vanguard” (Ofeyi), and on the other, “a band of enlightened few waging guerilla warfare, and acting on behalf of the community” (the Dentist). Soyinka’s novel,

nonetheless, ultimately regards each of these possibilities as solutions on the level of thought that cannot be executed on the plane of history, recognizing itself, in turn, as a “failed text.” At the same time, however, Karim argues that this failure leads to a realization with a distinctly political valence, the realization, in other words, that “real-world agents, its readers, must be interpolated into the world and the ethos of the novel.” This, then, is achieved by what is described here as the arrest of spectacle and spectator — a world to be transformed and the agent of change — as suggested, first, in a scene that plays out a containment of political possibility at the hands of the “culture industry,” and, second, in the novel’s depiction of a savage killing and dehumanization of an individual witnessed by the novel’s protagonist. Contrasting the “workers’ collective struggles with a passive relationship between the spectacle and the viewers,” and, in this sense, the reader, *Season of Anomy*, according to Karim, moves “from the activity of the characters in the novel, to the activity of the narrative voice, to the activity of its readers.” From this perspective, the solutions to the social and political impasses endemic to the world economic system, whose development takes on particularly intense and brutal forms in peripheral regions like post-independence Africa, are no longer to be found within the text, but rather — and in opposition to Soyinka’s dramatic output — outside of it.

Leerom Medovoi’s “The Biopolitical Unconscious” argues that ecocriticism “can and should be dialectically assimilated to the project of a Marxist literary and cultural criticism,” which, as other essays in this issue also stress, in turn also means that “Marxist literary criticism must be inflected in a new way.” Medovoi’s essay constitutes a forceful critique of dominant paradigms of ecocriticism that remain unable to transcend the imprecise attachment to what he describes as an idea of the environment posed in simplistically external and utterly “vacuous” relation to literature. In other words, Medovoi’s intervention bestows much-needed historical and material specificity upon ecocritical praxis that conceives of the environment merely as “sets of physical externalities to literature,” therefore “threaten[ing] to universalize [literature’s] worldliness to the point where it becomes untheorizable, and hence, unpoliticizable as well.” Furthermore, according to Medovoi, it seems necessary to surpass one of ecocriticism’s characteristic weaknesses: “its utter incapacity to theorize itself as anything other than a *thematic* criticism that passes ethical judgment on the depictions of either nature or built environments.” Proper ecocritical practice, “operates through a kind of contradiction between the relentless universalism of its alleged frame (the limitless domains of environment or nature) and the specificity of the ‘externality’ that actually animates it, and which makes it discernible as a matter of politics: the framing discourse of an

anthropogenically produced crisis of earthly life.” Medovoi insists that the environment must be understood in the context of capitalism’s regulation, that is, as a “biopolitical element in the mode of production” that ultimately registers primarily on the level of form. Probing ecocriticism’s limits, in particular its troubled relation to history and historicity, as well as science and materiality, he argues that “historical materialist ecocriticism must study literature’s relationship, not to our ideas about the environment, but rather to the *material relations* that have historically produced the ‘environment’ as an operative biopolitical category.” Rigorously historicizing the materially determined connection between literature and the environment, Medovoi posits the “‘population/environment/capital’ triad” at the heart of his Marxist ecocritical methodology that ultimately gestures toward one of Marxist criticism’s persistent and characteristic concerns: “how does the ultimate horizon of human history — the mode of production — pass into textuality?”

In the final article of this issue, Sarah Brouillette takes on a concept that serves as a valuable bookend to the preceding macro-discussions surrounding Marxist literary critique: creativity. In her ambitious essay, Brouillette illustrates that creativity as a concept shares much logical ground with concepts discussed in previous essays (theory, Marxism, form, etc.) in that its logic needs to be evaluated dialectically and its function evaluated in specific and ever-changing relation to historical and material structures. Maintaining this issue’s commitment to the dialectic as the only permanent core of Marxist critique, Brouillette’s examination of creativity in the current conjuncture moves beyond the two main theoretical positions on this question by working through not only their assumed differences, but, more interestingly, their surprising similarities. Contemporary capitalism, an increasing number of scholars argue, has shifted its primary site of production from the factory toward the mind or “mass intellect.” In fact, Brouillette shows, critics have been split into two main camps on this issue, one joyfully greeting new possibilities for preserving and furthering individual creativity, the other lamenting the intensification of exploitation (though, as Brouillette reminds us, this new exploitation is frequently perceived as its opposite). Whether celebration of immaterial labor by “creative class enthusiasts” or critique by “post-operaismo” scholars, however, the interesting basis for critique is, according to Brouillette, the common ground, or rather the shared analytical shortcomings that connect both positions. That is, the question Brouillette pursues is not how we evaluate this connection between creative expression and work (is it good and a way to further and preserve the individual creative impulse, or is it bad and a dystopian case of colonization in which the factory now encompasses the mind?). Rather, she proposes, the truly rigorous questions to ask are those that push us toward an analysis of

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the structural logic of this merger between creativity and capital. At the center of Brouillette's structural analysis stands the heuristic figure of the "artist-author," pointing toward both the particular issue of the social labor of creativity and the larger, structural issue: what is the connection between capital, creativity, and social structures, and how does this issue force us to develop adequately complicated, connected accounts of subjectivity? Ultimately, Brouillette argues, both dominant theoretical strands that examine immaterial and creative labor fall short on one crucial level: both advocates of the creative class and critics of immaterial and creative labor present us with de-historicized notions of subjectivity. "Lost in both sets of analyses is, thus," according to Brouillette, "any sense of the contradictory, material, and constitutive histories of artists' labor and of images of artists at work that subtend the conception of subjectivity they maintain." There is, therefore, a distinct sense of urgency regarding the need to develop Marxist analyses of creative labor and of the connection between capital and aesthetic production in the contemporary conjuncture, analyses that account for "the historicity and the particular emergence and spread of the vocabulary that makes contemporary labor an act of self-exploration, self-expression, and self-realization," thus fulfilling an "essential task in denaturalizing the character of contemporary capitalism."

Mathias Nilges and Emilio Sauri, guest editors

**The Left and Marxism in Eastern Europe:
An Interview with Gáspár Miklós Tamás**

Imre Szeman

Interviewer's Note

Gáspár Miklós Tamás (b. 1948) has long been one of the most important political voices in Europe. Trained as a philosopher and author of numerous scholarly books and articles, his is a life that has been intimately bound up with the political history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A prominent dissident in the 1980s and a parliamentarian in the first years of the Hungarian government following the end of Communism, Tamás has moved increasingly to the Left over the past two decades. Throughout his life, he has retained an unrelenting commitment to social and political justice, which he pursues both through his theoretical and political writings (he is a regular contributor to the *TLS* and to the most important Hungarian dailies) and his direct involvement in political action — a way of living one's beliefs that should stand as model for the Left today.

Though his work has been translated into numerous languages (including English), his ideas and positions still deserve to be better known in the English-speaking world than they are at present. An interlocutor in recent debates with Slavoj Žižek, and a figure once described as Hungary's Václav Havel, it is likely Tamás's commitment to the politics of a part of the world sometimes off the radar that has made him less of a global public intellectual than one might expect. This interview offers an introduction to and overview of the life of a remarkable thinker and activist; it serves, too, to highlight the ways in which the political and social dramas of a small country like Hungary can offer meaningful and important insights into broader forces shaping the entire globe.

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This interview was conducted in February 2010. All explanatory notes are my own.

The Left and Marxism in Eastern Europe: An Interview with Gáspár Miklós Tamás

Can you tell us about your family background and education?

I spent roughly the first half of my life (from 1948 to 1978) in Transylvania, Romania, in the city of Cluj/Kolozsvár. This may be something incomprehensible for your readers; to wit, a life at the back of beyond which was, at the same time, a life intertwined with the grand drama (and the farce) of the twentieth century. In a way, I was fortunate to be the child of a communist couple — my father was a writer and journalist, my mother a hospital nurse, both from the Hungarian minority there (which in my town was a majority at that time), my mother also Jewish — who both spent long years in prison before 1945. They came from the old underground movement, with habits and convictions pretty atypical for their time and place. My father did housework and looked after me, something absolutely unimaginable for the average man of his generation. My mother was seven years older, and there was between them a camaraderie only known to old-style socialists. Conversation was always “on a high level,” something that was not limited to intellectuals. Some of our acquaintances, committed workers of the old school, would not fritter away their time in discussing the weather or football; they would not stoop to anything inferior to world affairs, art, or space travel. I was raised on Goethe, Walter Scott, Victor Hugo, Tolstoy, Maupassant — and Brahms, Schumann, Mahler. Those were their tastes. When I was ill, my father read to me the long nineteenth-century epics of Vörösmarty and Arany.¹ And wonderful Soviet children’s books. In the midst of dictatorship and upheaval and scarcity, we had an almost Victorian childhood. No “youth culture,” no rock music, no travel — just a lot of books and music lessons and walks in the park.

My parents and most of their friends — tied together by their shared memories of oppression and persecution before the war — had been considerably disappointed in *their* regime by the time I came to think of politics beyond romantic picture books about the October Revolution. As internationalist Bolsheviks and ethnic Hungarians, they were shocked by the unexpected nationalism of the regime: by its mendacity, its economic failure, rule of the secret police, and idiotic censorship, combined with the nauseating sycophancy of the “new culture.” Some of them went to prison again. What is difficult to explain today is that in spite of this they felt part of a huge historical canvas — a history not necessarily with a happy ending —

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and did not believe that they had to renounce the only cause worth living for: the liberation of humankind.

Even if this latest attempt was obviously a total front, they would read their Brecht and Sartre, follow developments in Guatemala and Indonesia, and try to understand what was going on in the Soviet Union — by the 1960s considered an enemy by the Romanian party leadership seeking independence with a chauvinist and anti-minorities coloring — from books now forgotten, such as Konstantin Paustovsky’s fascinating memoirs.²

I may have been a provincial — and I was — but life never felt provincial.

I looked upon my parents with some condescension. Their revolutionary world was imaginary. Their Party inaugurated a system that was repressive, dumb, and boring, past any salvaging; it was scary, but it still could not be taken seriously. Its official art and philosophy were ridiculous with its patriotic phrase-mongering. It was all about stupid old power. But what was *not* my parents’ and, in general, the old commie intellectuals’ microcosm — with its universalism and its genuine concern with the downtrodden, their puritanism and altruism, and their passion for learning — was just a second-rate petty bourgeois boys’ life of sports, girls, syrupy Italian pop songs (remember Domenico Modugno and Adriano Celentano?) and pointless small talk, laughing at the expense of our classmates who happened to be fat or who had a slight speech impediment.

School was nothing. Education was at home, at the theater, at the concert hall, at the violin and piano lessons, and then at the public library. I could talk properly only to old — well, much younger than I am now but they seemed to be, and behaved as, old — men and women, who gave me *Wages, Price and Profit* or Goethe’s Italian travels and Dickens and Gottfried Keller and Stendhal for my birthday. I listened to radio plays on the wireless. It was the great season for *Hörspiele* [radio plays], and we could receive by then Radio Budapest, which was not only the center of our national culture but also, somehow, “the West.”

Then I went to university, studied classics and philosophy, married very early, got into political trouble before graduating, became assistant editor at a Hungarian-language literary weekly, published philosophical and literary essays, was subjected to protracted harassment by the secret police, was fired and blacklisted from publishing — but my Descartes book [*Descartes a módszerről*, 1977] came out somehow all the same — and finally was forced out of Romania. I did not want to go to the West, although it would have been easier than Hungary, where my bad reputation preceded me. I was a Hungarian writer and they still had to throw me out of Eastern Europe. “They” still want to, but I don’t think they will finally succeed. But “they”

now are coming closer to that than the combined regimes of Ceaușescu and Kádár ever did. In a few years, I had become an embittered enemy of a system which did not appear to have one single redeeming feature.

It was wonderful to be rid of that hellhole, Transylvania. But it is of course my *Heimat*, and in spite of having been persecuted as an ethnic Hungarian, I feel complete solidarity with Romania, a country tortured and humiliated. Ethnic nationalism — at least regarding Hungarians — has since abated, and I have new fraternal relationships with Romanians. I feel at home there again. I even modestly participate in developments there, and this is a source of great happiness.

What was your experience of intellectual and political life under the regime of János Kádár (leader of Hungary from 1956 to 1988)?

My experiences were bound to be atypical. First, I was a Hungarian émigré (and immigrant, a politically-exiled person) in Hungary, surely something anomalous. At the moment I arrived in Budapest, I joined the “democratic opposition,” the loose dissident network. I already knew its leading lights from previous visits and was always considered their Transylvanian ally. I had to be careful at the beginning until I received my papers, my citizenship, my work permit, and so on, so at first I published in samizdat only pseudonymously, but I came out into the open after the Jaruzelski coup in Poland (December 13, 1981) and was accordingly fired from the philosophy department of Budapest University [*Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem*].

But of course the specific preoccupations of the system’s adversaries should not be generalized. The mainstream culture of these years was a blend of extreme, indeed quite outlandish skepticism, and an efflorescence of creative energy. It was also very conservative politically. All elements of a traditional leftist cast of mind had vanished. The reaction to the ongoing crisis of the regime was not directed against its decadence but against its distant revolutionary origins. A massive hostility against the features of a socialist cultural “hegemony” — commitment, altruism, solidarity with the oppressed, the primacy of the Idea — had been analyzed as parts of the doctrinaire, “totalitarian” mindset, fanaticism, and dogmatism, so much so that the most admired critic of the time told me he hated *Fidelio* as it was “a bloody Bolshevik opera.” The best-loved thinkers of this era were Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Max Weber. When I was still teaching, I taught German romantic philosophy from [Johann Georg] Hamann to Schelling, including Franz von Baader and Novalis. The “communist” party had (?) abandoned “ideology” in favor of “professionalism,” pragmatism, and technocratic verbiage, as it did not need and did not want mobilization.

It must be understood — as I have shown in my essay, “Marx on 1989” (forthcoming in *Angelaki*) — that the Party (the one party with a capital P) in all Soviet-style societies was organized (and this was its hidden, inner principle) not territorially, but in the workplace, thus dissolving the classic social democratic dichotomy between trade unions and the political party, which is, of course, the secret of “reformism”: the inability of social democracy to address power. The Party was present at the point of production (just as its main revolutionary rival, the workers’ councils), unlike bourgeois electoral parties based in constituencies (ridings, electoral districts) that comprise people’s homes — that is, parties which appeal to their supporters and voters as consumers, home-dwellers, and opinion-holders, i.e., private citizens. Although the Party had long given up on socialism, its “deep structure” remained revolutionary since it was still intimately linked to the working class and sustained an egalitarian drive. The party cells in factories were foci of power, social services, education, and militant mobilization: they fought for influence with the technical management. Party secretaries of the large enterprises were the backbone of the regime; higher education, hiring, and promotion quotas favored persons of working-class origin. Patronage exercised by workplace organizations assured for a while a countervailing force, an ever-recurrent trend of strong upward mobility for sectors of the industrial proletariat, against the increasing inequalities of a state capitalist system (a class society, after all) with its inherent hierarchies and undeniable exploitation, oppression, and cultural rigidity. This countervailing force necessitated permanent mobilization, which, in the absence of genuine socialist goals, had to be moral. Well, it was precisely this which had been dispensed with in the 1970s. With the silencing and expulsion of the Lukács School, who engaged in the creation of an East European New Left in 1973 — and the nearly concomitant decomposition of the *Praxis* group in Yugoslavia — the last remnants of Marxist research, critique, and debate had been annihilated.³

Instead of mobilization, the Party sought neutralization, and it had begun to define “success” exactly like its Western counterpart, the welfare state: the rise of real wages, economic growth, and the expansion of consumption and consumer choice, leisure, entertainment, and the rest. In this, it offered competition (instead of an alternative) to the West, and lost. It was the Party itself that identified terror campaigns with revolutionary fervor. Since it had identified Stalinism with revolution, de-Stalinization meant inner peace, lack of *any* ideology and, naturally, market reforms.

But there were quite a number of Hungarian peculiarities. First, the memory of 1956 (centered on the idea of national independence and a competitive electoral democracy) and the quite exceptional magnitude of the

Shoah on Hungarian soil had made the Hungarian Party leadership, like its East German counterpart, extremely cautious in the replacement of Marxism-Leninism with nationalism. The savage nationalism known in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Albania, Russia, China, and Vietnam in the period — which gave each its oppressive edge — was largely absent in Hungary, so there was no official culture with its scary and tedious rituals, which meant fewer taboos, less censorship, more openness, and more fun. Together with higher living standards, the absence of ideological coercion, and a certain undemanding, sly hedonism, Hungary became the envy of the Eastern Bloc. People could travel (I couldn't because I was a dissident, but in the neighboring countries only dissidents traveled — with a one-way ticket to Western exile) and the press was informative and lively (by that time pretty pro-capitalist, extolling discretely the attractions of the West; the media hero was certainly not Brezhnev or Andropov, but first Willy Brandt, and then Mrs. Thatcher).

It was the Party's pride that we had excellent literature, a varied and lively arts scene, and high-quality social sciences. Aestheticism filled the gaping hole where revolutionary dogma lay buried. It was all very nice, but desperately empty. The expression "reforms" had already in 1970s started to mean what it does today: market reforms, anti-egalitarian measures, and a reduction of state interference, redistribution, and planning. That, in contrast to Stalinism (terror and the pains of any accumulation, period), appeared progressive, modern, and liberating. Socialism meant the grey, terrifying, repressive *past*, robbing it from its traditional advantage: the representation of Newness. A true end to hierarchy — that is, the end to all organized society, to all civilization as we knew it — was the great temptation, the great diabolical hope of communism, a future without coerced labor. If communism is not future in some sense, then it is nothing. And this is precisely what it had become in the 1970s and 1980s: nothing.

The Party had merrily acquiesced in this. Its leaders thought they had fulfilled their "progressive" obligations if most people were relatively and comparatively well-fed and if they were on the whole satisfied with television programming. But it was not only they who were annoyed by dissident criticism of the inequalities and human rights violations of their system. Dissidents reproached them for censorship, for the lack of a critical *Öffentlichkeit* [public sphere], for stultifying conformism, and for the lack of genuine and free political self-organization. The Party could recognize the leftist bent of dissident criticism and hated in it the "contestation," the inherent questioning of the legitimacy of their rule on grounds uncomfortably familiar. We dissidents annoyed the hell out of the quite apolitically conservative beneficiaries of our modest consumerism and pragmatism, who

identified social criticism as "leftist," hence "communist," hence virtually and potentially "Stalinist" or "totalitarian." Like conservatives always and everywhere, they hated philosophy or theory of any sort. Good conservatives always prefer *doxa* to *episteme*, which is why all good philosophy is subversive. Dissidents were vaguely on the left ... but they had no power! But what could be the sense of being on the left in these circumstances? The professed aims of the Left could not be taken seriously by adult people who saw "socialism" as an effective trick in getting a lot of power and effectively legitimizing the sacrifices needed for modernization and rapid development.

The lack of cynicism in dissidents, philosophers, sociologists, avant-garde artists, activists, troublemakers, hell-raisers, and whistle-blowers — the deadly earnestness my present readers confront in any Marxist or anarchist meeting in a basement near you — has made us extremely unpopular in middle-class and intellectual milieu desirous of something lighter, more ironical, more melancholic, and more pleasant. Light-hearted sexual license, perfectly compatible with patriarchy and nihilism, is not identical with the serious and high ideal of "free love" between equals, with its necessarily complex rules of engagement; behavior preempting a future emancipation in a still-repressive society can be exploitative. All radicals know how sexual and other emotional predators can exploit the inherent egalitarianism and trusting openness of the milieu. In our case, it was not only emotional parasites of many genders, but also secret agents, *délateurs et mouchards* ("denouncers" and "spies" is too weak: polite English, unlike working-class slang, does not have an authentic police-state vocabulary, you lucky stiffs).

The Party's policy of demobilization was quite successful. As long as the living standards were improving, the populace was quiescent. However, the center of politics shifted from the Party organizations to the network of reformist technocrats in the Finance Ministry, the National Planning Authority, the National Bank, the appointed reform *quangos* [quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations], and the various social-science projects under the aegis of the Academy of Sciences. Through the enforcement of loud manifestations of political loyalty and verbal revolutionary fervor the mainstream was characterized by apolitical, technocratic talk. The regime was more and more dependent on Western loans, and therefore had to make concessions to Western political sensibilities and tastes: it had to go soft on repression, especially on the routine persecution of intellectuals. Not only dissidents, but old-fashioned Marxist-Leninists were reprimanded, downgraded, pensioned off, or fired. The regime wanted to get rid of all manner of politics. After the first wave of pay cuts, the working class started fermenting, so the cautious leadership —

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unlike in other “real socialist” countries — slowed austerity policies through the accumulation of new debt and the brutal reduction of new investments. The Party feared the proletariat and did not want committed socialist intellectuals who might join in eventual protests.

Thus, it had gradually lost everything from its “workerist” legacy and plebeian identity. Little wonder, then, that nobody had lifted a little finger in the defense of “real socialism.” In its effort to satisfy and pacify everybody and reach consensus through enforced and generalized conformism, the successor regime to the October Revolution ceased to represent anybody except the narrow interests and the self-preservation instinct of its bureaucratic-technocratic elites. Its main weapon, the security apparatus, failed to organize — or even to contemplate — resistance to the impending liberal turn; like the leadership itself, it focused only its leading members’ survival and on accommodation with the new dispensation. This is not to say that the Party and the security apparatuses had forgotten or completely relinquished their authoritarian habits and routines, and did not try to control the transition; but on the whole, they did not succeed.

A great deal has been made of the presence of former Party figures at all echelons of the new institutions. Their presence is a fact. But it would be asinine to think that a wholly different system, a wholly different system of governance, has nothing new because some commanding posts are still manned by formerly powerful persons. Anyway, the great winner — in terms of profit — is not the “nomenklatura bourgeoisie,” although most of them are quite wealthy either as highly placed civil servants, or as business people, or as mafiosi, but the transnational corporations and the power networks that can be loosely called “Western.” These corporations were not interested in the re-launch of obsolete rust-belt industries; they have bought state-owned firms for a song, closed them down, and inundated domestic consumer markets with junk from their old suppliers. Where would people fired from their old workplaces find the money to make these consumer markets lucrative? This is not a question contemporary capitalists ask themselves.

The worldwide disintegration of labor had taken the form of political transition in Eastern Europe. It was the irrefutable end of the proletariat as a political subject, even mythologically, and it was the end of its — surely fraudulent and vacuous — representation. Its end was soon followed by that of its historical rival: social democracy in the Western liberal states. The rise of China has shown that this representation can be continued, and that the name of this continuation is capitalism.

The Left and Marxism in Eastern Europe 21

Can you remind us about the events of 1988-89 as they unfolded? Westerners will have some idea about the role played in the collapse of Communism by (for example) the lifting of travel restrictions by the Hungarian government in January 1988. They are far less likely to have a sense of the significance of the activities of opposition movements whose activities precipitated the resignation of Kádár in May 1988, the reburial of Imre Nagy in Heroes’ Square, and so on. As you’ve pointed out in your own writing, the West now takes credit for a political change that couldn’t possibly have come about without significant internal opposition. What imperatives drove this opposition? And what expectations did it have for the future of Hungary?

The “events” as you are calling them by an appositely neutral term, were, however illusory, momentous and quite wonderful. Illusory, as they were grounded on totally unanalyzed and unreflective notions such as “democracy,” by which most people understood political pluralism, basic rights and liberties, and an end to Soviet occupation. They have also involved what we could a little grandiloquently call “the politics of truth,” which is more than the suppression of censorship: it was a call for a merciless exposition of the hidden history of crimes committed by the dictatorship. The effective result of this varies from country to country. Hungary is perhaps the worst culprit. Here not even the secret service files had been made accessible to the public and to research. Parliament has been tergiversating for twenty years now, and the public is apathetic, believing — perhaps rightly — that after two decades of special services treatment the documents will be partial, truncated, maybe even forged.

As to our role in the changes: it was of course not the merit of dissidents that things had changed, but it was certainly our merit that we persisted and were there when the events started happening owing to various circumstances.

The chief honor pertains, of course, to the Polish workers. Even they, after uncovering the astonishing fact that unlike 1953, 1956, 1968, the Soviet Union was not any longer willing to intervene on behalf of its satellite regimes and that the Party did not resist, were surprised that the system (in this case, the simplified French term, *le pouvoir*, makes perfect sense) had to save itself through a recourse to the army, something fundamentally contrary to the essence of a Leninist system. However, even the Polish workers’ movement was quite exhausted by 1989; the Round table talks were felt by many as sign of a defeat.⁴ The program of *Solidarność* had changed 180 degrees. An orthodox blend of workers’ councils, self-management (the slogan was a Self-Managing Workers’ Republic), and a robust view of

equality were turned into a characteristic neoconservative creed. David Ost has shown how belief in Western-style modernity motivated Polish workers' resistance leaders not only to accept, but to promote policies detrimental to themselves, destroying thereby their own movement.⁵ In a few years, Polish workers would vote for former "communist" apparatchiki, who later were to be wiped out of Parliament not so much for their neoconservative policies, but for their mind-boggling corruption.

In East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and a few other places, there was genuine elation, caused partly by the incredible ease with which the much-feared dictatorial powers crumbled. I, for one, was happy. I was not a real leader of the movement, but I certainly was its main orator. From 1988 to 1991, I must have given about two hundred speeches. One did not sleep, and one didn't, ever, shut up. It was a rush of liberty and — as always when people are given to understand that they matter — there was an outbreak of collective imagination, intelligence, and inspiration. It was as though we were all speaking in tongues: I remember staying up late in a God-forsaken, poor, and cold Hungarian village discussing Tocqueville, Lord Acton, John Stuart Mill, comparing the U.S. Supreme Court to the German Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe. The very same people are now probably watching tabloid television and talking about soccer. It is a pity — a thousand pities. One could see what people — given motivation and hope — are capable of. This is perhaps the most lasting legacy of 1989: the experience of real masses of people involved in political thinking, from close reasoning to flamboyant passion and, surprisingly, fueled by an unquenchable thirst for facts. Who are we, and what is the point of our existence? This is what nations are thinking about during revolutions. Apart, that is, from falling in and out of love with an astonishing speed. I was faithful to somebody at the time, but I was painfully aware of what was going on around me. Joy.

It is quite terrible to contemplate that all this is lost; even the memory of it is barely shimmering.

The reburial of Imre Nagy is remembered, of course; it is TV footage often repeated. But Imre Nagy and his comrades are not liked at all: they had been Muscovite commies, after all, martyrs or not. At the same time, the traitor and hangman, János Kádár, is considered to have been the greatest Hungarian statesman of the modern age, by people on the Right as well as the Left. In a way, they're right. Kádár was a conservative and nothing else, with a lot of blood on his safe pair of hands; his counter-revolutionary political character is a perfect match for contemporary attitudes. Philistine, safe, authoritarian, caring only about living standards and public order, he is our ideal now. By the time the Committee for Historical Justice had

organized Nagy's reburial, horse-trading was taking the place of genuine popular action. I vastly preferred the same day a year earlier, in 1988, when we were beaten up and arrested by police for remembering on 16 June the thirtieth anniversary of Nagy's and his comrades' execution.

Can you tell us about *Beszélő* and the *Social Contract* program?

I was not an editor of *Beszélő*, only a frequent writer for it, nor an author of the *Social Contract* program; moreover, I have criticized the latter in another samizdat publication. It seemed to me insufficiently radical at the time and, especially, it gave very little room to people's spontaneous activity. It was also embarrassingly close at times to the discourse of the Party reformers. All this is insignificant now. The differences between the dominant current within dissidence, "radical reformism," and the others, pale now in significance.

Obviously, dissidence as such was on the whole to the left of its successor organization, the Free Democratic Alliance, that has since lurched towards neoconservative economic policies — urged by many people, including myself then — while remaining radically liberal in trying to preserve its formerly quite radical human rights and civil liberties agenda. But this, as it turned out, did not include trade union rights.

Could you give us an overview of your involvement in Alliance of Free Democrats (*Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége* — or SZDSZ)? What were the political commitments of the party? How did these change in the decade following 1989? What caused you to leave the party in 2001?

My own role was that of an orator, public speaker, and an effective writer for the cause rather than proper leadership work as it was perceived then. Looking back, it appears that my revolutionary temperament was more important than any doctrinaire position I may have embraced at the time. Whatever I might have wanted to do, one was confined to the life-and-death struggle against extreme nationalism and growing racism. The right-wing government of the period had supplied (illegally and secretly) the nascent Croatian separatist armed forces with Kalashnikovs. I spoke against that in Parliament, and I was declared, of course, to be a traitor to the nation. The definition of a good patriot, then, ought to have been to be an anti-Serb chauvinist.

In 1994, I did not stand for Parliament again, resigned my responsibilities in the party as well, went to teach and to do research to the U.S. and Western Europe again (Chicago, *Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin*,

Dickinson College, Georgetown, Yale, New School), and started to reconsider my positions. It was not only the abysmal economic and social failure of the East European “regime change” that made me change my mind after having changed the regime, but philosophical difficulties I always had with liberalism. What Habermas calls, following Böckenförde, a problem of the pre-political foundations of a liberal state, gave me a lot of headache. The problem can be solved in the manner of Leo Strauss — a thinker I still admire enormously — in the traditional (albeit radically modernized) theological way only, thereby restricting or annihilating the Enlightenment aspects I was not politically willing to do. You can see that any honest conservative re-foundation of “democratic” society, as in the case of Simone Weil’s London writings (in fact, her testament) will have to ban pluralism and the autonomy of the subject; it would lead to the self-annihilation of the Western liberal state (Simone Weil proposed that after the war, the multi-party system should not be restored and a truth censorship imposed on the media) in spite of both thinkers’ deep commitment against fascism and national socialism. There was no way out towards the Right. In my life, too, the moment had arrived to turn to Marx.

And let it be said quite clearly: I am blaming myself and my friends for having helped to introduce an inhuman, unjust, unfair, inefficient, anti-egalitarian, fraudulent, and hypocritical system that is in no way at all superior to its predecessor, which was awful enough. We’ve been criminally blind and thought, immaturely and selfishly, like many generations of victors before us, that our political success and fame meant a better deal for all. Ridiculous.

What has happened to the SZDSZ in recent years? At present it is a very weak third party after the MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party, *Magyar Szocialista Párt*) and the Fidesz-KDNP Coalition (Alliance of Young Democrats / *Fiatalkor Demokraták Szövetsége* — Christian Democratic People’s Party / *Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt*), with only eighteen seats (out of a total of 386) in Parliament. Is it a spent force politically?

It is. It did not make it to the European Parliament in June 2009 and it has practically ceased to exist. It’s an ugly end — corruption scandals and the like. Liberal anti-communism is meaningless. The majority of a “natural” liberal basis (young professionals, civil servants, intellectuals, etc.) is now clustering around the extreme right.

Can you give me some sense of the current state of Hungarian politics? To an outsider, it is an incredibly confusing political landscape: the

MSZP (the former Communists, one has to remember) have pushed a ferociously neoliberal agenda, which in turn has led the right-wing opposition to take up defense of some social programs that the government has attacked, less out of ideological conviction than political opportunism. The typical valences by which we make sense of political systems seem to be deranged — unless, of course, one places virtually all of the current parties in the government on the right-hand side of the spectrum.

But I sense that things are even worse than the total absence of a Left might suggest. The dominant attitude of the public in Hungary today seems to be that the entire political system is illegitimate and irredeemably so. Former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány’s (2004-2009) reign was characterized by a series of shocking scandals, including the release in September 2006 of an audio recording from a closed-door meeting in which he is heard admitting that “we have obviously been lying for the last one and a half to two years”; his resignation on March 28, 2009 in response to the collapse of the Hungarian economy — a flight from political responsibility under the guise of taking the blame for the situation — has hurt more than helped. Is there any faith left at all in politics in Hungary?

No, no such faith is available, but there was not much of it to begin with. The public is bitter, disappointed, and angry. There is fundamental doubt concerning institutions. The Web — this fertile ground for urban legends, superstition, hate propaganda, and sheer lunacy — has almost completely supplanted traditional media, which were in decline anyway, and a both cynical and hysterical unreason reigns supreme. This is not unique to Hungary, as you know.

What forces have shaped and defined social, cultural, and political life in Hungary since 1989? You wrote in *Magyar Hírlap* in 2006 that “Hungary’s new civic society despises civic democracy.” What did you mean by that?

Well, this is an instructive case of the semantic, symbolic, and political differences between the Anglophone world and the rest. You can also translate this sentence as “Hungary’s new bourgeois society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*] despises bourgeois democracy [*bürgerliche Demokratie*].” And this, again, is not exclusively Hungarian: it is valid to the entire ex-Soviet world from Berlin to Vladivostok. First, East Europeans have no respect and no understanding for a bourgeois, liberal, Enlightenment past that was never

entirely theirs. Bourgeois modernity was foreign. It came mostly from the Judeo-German, closed towns. It was defended by imperial and royal absolutism, not by popular movements. Then, modernity was imposed from above by communists kept in power by the new imperial masters, the Soviet Union. And last, it was 1989, which, instead of a new kind of “good society,” proposed the “inevitable”: cuts, cuts, and more cuts. This was the radiant future we promised.

Second, we have compromised the idea of freedom for a lifetime by calling an end to egalitarian state redistribution to be tantamount to liberty. It seemed that oligarchic rule, fake electoralism, a yellow press, a precipitous decline in culture and education, a revival of authoritarianism and racism/ethnicism, misogyny, and homophobia were lesser evils — like the Stalinists used to say, “transitory phenomena” to be cured by “market spontaneity” and the creativity of capital. The myth of “civil society” can be very pernicious as it presupposes a society based on voluntary acts of contractual equity, forgetting that the main example of this is the labor contract. The hidden hypothesis here is that labor is contractual like any other act of exchange; hence exploitation is an expression of freedom.

Who can badmouth East Europeans, new to market capitalism of the last variety, if they do not believe in all this nonsense? Why should they?

What forms of alternative politics or social movements exist in Hungary at the present time? In 2007, a colleague and I conducted a series of interviews with university students in Budapest that probed in part their view of political possibilities in the present and in the future. All expressed extreme cynicism about politics; all seemed resigned to life under neoliberalism, especially in a small state like Hungary, which (they felt) had little economic and political autonomy; and none had any sense of the activities or even existence of alternative political movements. Are these students blind to new political developments or is there currently a political vacuum on the left?

This is indeed so. But this does not mean that we should allow this situation to persist. There are promising beginnings of a *New New Left* in Eastern Europe, at least intellectually; Hungary is a temporary exception. But it is coming here, too.

One of the exciting developments of recent years has been the creation of the Green Left (*Zöld Baloldal*) in Hungary. You were leading the list of candidates for this party in the June 2009 European Parliamentary elections. Can you talk about your shift from the SZDSZ to the Green Left? And what are your hopes for the party?

Since you’ve asked this question, a court decision has prevented us from standing in spite of initial media successes and good reactions to our initiative. The appeals are running in the courts, but the European elections are over. The party will try to participate in the national elections in April 2010, but I won’t be a candidate this time.

This group is a coalition of various left *groupuscules*, including unreconstructed old-style communists, Greens, some people from the minuscule far left, social democrats, sections of the anti-globalization movement (also very small), pacifists, feminists — the usual suspects. We have no money and help from abroad is forbidden, although we have the moral support of the European Left Party, led by *Die Linke* in Germany and the *Parti Communiste Français* (though the latter are not exactly my favorites). I am not sure we’ll be able to stand. The conditions are forbidding: we need to gather tens of thousands of supporting signatures in an atmosphere of generalized fear. Also, I have doubts about some components of the movement. I accept being the public face of these groups, and I am formally the chairman of its advisory committee, but there is no great activity to see.

Last summer was exhilarating. We gave a sign that the Left is here and won’t go away just like that, so we weren’t wasting our time. This national election will result in a triumph of the nationalist Right, including the fascists — the “Jobbik” party, meaning loosely “the better part,”⁶ openly siding with paramilitary and sometimes with terrorist organizations, allegedly engaging in racial killings of Roma and attempts on the life of socialist and liberal politicians. The charges are now being investigated by the public prosecutor; the main suspect now in preliminary custody will be an “independent” candidate supported by this party.

You now describe yourself as a Marxist, with plans for a Marxist theory group in Hungary in addition to your ongoing work as a writer and political commentator from the Left. Why Marx now? In Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, Marxist ideas and theories were hard-pressed to survive their connection to state socialism and the elimination of courses in Marxist-Leninism in universities. Even though the economic collapse has discredited neoliberal ideology — at least its most

extreme variants — Marxism in the region is still linked with totalitarianism.

Indeed, as you know, there are ongoing attempts to formalize the connection between communism and fascism as little more than variations on the same totalitarian theme. Budapest's Terror House Museum makes no distinction between Bela Kun's 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, Admiral Horthy's regency, fascism, and post-War communism — it's all just "terror" by comparison to liberal capitalism. The "Prague Declaration" announced by the Czech Senate in June 2008 calls for the European Parliament to recognize communism and Nazism as aspects of Europe's totalitarian legacy. In Hungary, the Supreme Court has recently rescinded the sentence of one of the police officers who shot and killed communist and anti-fascist Endre Ságvári in 1944 — a purely symbolic move whose implications for the Left are chilling.

What work do you hope that Marx and Marxism can do in this context?

To all this we may add that the Romanian Parliament has promulgated a solemn statement, based on a report by a committee appointed by the Romanian president, chaired by Vladimir Tismăneanu, professor of government at the University of Maryland, which states that communism is a crime against humanity or some such thing. (Professor Tismăneanu — witness his articles and interviews in the Romanian press — believes that people such as Slavoj Žižek or myself are a major danger to human freedom.) Similar decisions by the Polish Supreme Court are forthcoming. In Hungary, the hammer and sickle, the red star, the swastika, and the arrow-cross (the coat-of-arms of the Hungarian Nazis) are all banned as "totalitarian symbols." The European Court of Human Rights has exempted the red star and the hammer and sickle from the Hungarian ban, but the Hungarian state refused to comply.

Still, after all this, when a few of us have announced our allegiance — which, of course, includes a repudiation of "real socialism" of all stripes — our audiences weren't on the whole upset, but rather incredulous! Not so much for the apparent reason of the folly of joining the defeated (I, for one, feel defeated in my former avatar of an Old Whig, but certainly not as a revolutionary socialist) or of confessing to a belief compromised by the terrible things done in its name, but for the mere implausibility of having social and political principles of any kind at all! Most people don't regard Marxism as criminal, but as naïve. But this is people's opinion of liberalism or Christianity as well. Any view seemingly contradicting individual or collective selfishness or self-regard seems incredible. As I personally cannot

be accused of any collusion with the former regime (except, rarely and absurdly, by very young Nazi slanderers who cannot spell "Capital") and as I have no reason for apologia in this respect, critics are content to call me out of date, as they fail to follow intellectual fashions that have reverted to the pre-1989 normality in the West: radical chic is on the left again. All this does not prevent the radical right to bay for my blood, but they have been doing this since I was a rather conservative liberal. This has nothing to do with my substantive view; nobody who is not an ethnicist can be exempt. It is even a smidgen nicer to be a Marxist than a liberal: at least I am not considered to be sold out to *foreign* capital, although I can still be slandered as being soft on Jews.

Which traditions of Marxism are you drawing on? Are there any contemporary writers or theories which you find especially useful, compelling, or relevant?

Several. Even when I was ideologically very remote from Marxism, I did not stop reading some of its literature. I was quite influenced by the early and middle work of Cornelius Castoriadis — I also knew him, an astonishing man — and Karl Korsch. Although I was personally close at one time to many people from the Lukács School, it is only now that I have read him with sustained attention. (His pupils have gone in the opposite direction, e.g., my erstwhile friend Agnes Heller has become a conservative with an increasingly strong Judaic interest, and a cold warrior *après coup*, who is bizarrely accusing her old friend and colleague, István Mészáros, author of *Beyond Capital* and guru to Hugo Chávez, of having been expelled from Canada as a Soviet agent — Mészáros is an 1956 political émigré, an emeritus professor at Sussex University with impeccable anti-Stalinist credentials.) I am an avid reader of *operaismo* and of pre-*Empire* Negri, and also at the opposite end, the *Wertkritik* school, in my view the best heirs to Critical Theory (Hans-Georg Backhaus, Helmut Reichelt, Michael Heinrich, but also the unruly genius, Robert Kurz, and the "cult" periodicals of this tendency, *Krisis*, *Streifzüge*, *Exit!*) as well as authors like Robert Brenner, Ellen Meiksins Wood, David Harvey, Michael Lebowitz, and various Marxists working in England too numerous to mention. The greatest impact came, however, from Moishe Postone's *magnum opus*. These choices may seem eclectic, but I don't belong to any of these currents. I am working on my own stuff and I am learning from all of them.

Your writing over the past decade has perceptively examined the rise of right-wing populism in Eastern Europe and Hungary. This is a development that has been relatively under-reported in the West; it has taken Berlusconi's anti-Roma policies to raise greater awareness about the rise in violence towards Roma throughout Europe and in the post-Soviet region in particular. The most obvious form of right-wing populism lies in the revival of xenophobia and ultranationalism in the region (for instance, it is now common to see t-shirts and bumper stickers with maps of Hungary prior to the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, even around Budapest). But you've pointed to other, somewhat subtler forms, too: Gyurcsány's proposal in 2008 for a "work test" for the unemployed, which was intended to establish who is competent to work, and which is just the tip of the iceberg of an ongoing withdrawal of the rights of citizenships and the rise of fascism in the region.

What accounts for this right-wing populism? In what ways do the failed promise of post-Soviet democratic renewal and the twenty-year drama of neoliberal economics contribute to its rise? (That is: in what important ways is this populism different than early forms in the region?) How and where do you see it expressing itself? What needs to be done to arrest it?

What you call right-wing populism, I think, erroneously, I call post-fascism (see my "On Post-Fascism" in *Boston Review*, Summer 2000). There are, of course, important differences between post-fascism and "classical" national socialism — the former is not militaristic, it is not "totalitarian," and so on — but the parallels are striking, too. That the enemy is both bourgeois liberalism and Marxism (which for the far Right means all varieties of the Left, from social democrats to anarcho-syndicalists, a usage inherited by the North American mainstream press which is in the habit of calling "Marxist" any peasant Jacquerie in the Himalayas if they're hoisting a red flag) is certainly telling, i.e., they are still romantically (and insincerely) opposed to all forms of modernity and are daydreaming about caste society, sacred kingdoms, the superiority of the warrior to "his" woman, racial purity, the cleansing properties of mother earth, and the like. As I am writing these responses, the phone rang, and a friend reported that posters with the likeness of Socialist Party candidates have been decorated with Stars of David of the prescribed (by the Gestapo) "canary yellow" hue, but then my own posters were so decorated in 1990 — I was elected, however. This time, the affair is much more serious. The common element between "communism" and "liberalism" is the fantasy figure of the Jew (the candidates in question are reliable Gentiles) embodying mediation and universalism. Jews as physical persons

are less threatened, though, than the Roma who are victims of racial killings and open discriminatory practices everywhere in Europe. (Also the Canadian government is restricting travel — demanding visas — from countries that the Roma are trying to flee.)

The reasons for this are crystal clear.

With the development of technology and the participation of the new industrial powers (China, India, and Brazil) in the international division of labor, with the increasing intensity and speed of work, with the lengthening of labor time in the global rust belt, the workforce is everywhere becoming "precarious" and unemployment is a universal fact of life for huge masses of people. Concomitantly, improving health stretches life expectancy to unprecedented heights. Health insurance, social services, and central state redistribution of resources are becoming ever more important, frequently the only reasonable source of livelihood for entire regions, social strata, and various populations and generations. There is a grim competition for state resources.

Mainly, the competing groups are the struggling and endangered middle class and the poorest underclass or, in global terms, the crisis-ridden North and the famished South. No capitalist state can afford to satisfy both. In keeping with the fundamental character of liberal societies, the transformation of Western liberal societies into white middle-class fortresses needs legitimization.

This legitimization is offered by various stratagems of "re-moralizing" politics, that is, of stigmatizing underclass, precarious, immigrant, and other ethnic minority populations as "undeserving poor," people abusing the social welfare system, work-shy, criminal, etc. Contemporary racism and "welfare chauvinism" is everywhere. The latter is typified by the Tea Party movement in the United States, where middle-class audiences and opinion groups are vociferously rejecting help for those (including other middle-class subgroups) that are outside the health benefit/insurance system. These are tacitly acknowledged as being black or Latino/a, allegedly protected in a partisan manner by a black president. Ronald Reagan's white working-class and lower-middle-class voters may be back. According to Karl Kautsky — in a brilliant essay unearthed by the London periodical *Historical Materialism* (easily a competitor to Grünberg's *Archiv*) — the answer to Werner Sombart's famous question as to why there is no socialism in the United States is blacks. This situation is now extended to the whole white world. The class struggle is foiled by the ethnic conflict, clearly exacerbated by deliberate and well-aimed political action — in Western Europe chiefly against Muslim immigrants, in Eastern Europe against the Roma plus Northern Caucasus ethnics and Kosovar Albanian migrants. Nor are

traditional enmities neglected: ethnic Hungarian minorities in Slovakia and the Ukraine are prevented from freely using their mother tongue in shameless violation of their constitutions and of international and European law.

The Left is everywhere faced with an intractable dilemma: how to achieve a political situation wherein the blue-collar workers of the global rust belt, the precarious sub-proletarians, the civil servants of various kinds, the students, and the ethnic minorities (including the migrants) are able to make common cause and turn against the system instead of turning against one another? This recipe has not been found. The post-Trotskyite Socialist Workers' Party in Britain and the *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* (ex-*Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire*) in France are forging alliances with Muslims — but with those attacked by the other members of the Left for neglecting the plight of oppressed Muslim women and so on. Basically, the mainstream Left is increasingly using veiled racist (properly speaking) ethnicist/culturalist arguments. One of the two co-sponsors of the draft bill banning the Islamic veil in public places at the National Assembly in France is a communist. The other is, of course, a Gaullist. The far Left, though, is increasingly identified with ethnic issues and it is gradually slipping towards the ineffectual liberal rhetoric of human rights. The result is naturally the triumph of the likes of Sarkozy and Berlusconi and some of their even worse colleagues in Denmark, Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, and everywhere in Eastern Europe.

The social/ethnic discrimination has its secondary uses as well. It legitimizes a return to the police state that was hardly a real danger for majorities in the West. But it is now. Prisons chock-a-block with mainly ethnic sub-proletarians are not any longer a peculiarity of the United States. Left-wing radicalism is beaten by the wave of social and racial exclusion (and in some places by fascist activism) and so is the hope of egalitarian or socialist transformation.

The necessary fusion of the various sectors of the oppressed is — again or, if you wish, eternally — the problem of emancipation and, what is the same thing, of anti-capitalist combat, and this need a renewal of radical political philosophy — *beyond* the already quite considerable results it has achieved, but which have failed to help to overcome this largest of obstacles.

What comes next for you — politically and theoretically?

I think this flows from my previous response. It is increasingly necessary to create a theory that can overcome the perennial temptation of Rousseauian egalitarianism with its ineluctable aporias around the General Will, but which is nevertheless able to offer a normative view of communist society without

utopianism. In the absence of that, the Left will be necessarily led back to a political practice aimed at a homogeneous society created against personal autonomy in order to get rid of the mortal sin of exclusion, humiliation, and injustice. If we have learned one thing from the twentieth century, it is that this is neither feasible nor desirable.

Nor is it tolerable that we should acquiesce in what I have called in a Paris conference (*Puissance[s] du communisme*, in the memory of our friend, recently deceased, Daniel Bensaïd, theoretician of the LCR/NPA and many other lives besides, at the *Université de Paris-8, Vincennes Saint-Denis*) *une civilisation de merde*. This is not to be borne any more.

For this, I feel we need a renewed interpretation of the state and of law, of labor and money, of justice and legitimacy. Most of the prevailing theories concerning these are tailored to suit the needs of liberal class societies that clearly are in a deep — and by no means only economic — crisis. This is work enough. I'll try at least to start it, and of course I am not the only one (far from it!) to be willing to engage in it. The results will have to come, since they are sorely needed.

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Notes

¹ Mihály Vörösmarty (1800-1855), one of the most important Hungarian dramatists and poets of the nineteenth century, and poet and writer János Arany (1817-1882), famous for his epic trilogy on the life of legendary nobleman Miklós Toldi.

² Konstantin Paustovsky (1892-1968), a once-prominent Soviet writer nominated for the 1965 Nobel Prize for literature — a prize that ultimately went to Mikhail Sholokhov.

³ The reference here is to the group of scholars associated with Lukács, typically referred to as the Budapest School, which included Agnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, György Márkus, and Mihály Vajda, among others. See Ferenc Fehér and Agnes Heller, eds., *Reconstructing Aesthetics: Writings of the Budapest School* (New York: Blackwell, 1986) and András Hegedűs, ed., *The Humanisation of Socialism: Writings of the Budapest School* (London: Allison and Busby, 1976).

⁴ The reference here is to talks that took place from February 6 to April 4, 1989, in Warsaw, between the Jaruzelski government and the Solidarity trade union; they were initiated by the government to offset the widespread social unrest that had developed in Poland due to the activities of Solidarity and a generalized and intractable economic crisis in the country. Amongst the outcomes of these talks was the legitimization of Solidarity as a political party and an elected Presidency and Senate. It was this that allowed Solidarity to win a landslide in the election of June 1989.

⁵ See David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005).

⁶ In Hungarian, “*jobb*” means both “right” and “better.” “*Jobbik*” is a play on words: the party claims through its name to be both the best party and the one farthest to the right. The word is also used in a familiar expression: “*előveszi a jobbik eszét*” or “to begin to see the light.”

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www.mediationsjournal.org/marxist-literary-criticism-then-and-now.

Marxist Literary Criticism, Then and Now

Imre Szeman

Neither is philosophy turning to advantage the approach of that professor who, in the pre-Fascist era, experienced an urge to rectify the ills of the times, and examined Marlene Dietrich's film, *The Blue Angel*, in order to obtain, at first hand, an idea of how bad things really were. Excursions of that kind into tangible realities turn philosophy into the refuse of history, with the subject-matter of which it is confused, in the manner of a fethisistic belief in culture per se.

Theodor Adorno
"Why Philosophy?"¹

"Traditional" Marxism, if "untrue" during this period of a proliferation of new subjects of history, must necessarily become true again when the dreary realities of exploitation, extraction of surplus value, proletarianization, and the resistance to it in the form of class struggle, all slowly reassert themselves on a new and expanded world scale, as they seem currently in the process of doing.

Fredric Jameson
"Periodizing the 60s"²

What has Marxism contributed to literary criticism? And what does its encounter with literature in the twentieth century mean for the directions that Marxist criticism might take in the twenty-first? These are huge questions — too large for a short paper; to answer them properly would require, to begin with, some assessment of the state of various Marxisms today (whatever existence they eke out here and there) as well as the situation in which the profession of literary criticism finds itself. Nevertheless, I thought it might be useful to take the subject head-on, however briefly — a sketch with inevitable gaps, but one that could offer a starting point to the project of filling in the bigger picture.

There is no such thing as *a* Marxist literary criticism: no established approaches, no clear methodology, no agreed-upon ideas about how to approach a text or what count as appropriate texts to read, or, indeed, no clearly established sense of why one might expend energy on literary analysis to begin with. It is difficult even to establish a core set of interests and commitments that mark it off from other forms of literary criticism. Marxist literary criticism need not make reference back to Marx (who liked Shakespeare but didn't discuss literature in relation to historical materialism); it certainly doesn't deal with a stock set of questions or topics — say, class or labour, in the way sometimes imagined in introductory texts on literary criticism. There are numerous modes of Marxist criticism related to one another through a theoretical family resemblance and perhaps a shared, general political outlook. The taxonomies of Marxist approaches offered by Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, and others not only differ from one another, but show enough internal variation as to leave things confused in the extreme. For the form of Marxist criticism which Eagleton, for instance, calls “economic” — a category including such things as the sociology of literature and book history — words in books don't really matter, or at least aren't the primary source of literature's social and political function and importance. But for the other forms of criticism he discusses, from social realism to *Ideologiekritik*, the marks on the page that are the typical focus of literary criticism are the main things to be assessed and analyzed.

There are, it seems to me, three primary forms or modes of intervention that Marxist literary criticism has taken, especially since the 1920s, beginning with the early work of Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Lukács, and others. These modes of Marxist criticism have changed in content, but less so in form — though the conditions under which they are practiced and carried out have changed, a fact not always reflected within newer practices of Marxist criticism, which make use of (say) the old insistence on the relation of literary form to social form even while the former has declined in importance and the latter has been reshaped in response to new forces and historical

circumstances. Hopefully, spelling out these three modes can help to show us where Marxist literary criticism stands today and what might be on the horizon.

In perhaps its most simple and basic form, Marxist criticism has taken the form of a series of methodological criticisms and challenges to existing forms of criticism. These are reminders of what to do or not to do — to “Always historicize,” for example, or to remember the centrality of class struggle and the determining role of the forces and relations of production to social life and to literary and cultural production. Such critical imperatives are meant to shape literary criticism as such, pulling it away from idealist forms of historicism and formalism and toward a commitment to the social character of literary writing. In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams remarks that “‘Marxist criticism’ and ‘Marxist literary studies’ have been most successful ... when they have worked with the received category of ‘literature’, which they may have extended or even revalued, but never radically questioned or opposed.”³ Adorno on Mann, Lukács on Scott, Jameson on Gissing, Schwarz on Brás Cubas: each of these analyses might introduce new insights into the objects and authors being studied, but they still largely take the form of learned commentaries of objects known in advance for being ones filled with significance and in need of study with the tools of literary analysis. Here, Marxism piggybacks on received definitions of literature and literary study in a manner that defines it as a theoretical approach to texts — one of a handful which can be substituted for one another depending on context or even an individual critic's analytic sensibilities.

The second mode of Marxist criticism builds on the impulse of this first, but extends it significantly. Here, the received category of literature around which institutional practices such as professional organizations and university departments are organized is scrutinized and placed into question. Marxism has at the core of its theory and practice the analysis of history and of the shifts that take place within it; it assumes that the economic is (“in the last instance”) of prime importance in how human social life is organized. With respect to literature and literary criticism, it thus tries to understand the existing social and political function of these practices by mapping out the manner in which they have developed and changed over time — that is, both how these practices themselves have changes *and* shifts in their social and political function. This is a form of metatheory: a view of the status and practice of the literary in general which focuses more on social form than on aesthetic content; it is something akin to a history of ideas traced out within materialist philosophy. Williams and others remind us that literature developed into “an apparently objective category of printed works of a certain quality” out of something more inchoate, something once linked to reading

ability and not limited to creative or imaginative works defined by taste or sensibility.⁴ But beyond this acknowledgment of definitional shifts with the category of literature is an insistence on the politics of literature in relation to larger social developments: “*Literature* and *criticism* are, in the perspective of historical social development, forms of a class specialization and control of a general social practice, and of a class limitation on the questions which it might raise.”⁵

If the first mode of Marxist criticism introduces more complex forms of literary analysis into existing forms of criticism, the second aims to shatter the self-certainties of literary analysis by insisting on the ways in which culture and power are necessarily bound together, perhaps especially so in the constitution of literary criticism as a practice. Terry Eagleton has written that “Nobody is much bothered by materialist readings of *Titus Andronicus* ... but a materialist theory of culture — a theory of culture as production before it is expression — sounds, in the spontaneously idealist milieu of middle-class society, something of a category mistake or a contradiction in terms.”⁶ The most important intervention made by cultural criticism in the twentieth century — and not just in Marxism, but in the work of scholars from Thorstein Veblen to Pierre Bourdieu — was to desacralize and demythologize ideas of literature and culture, highlighting the social and political violence which shaped the consecration of these categories into practices immediately associated with transcendent value; the insistence on culture as always already a form of production is only the beginning of this effort. While political reflections on the category of literature and culture itself have contributed to the practice of literary criticism, they have just as frequently pushed critical analysis in other directions — towards sociological approaches to literature and culture (the latest of which is exemplified by the work of Franco Moretti) or to the study of numerous other modes of cultural expression and practice. Challenges to the institutions of literary analysis make it — or at least should make it — hard to continue with criticism as usual.

“Culture for Marxism is at once absolutely vital and distinctly secondary: the place where power is crystallized and submission bred, but also somehow ‘superstructural’, something which in its more narrow sense of specialized artistic institutions can only be fashioned out of a certain economic surplus and division of labour, and which even in its more generous anthropological sense of a ‘form of life’ risks papering over certain important conflicts and distinctions.”⁷ This tension lies at the heart of most forms of Marxist criticism that deal with culture as opposed to economics, politics, or the social. Culture is an object of suspicion as a result of its structural function and, indeed, its very existence, but is also a field which requires critical study

— and not just because of its ideological function (to which Eagleton points here), but because it is also imagined as a space in which the crystallization of power can be interrupted or halted, and submission turned into autonomy and genuine self-expression. If literature and culture were simply the space of ideological expression, if ideology was simply false consciousness or a blunt substitute for religion, they wouldn’t create such headaches and problems for Marxist criticism. Rather, culture is also imagined within Marxism as a space of political possibilities and alternative imaginings — not “politics by other means” in any simple and direct way, but also not ultimately separable from politics.

Marxism may be “deeply suspicious of the cultural, which it views as in the end the offspring of labour, as well as, often enough, a disownment of it,” but it also can’t give up on culture or literature.⁸ The longstanding anxieties within Marxism about what Herbert Marcuse called “affirmative culture” or what others name as “instrumental culture” aren’t meant to close down the horizon of possibility offered by culture, but to show the enormous difficulties for criticism in addressing culture without participating in its reification and instrumentalization. Adorno’s worries in “Cultural Criticism and Society” and elsewhere echo those of Marcuse: both worry about the tendency of criticism to be interested in culture because of its links with the spiritual and the transcendent.⁹ “Man does not live by bread alone; this truth is thoroughly falsified by the interpretation that spiritual nourishment is an adequate substitute for too little bread”; and Marcuse again: “The culture of souls absorbed in a false form those forces and wants which could find no place in everyday life.”¹⁰ The challenge for Marxist criticism has been to name or identify alternative or antagonistic forms of life expressed in culture, while keeping the lie also named by culture firmly in mind. A difficult task: playing with and against the false autonomy of culture established by bourgeois social life since the late eighteenth century. The criticism of the past several decades, whether looked at individually or as a whole, has taken this challenge up with more or less rigor, but without any coherent plan of attack. With respect to literature, some forms of criticism have sought to separate out reified forms of culture from other, more revolutionary forms; in many cases this has reflected existing taxonomies, with (say) mass culture being seen as the most ideological, and forms of experimental or explicitly political literature being seen as having escaped instrumentalization and so having special significance (Jameson speaks of modernism in this fashion, even if at other points he insists on the opposite point). Marxist criticism which places wagers on the utopian dimension of this or that novel or genre — “serious” science fiction, for instance — seems to forget the second mode to which I’ve pointed concerning the political and economic conditions of

possibility of literary writing *and* criticism, with the effect being a curious, uncritical acceptance of (for instance) writerly aims and intentions, and of the category of the literary more generally.

More interestingly, other forms of Marxist criticism have imagined that it is “possible to find the material history which produces a work of art somehow inscribed in its very texture and structure, in the shape of its sentences or its play of narrative viewpoints, in its choice of a metrical scheme or its rhetorical device.”¹¹ This is to use symbolic responses to an objective historical situation as a way to read back through to those circumstances, whether in a direct, unmediated form, or perhaps with the added bonus that inscribed in symbolic forms is some hint of the Real or the social unconscious of a given historical period. The most powerful of these approaches is found in the work of Fredric Jameson, who famously views literature as a symbolic practice that provides imaginary and ideological solutions to unresolved sociopolitical contradictions. In Jameson’s “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,” the divide between mass and high culture is collapsed; each is now seen as a different way of managing the same set of social contradictions, thus providing materials valuable for critics who want to better understand the ways in which culture is reified.¹² It is the “utopian” content of mass culture that most readers of Jameson’s essay seize on, the idea that a latent element of any form of cultural expression casts doubt on the fixity of the political present and its self-certainties. Here, the hope that culture yields political tools and insights (if not transcendence of an older, spiritual kind) is tied together with a more sociological, institutional approach: one gets the rewards of literary criticism while approaching things from a Marxist perspective. What’s still left out of the picture is how and why certain forms of culture might be seen to escape the instrumentalization that worried the Frankfurt School. If everything has a utopian content (even if perhaps only in the minimal sense outlined by Williams: “*No mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality excludes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention*”), then there’s no need to make distinctions about what to study as especially significant forms of culture.¹³ Literature is displaced from the center of Marxist critical concern, but in the process culture becomes a space of study primarily for what it reveals about conditions and developments at other, more socially significant levels.

If one way of addressing the crisis that affirmative culture introduces into Marxist criticism was to divide culture into serious work and junk, avant-garde modernism and mass culture, Jameson manages this problem (in part) by considering different zones of capitalism in which “culture” takes different forms. The utopia which is supposed to go hand-in-hand with

reification is divided spatially, with utopia being displaced from the West to the rest. Already in the “Reification” essay we find him introducing the idea that revolutionary cultural expressions can be found only in those places whose conditions of possibility — formal, but not yet real, subsumption into global capital — allow for forms of cultural production that don’t obey the inexorable logic of affirmative culture. This spatial move is also a temporal one — it suggests (questionably) that literature and other cultural forms once lived out the political promise of their semi-autonomy from social life, before collapsing into the undifferentiated murk of instrumentality. For Jameson, the phenomenon called “globalization” seems to have eliminated this possible political opening in the gap between formal and real, so that now what we read in his work and that of other Marxist critics is an insistence on the fact that everything is now cultural — an assertion whose implications have been difficult to ascertain or to properly make sense of, perhaps especially so when it comes to the question of what it is one imagines one is doing in engaging with this or that literary text from a Marxist perspective. Everything is cultural: should we take this as a further intensification (or even dialectical transfiguration) of the drama of the spectacle to which Guy Debord alerted us, or as announcing a welcome social immanence whose outcome can be nothing other than the multitude and the commons described by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri?

Where are we then left? The first mode is inadequate; the second, reductive; and the third, confused by the movement between the repudiation of culture as an ideological category and a belief in its potential redemptive and/or political possibilities — a politics grounded in older critical ontologies and epistemologies, even if these are troubled by Marxist categories. How, then, do we relate these approaches to literature and its potential end(s)? Literature always has a truth value of some kind. Even if its slow marginalization as a social practice has made it tempting to insist more strongly on its class basis and social untruth, it would be a mistake for Marxism to think that it is done with it once and for all. Literature still provides cognitive, utopian, or aesthetic insights, and writing itself remains a political practice — “one of the most transgressive and most easily exchanged cultural forms through which dissidence can be articulated, not least because the material prerequisites of pen and paper” — or the keyboard and the wireless connection — “are relatively easy to acquire.”¹⁴ But this persistence of literature (a persistence which finds analogs in the figures of excess animating poststructuralist philosophy or Deleuzian politics) doesn’t find an easy counterpoint in Marxist literary criticism, much of which seems to me to continue to work within one of the three modes I’ve just outlined, if (to be ungenerous) with an increasing lack of purpose and direction. What

other path could it follow? To a large degree, literary criticism has absorbed Marxism's methodological pointers and grasps the implications of its larger critique of literary institutions, even if it hasn't acted on them (here, the institutional instinct for self-preservation kicks in). As for its own attempts to grasp the strands of culture that slip out from under affirmative culture, this seems to have brought Marxist criticism back to a sense of culture as pure ideology *or* as pure political possibility, without a clear sense of which situation holds where or when, convinced of neither outcome, but energized by these breaks, gaps, and incompletions.

To get a sense of why this might be the case — and what might come next — we need to think about the historical conditions of Marxist criticism itself. More than thirty years ago, Perry Anderson diagnosed a paradigm shift in Marxism — a shift away from political practices intimately connected to the activities of parties and unions to a phenomenon he named “Western Marxism,” which roughly comes into being with the work of the Frankfurt School. For Anderson, the “first and most fundamental of its characteristics has been the structural divorce of this Marxism from political practice.”¹⁵ In Western Marxism, the divide of theory and practice isn't something to be actively engaged, but has become affirmed as a given, with energies thus devoted entirely to theory at the expense of practice. Marxism shifts towards philosophy, and becomes an “ever increasing academic emplacement”; its central focus is on culture and aesthetics, particularly of the bourgeois kind; and it becomes “Western,” which is to say, “utterly provincial and uninformed about the theoretical cultures of neighbouring countries.”¹⁶ For Anderson, this strain of Marxism is also characterized by a consistent pessimism as it develops “new themes absent from classical Marxism — mostly in a speculative manner.”¹⁷ “Where the founder of historical materialism moved progressively from philosophy to politics and then economics,” Anderson writes, “the successors of the tradition that emerged after 1920 turned back from economics and politics to philosophy.”¹⁸

Anderson's characterization of Western Marxism is meant to sound alarm bells about the draining of energies from what he would have understood (in 1976 at least) as a “proper” form of politics. He writes that “the hidden hallmark of Western Marxism as a whole is that it is a product of defeat.”¹⁹ This criticism comes at a moment in which actually-existing socialisms — even given their very real flaws and their distance from Marxist theory — presented a viable alternative to forms of liberal democratic capitalism and unionism remained a strong movement across the world. In the context of our circumstances, it is easy enough to see the depth of this defeat as something we are still in the process of coming to understand. Many of the points that Anderson makes with respect to Western

Marxism seem characteristic of Marxist criticism today: it is largely divorced from political parties or even from social movements (though perhaps not at its anarchist edges); its practitioners are primarily university-based and generally accepted there as one variant of a multiplicity of critical approaches; and they are interested in philosophy more than in (say) the nitty-gritty of re-establishing an international party operating above and beyond parochial nationalisms. These points are, of course, directed at Marxist criticism in general and not just at Marxist *literary* critics, who were in relatively short supply before Lukács (despite Plekhanov and Lenin and Trotsky's writings on art and literature).

The intervening thirty years and the end of state socialism have brought about new geopolitical configurations within which Marxisms circulate, and, as such, new criteria with which to assess their political possibilities. Western Marxism looks like a defeat if one imagines politics to have to take a certain form — that which characterized Marxist and socialist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The political and historical terrain has altered so much in the global era that it would be a mistake to measure success or failure on these grounds (a point made repeatedly since at least Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*).²⁰ Anderson laments the break of Western Marxism with an international party and criticizes its parochialism. While there remains nothing like a new international socialist party, the palpable sense of having to frame one's political imaginings and activities in a global context ensures that the “Westernness” of Western Marxism has now dissipate — though, in part, this is because of the global circulation and re-purposing of Western Marxism in places around the globe (university-based Marxists even in Russia, Eastern Europe, and China are Western Marxists in terms of the archives they draw upon and their broad interest in culture over politics and economics). Nor does culture hold the attention of Marxist criticism as it once did, and, where it does capture critical attention, the focus is certainly not bourgeois culture alone. If anything, the shift from economics to philosophy that Anderson describes seems to have been reversed in recent years. The very absence of the socialist world (at least on its former scale) has brought the structuring force of economics to the surface in a way that has rendered its foundational role apparent to everyone: political economy is back in style. One of the real limits of Western Marxism was that despite its best intentions to do otherwise, it, too, tended to treat culture as in the end semi-autonomous from politics, and so as a space necessitating a careful mapping by those whose political commitments demanded a search for alternative social forms and imaginings. Anderson writes that while Gramsci dealt extensively with Italian literature in the *Prison Notebooks*, he “took the autonomy and

efficacy of cultural superstructures as a *political* problem, to be explicitly theorized as such — in its relationship to the maintenance or subversion of the social order.”²¹ In this sense, we are all Gramsci now, with the difference being that the political problem with respect to culture today is, in fact, its *lack* of autonomy and efficacy, its equivalence with the political in a manner that leaves conceptions of its function as ideological or anti-ideological unhelpful and beside the point.

Western Marxism’s focus on culture generated contributions to literary criticism that have been productive even for those who don’t understand themselves to be Marxists. However we might assess the status of its activities — a distraction from real politics or a contribution to understanding the complexity of social signification and meaning-making without which there can be no politics — we are in new historical circumstances that have pushed Marxist criticism towards new objects of study and modes of intervention. This is an ongoing process; the three approaches to literature or culture that I described above continue to describe much of what is done under the name of Marxism. But the changed political circumstances of the present moment — one which finds capitalism under question, widespread expressions of anxiety about ecological futures, and so on — have pushed critical energies in other directions, and will continue to do so. One of the only positive things that Anderson says about Western Marxism is that it proved to be unexpectedly immune to reformism. Marxism is a theory of social and political transformation — of revolution, not evolution, since it understands that no amount of amelioration of existing political and economic frameworks will address the broad social injustices that capitalism produces. At the moment, studies of literature within universities may not be the main site for such transformations to be better understood, or actualized — which isn’t the same as saying that such studies don’t have any value at all.

Notes

¹ Theodor Adorno, “Why Philosophy?” in *The Adorno Reader*, edited by Brian O’Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 53.

² Fredric Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s,” in *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986*. Vol. 2 (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1988) 208.

³ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 53.

⁴ Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 48.

⁵ Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 49.

⁶ Terry Eagleton, “Introduction Part I” in *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader*, edited by Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne (New York: Blackwell, 1996) 14.

⁷ Eagleton, “Introduction” 7.

⁸ Eagleton, “Introduction” 6.

⁹ See Theodor Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” in *Prisms*, translated by Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT P, 1997) 17-34.

¹⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: Free Association Books, 1988) 109 and 110.

¹¹ Eagleton, “Introduction” 11.

¹² See Fredric Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,” *Social Text* 1 (1979): 130-48.

¹³ Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 125.

¹⁴ Drew Milne, “Introduction Part II: Reading Marxist Literary Theory,” in *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader*, edited by Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne (New York: Blackwell, 1996) 27.

¹⁵ Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1976): 29.

¹⁶ Anderson, *Western Marxism* 49 and 69.

¹⁷ Anderson, *Western Marxism* 93.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Western Marxism* 52.

¹⁹ Anderson, *Western Marxism* 42.

²⁰ See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, New York: Verso, 1985.

²¹ Anderson, *Western Marxism* 78.

Literature, Immanent Critique, and the Problem of Standpoint

Neil Larsen

What follows is a rough and condensed sketch of the central argument in a larger work-in-progress that goes for now under the probably grandiose title of "Principles of Immanent Critique." My most immediately practical aim in writing such a work is to make available to the public, and especially to students, the outline of a proposed method for critical theory in the humanities and "cultural studies" generally, and, more particularly, in relation to literature as a possible critical-theoretical object. The preliminary thinking behind this project is the result of roughly ten years of teaching critical theory in both graduate and undergraduate classrooms. During this time, I came to distrust and finally to reject the now-standard, eclectic pedagogy, reflected in most "theory" primers and introductions, in which the various schools of "theory" as conventionally identified — from feminism to poststructuralism to Marxism and psychoanalysis — are explicated one by one. Of course, students, especially those looking for academic work, need to know these things, but the intellectual result of presenting critical or "literary" theory as, say, all that fits between the covers of the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* is, whatever else it may be, antithetical to the very concept of theory itself, which must insist, as a methodological postulate, on its own universality and exclusivity in relation to its object. Teaching the various schools "critically" — say, from the standpoint of Marxism or feminism, however either of these standpoints is to be defined — can, in principle, avoid this pitfall, and this has, de facto, been my own practice in the "theory" classroom. But to practice even this critical, metatheoretical method in a consistent and rigorous way will still require advancing not only what amounts to a critical theory of "theory" itself (something I'm also working up as a kind of companion piece to "Principles of Immanent

Critique”), but also that one be able to explain, from one’s own theoretical standpoint, the procedure whereby valid intellectual results are to be obtained. It is, surely, a basic criterion of theory that its truth be reproducible by anyone who takes up its standpoint and thinks through and by means of its axioms and categories — which is as good as saying, reproducible by anyone expected to learn it. If so, then this is a criterion that what passes for theory in the humanities fails, abjectly, to meet. *Critical* theory, if it is to be consistent with its own principles, has to conduct itself differently.

I begin this exposition somewhat awkwardly by laying out two seemingly disparate problems, or points of departure. The first is explicitly theoretical and probably in “bad” abstract form at this point, but it frames the whole of what I will be discussing here: in what do the theory and practice of immanent critique consist when in specific relation to cultural and, in particular, to literary objects? What are its basic methodological principles in relation to such objects? I take as given, and in no particular need of argument here, the principles of immanent critique in the case of the critical social theory, inaugurated and still epitomized by Marx’s *Capital*, in relation to *its* object: the reified social form of capitalist modernity. Immanent critique in this form, to cite Moishe Postone’s lucid and succinct formulation in *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*,

does not judge critically what is from a conceptual position outside its object — for example, a transcendent ‘ought’. Instead, it must be able to locate that ‘ought’ as a dimension of its own context, a possibility immanent to the existent society. Such a critique must also be immanent in the sense that it must be able to reflexively grasp itself and ground the possibility of its own existence in the nature of its social context. That is, if it is to be internally consistent, it must be able to ground its own standpoint in the social categories with which it grasps its object, and not simply posit or assume that standpoint. The existent, in other words, must be grasped in its own terms in a way that encompasses the possibility of its own critique: the critique must be able to show that the nature of its social context is such that this context generates the possibility of a critical stance towards itself. It follows, then, that an immanent social critique must show that its object, the social whole of which it is a part, is not a unitary whole.¹

Postone goes on to argue that the full development of Marxian immanent

critique in *Capital*, because it entails the situating of its own standpoint within its historical object, also implies the historical specificity of theory itself:

This implies the necessity for a new, self-reflexive sort of social critique. Its standpoint cannot be located transhistorically or transcendently. In such a conceptual framework, no theory — including Marx’s — has absolute transhistorical validity. The impossibility of an extrinsic or privileged theoretical standpoint is ... not to be contravened implicitly by the form of the theory itself.... *Capital*, in other words, is an attempt to construct an argument that does not have a logical form independent of the object being investigated, when that object is the context of the argument itself.²

It is immediately evident from the above that the question of what constitutes an immanent cultural or literary critique already and necessarily implies prior, more fundamental ones: What, for example, is the precise, determinate relationship of “literature” as an object — if any — to the socially and historically specific object of critical theory as social theory (or, as Postone often puts it, of immanent *social* critique)? Can “literature” itself be understood, in any determinate or conceptually precise way, as a “nonunitary whole”? What, then, would be its internal contradictions? And — perhaps summing up all of the above questions — what would constitute the *standpoint* of immanent critique in the case of a cultural or literary object?³

These are not new or unfamiliar questions. Critical theory and Marxist literary criticism generally have grappled with them in one form or another from their earliest beginnings. But the breadth and richness of the answers contrasts with what has simultaneously been a deficit of methodological clarity, rigor, or consensus regarding the fundamental principles and categories of an immanent critique of literature and their precise, dialectical order of determination. Much of the most widely read Marxist, and purportedly dialectical, literary theory and criticism, particularly in its French and Anglo-American variants, bears little if any relationship to the general principles of Marxian immanent critique as outlined above by Postone, and reduces, at best, to the level of an ideology-critique in which literature is read off as just one more superstructural effect. One would be hard-pressed to find in Raymond Williams, Pierre Macherey, or Terry Eagleton, say, anything remotely resembling a theoretical critique “undertaken from a standpoint that is immanent to rather than outside its object of

investigation.”⁴ The most significant exceptions here, lying closer to the Central European cultural center of Hegelian-Marxism and critical theory proper, are Lukács and Adorno, who both had made systematic efforts to integrate literary and aesthetic criticism within the general dialectical principles of immanent critique. Nevertheless, it is symptomatic here of the same methodological deficit, even if on a higher plane, that works such as *The Historical Novel* and *Aesthetic Theory* stand in such a diametrical — and dialectically unmediated — opposition to one another. Lukács, in particular, *qua* early-twentieth-century Marxism, and the more methodologically orthodox, gave the most unequivocal answer to the question of standpoint — that of the proletariat as revolutionary class. But it is an answer that has now effectively fallen victim to historical developments whose own immanence the Lukácsian aesthetic theory did not, and perhaps could not, detect. This is not, in my view, because the claims Lukács lodged in *History and Class Consciousness* on behalf of the “standpoint of the proletariat” were overly messianic or “idealist,” but because, as the contemporary crisis of capitalism arguably makes clear, no class, but only the classless society itself, indeed the very possibility of the social in the face of the social exterminism of capital, could redeem them. Adorno’s critical and aesthetic theory has seemed to fare better in the late modern conjuncture, and it is unquestionably to Adorno that one must turn first and above all in search of the principles of an immanent literary or aesthetic critique. But given Adorno’s skepticism regarding method itself — something reflected in the often cryptic, paradoxical, and “methodically unmethodical” reflections on the methodological immanence of critique to be found in even the most explicit of his writings on this subject — the search for a truly dialectical standpoint here will prove to be both arduous and highly problematic in itself.⁵ As I have argued elsewhere, Adorno sensed more acutely than any other thinker then or since the immanently negative, dialectical truth of art and culture on the level of the concrete work or cultural phenomenon.⁶ But he framed his own essayistic and aphoristic acumen in terms of a monolithic, effectively underhistoricized social and political theory (what Postone has termed the “critical pessimism” of the Frankfurt School) that in turn forced his critical theory, at precisely its most powerful and richest moments, into a form tending to methodological unreproducibility.⁷

Rather than confront the problem of immanent critical standpoint *qua* “literature” on the directly categorical plane, however, and suspending here what is, in the long run, probably the more productive and fruitful strategy, itself more immanent in spirit, of pursuing this question through a close study and critique of Adornian immanent critique itself (with perhaps a series of

side glances at Lukács), I propose to come at this question, so to speak, from below by situating it in its pedagogical and its most immediate intellectual-phenomenological context. This, then, introduces the second problem or point of departure, which I will develop at some length in what follows, returning via this route to the more abstractly theoretical form of the question as initially formulated above.

Anyone who has been given the job of teaching “theory” in relation to literature — or of teaching literature “theoretically” — and who has tried to do this in a systematic, methodical way will sooner or later find himself in a familiar quandary: how to satisfy the expectation that the “theory” in question be “applied” to literature, the latter almost invariably as embodied in a particular work or “text.” Say — and here I draw on my own recent classroom experience in trying to teach critical theory to Comparative Literature undergraduates — the “theory” is psychoanalysis, specifically Freud’s essay on the uncanny, and the text is a staple specimen of “theory” handbooks, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. Especially if what passes in the instructional literature for the “theoretical” reading of such texts is operating as a model, the “application” of the former to the latter must, it seems, follow. But exactly how? After the selection of “theory” and text — and setting aside here for now the question of what, methodologically, justifies even so much as that copula — what is the next move in such a “theoretical” analysis or critique? If psychoanalysis is taken on its most general, categorical level as, say, the theory of the unconscious, what, then, makes the latter “applicable” to *Beloved*? Speculation as to Morrison’s unconscious? About the unconscious of the novel’s main characters? These are usually the first, common-sensical “applications” favored by students, even if the fallacies here are obvious to the more seasoned literary “theorist.” But, if this is not what is meant by “applying” theory in this case, then what is? A more practical and likely solution is perhaps to be found in narrowing down the scope of “application” and, say, searching *Beloved* for instances of the affect Freud describes as the uncanny, especially since Freud’s own interpretation of Hoffmann’s “The Sand-Man” can be recommended to students as a model. But then suppose that no clear instances of the uncanny are to be detected in *Beloved*. What then? Is the theory of the uncanny therefore the *wrong* theory — meaning that another must be found? Freud’s interest in the uncanny in “The Sand-Man” is not, finally, a literary but a therapeutic, or, more generally, psychological one, and Hoffmann’s text serves him as a richer source of the affect — and perhaps, thereby, a better vantage point onto the general phenomenon of repression and its neurotic symptoms — than is typically afforded by the “psychopathology of everyday life.” But if

what is sought in the “application” of theory to text is something on the order of a “critique,” then how, in turn, does the detection of this or that affect or symptomlike quality in *Beloved* further this end?

Here and there some genuine *interpretive* insight may result from such repeated, essentially random collisions of “text” and “theory.” Readers of *Beloved* armed with Freud’s essay may be struck, for example, by what doubtless is a relative absence of the uncanny in the novel, given that it is a story centered around the quintessential locus of uncanniness, the haunted house. Nowhere is it written, of course, that a ghost story must be frightening or uncanny, but the fact that *Beloved*, a novel that self-consciously thematizes the return of the repressed, internalized violence of slavery, prefers — in evident obedience to the standardized formulae of García Márquez’s style of “magical realism” — a stylized, domesticated, and quasi-ethnographical ghost to a haunting one may suggest to its would-be psychoanalyst that the genuine site of repression within the *novel’s* unconscious lies in its overtly *canny* treatment of intrinsically uncanny material. But even if this line of analysis is able to connect up otherwise disparate, problematic elements within the novel, it remains essentially descriptive. Nothing, here, whether “theoretical” or “textual,” *grounds* — that is, renders *necessary* — the movement from interpretation to critique. One can as plausibly argue that *Beloved’s* “un-uncanniness” (assuming even this interpretive result is compelling in the face of objections from readers who claim that they *are* haunted by *Beloved*) is evidence, say, of its capacity for the symbolic mastery — for *sublimating* — the repressed violence of slavery as that it is evidence of the novel’s neurotic displacement of the very repressed violence it gestures at bringing to consciousness. And both of *these* would-be critical-theoretical readings of *Beloved* presuppose as “critical” what amounts to the psychoanalytical, therapeutic value judgment according to which the unlocking of repressed impulses or experience counts as a desirable goal. It would be perverse, *qua* psychoanalysis, to dispute this, but nowhere is it written, either, that novels are analogues of psychotherapy.

And so on. In the same way that “text” and “theory,” however enlightening their subsequent, accidental linkage, appear to collide in an irrational space of pure immediacy and indeterminacy, so, too, do the cognitive and critical aims of theory per se appear, inevitably, to exist independently, if not in outright opposition to one another. And yet, one searches its canons and copious instructional literature in vain for any glimmerings of suspicion that something is amiss in the house of “theory.”

But anyone schooled in dialectical thinking ought to recognize in this intellectual pathology — what I will refer to in what follows as the “fallacy of application” — the symptoms of a reification. “Theory” and “text,”

“interpretation” and “critique,” are not merely each other’s accidents but are structured as *antinomies*. As soon as its object becomes a “text,” *any* theory “applied” to it — no matter whether it is psychoanalysis, structuralist narratology, or Marxism itself, and no matter its own immanent richness and conceptual mediation — is reduced to being a mere intellectual fetish, a species of abstract tautology. And the same goes, inversely, for “texts”: as “read” by a theory understood, *a priori*, as external to their own objective mediatedness, these become rigid ciphers, as meaningless, finally, in relation to interpretation as they are meaningful within their own immanent contexts.

In one form or another, including the currently preferred and equally pseudo-theoretical gambit that thinks to avoid it by substituting a “cultural” for a literary object, the “fallacy of application” pervades and, in a sense, defines the humanistic discipline of “theory,” whether literary, cultural, or otherwise. That fact may, of course, mean as good as nothing to the theoretical problem of immanent standpoint with which we began. The disciplinary entities known as “theory” and “literature” must never, at the cost of automatic critical self-trivialization, be confused with their genuine content as concepts for critical theory *extra muros*. Yet, if submitted to a second reflection along the very lines of its apparently antinomic structure — that is to say, to this extent, immanently — the “fallacy of application” can be made to point beyond itself. One may, for example, pose the question (and this is the strategy I follow with my own students) of why it is assumed that “theory” in this context must be “applied” in the first place? To what kinds of objects is theory, as more generally and conventionally understood *outside* the literary-critical context, “applied”? The answer — that theory in the case, say, of a theory of global warming is applied to data, to facts — then prompts the next question: is *Beloved* (or literature itself) an empirical datum the way, for example, rising ocean temperatures are? The answer to this may not be obvious, since the object conventionally designated as *Beloved* here does appear to have empirical properties, e.g., the precise combination of words on its pages, or the fact that Morrison wrote it, and wrote it at such and such a time and place, etc. But is it to these kinds of empirical properties of *Beloved* that we are seeking to “apply” Freud’s theory of the uncanny?

Here, the aid of Freud himself can again be invoked. To what kinds of objects — if we set aside here the literary kind in the case of “The Uncanny” — is psychoanalytical theory “applied”? The answer here is a multiple and complex one — encompassing the neurotic symptom, parapraxes, the unconscious itself — but included in it would, uncontroversially, be simply *affect*, since that is, at base, the psychological category to which the uncanny belongs. “The Sand-Man” is of interest to Freud here as an object for psychoanalysis only insofar as it produces an especially vivid sensation of

the uncanny in its readers — that is for the narrative's own affective properties. Is it not, after all, then, to the affective properties of *Beloved*, whatever these may be — or rather to the novel's *form* as an object that generates or elicits affects — that the psychoanalytical theory of the uncanny is properly “applied”?

This reasoning may seem overly elementary and naïve to the adepts of “theory,” but in fact it already furnishes us with the logical structure for exiting the reifying “fallacy of application” — a fallacy to which no form of nondialectical theory, however sophisticated, does not itself eventually succumb. For, although affects such as the uncanny may indeed be treated as empirical data — something that Freud himself as, on one level, their scientific observer obviously considers them to be — their *form* as objects when we “observe” them in “The Sand-Man” or *Beloved* is not that of, say, rising ocean temperatures. As readers of these “texts,” we cannot observe such “affective” objects without observing their presence (or, for that matter, their absence) in ourselves. Affects such as the uncanny, in other words, are not truly empirical objects at all, but objects in simultaneously subjective form, or — the Hegelian usage now becomes practically unavoidable — “subject/objects.” This becomes clearer, at least to my students, if we then consider the kind of pre- or quasi-literary narrative object for whose analysis Freud is most celebrated: dreams. Everyone ponders the meaning of their own dreams, i.e., to that extent, treats them as theoretical objects. But, in “applying,” say, the analytical methods expounded in *The Interpretation of Dreams* to one's own dreams, one “applies” these reflexively to oneself. Are “we” not our own dreams — and yet, at the same time, also *not* our own dreams, insofar as we objectify them and treat them independently of our subjective immediacy? Is not the subject who dreams — both as individual and as collective subject — continuous, however unconsciously, with the subject “applying” the theory, or rather, with theory itself as “subject”? As “subject/object,” the dream — and no less the literary representation or narrative that is “The Sand-Man” or *Beloved* — differs from an empirical datum such as rising ocean temperatures not only *qua* fact or object of theoretical “application” but *qua* its very *form* of objectivity. The crude, relativist fallacy (neo-Cartesian twin to the fallacy of application) must itself be militantly warded off at this point: the “subjective” dimension of, say, affective objects such as sensations of the uncanny, whether in dreams, neurotic symptoms, or literary narratives, does not make their theorization any less “objective.” To think so is to believe that the subject who theorizes is finally discontinuous with the subject who dreams, who feels, who reads, or, indeed, who writes. There is no theorizing subject external to the affective and representational forms that mediate — that indeed *are* — this subject as

well. To predialectical ears, the expression will still sound paradoxical or esoteric at this point in the pedagogical exposition, but its logic, like that of the “subject/object,” has become inevitable: theoretical objects in the form of “subject/objects” are themselves, as a result of their formation, no less the *subjects* of their own “theorization.” Their “theory” does not, in any absolute or final sense, come to them from outside their own being as objects — hence it is not “applied” to them at all according to the standard, empirical meaning of “theory.” The theorization of objects whose form of objectivity is common to affects, dreams, narrative, etc., is, from the standpoint of this form itself, at the same time, their *self*-theorization. Theory, then, is not “applied” but is *immanent* to such objects. Here, we have the first and most basic methodological principle of immanent critique in relation to “literary” objects, however counterintuitive and paradoxical this may still appear to conventional belletristic and “theoretical” literary criticism alike.

In this, it is true, immanent critique in its methodological relation to literature would not as yet be distinguishable from the method of immanent social critique exemplified in *Capital* and expounded by Postone — or, for that matter, from the immanent relationship of knowledge and its object as argued in Hegel's *Logic*. The abstract certainty that a “text” such as *Beloved* is an immediately subjectlike, nonempirical object, and thus already present in any theoretical consciousness of it as an object, still gives us no clear idea of what its critique would mean, nor of how to undertake it. Thus we are, it would appear, no closer to discovering what — if anything — constitutes the precise, determinate standpoint of immanent critique as “literary” critique. Nevertheless, the mere fact that — if the practical and, so to speak, negatively phenomenological derivation sketched out above is valid — the surface of an object such as *Beloved* offers up nothing immediate to connect it to “theory” in its nondialectical, Cartesian-empirical form, already tells us more than this. For the *literary* object, in contrast to the more general and abstractly social object of theory, suggests, if anything, an almost irrational imperviousness to positive, empirical “science.” The abstractly social here appears more vulnerable to reification than does the literary object — whence the fact that the “sociology of literature,” though real enough in a trivial, disciplinary sense, comes no closer to being “applicable” as theory to the literary object itself than would, say, a mere word count. The literary object as “subject/object” merges, in the end, with the social as a fully *dialectical* category, but the distance separating it from a dialectical, immanently critical method appears, if only negatively and “irrationally,” to be both shorter and yet more occult and abyssal. The reification of “literature,” unlike that of society, leads directly and spontaneously into a no-man's land of theoretical and methodological self-parody and paralysis. As in the

above “pedagogical” derivation, theory, in effect, stumbles onto its own immanent relation to the literary object because all other modes of access have been denied it.

But, to take this thought any further, we must first specify more precisely and conceptually the formal or categorical reality of the “literary” object in its relation to critical theory. We have termed the form of objectivity to which “literature,” along with affect, dream, narrative, etc., belongs — at least as an immanent context of psychoanalysis — as that of a “subject/object.” But this distinction, too — though only by its means does “literature” enter into the general domain of dialectical thought — fails to isolate the concrete category through which the “literary” form of “subject/object” mediates and is mediated by its relation to the social totality.

What is this category? A return to our pedagogical thought experiment may again help to pick up its thread. The misguided attempt to “apply” psychoanalytical theory to *Beloved* had forced us into a “theoretical” antinomy from which it became possible to conclude, *via negationis* and with the aid of a lesson in interpretation provided by Freud in “The Uncanny,” that the literary object itself must possess “subject”-like qualities — qualities whereby it resembled the more conventional objects of psychoanalysis. But this resemblance itself, the obvious affinity of the literary object for dreams and various other sorts of psychic objects analyzed by Freud, clearly discloses more than the subjective mediation of such objects. For what determines this, so to speak, pretheoretical intuition of resemblance rests not only on what is sensed as the *a priori* presence of the subject in the object but on a specific and concrete *form* of their mediation. In the “literary” and, more generally, psychoanalyzable object alike, a subject mediates itself through an object *consciously*, and this objective medium must in turn possess the qualities that make this conscious mediation possible.⁸

The question, then, absent the “fallacy of application” — i.e., once the pseudo-empirical form of the literary object has been discarded by critical theory as itself either nonessential or a reification — becomes that of this objective medium itself. This can only be what is common to “literary” objects such as *Beloved* and “The Sand-Man” and other affective “subject/objects” such as dreams, symptoms, parapraxes, etc.: not “affect” per se, since it can take a purely unmediated, subjective form, but that which conveys or reproduces it here, namely, narrative, the symbolic, representation, etc. In a word: mimesis.

“Mimesis” for many of us will, of course, evoke the now-effectively defunct tradition of Aristotelianism and the scarcely less hoary figures of an Auerbach or a Frye — the avatars of an aesthetics of imitation long since

thought to be obsolete in the wake of modernism, the avant-garde, and, finally, of contemporary “theory” itself, especially in its “linguistic turn.” In fact, mimesis as a theoretical category plays centrally, if in widely divergent ways, in the dialectical aesthetics of both Lukács and Adorno. But setting aside once more here any foray into the latter terrain, and reasoning simply in accordance with the dialectical axiom that categorizes the “literary” object as a form of “subject/object,” mimesis can be speculatively identified here as that category already inferred from the preceding pedagogical derivation: the process whereby a subject mediates itself through an object, but here as a process taking place in and for consciousness (or the unconscious). All that is missing from this dialectical category here — for reasons shortly to become apparent — is the postulate of its essential determination as a directly *social*, as well as conscious, mediated unity of subject and object. Mimesis here names, in other words, the dialectical relation of subject and object as a *conscious*, directly social relation.

An object such as a dream, a verbal narrative, or a visual representation would not, in this sense, be termed “mimetic” simply because a subject makes use of it to “imitate” an object external to itself — the undialectical, common-sense notion of mimesis inherited from the classical tradition and reproduced in critics such as Auerbach. Such objects are termed “mimetic” here because they are the media through which a subject — *itself* — immediately social even when “private” and thus already present in its own object — continuously reobjectifies itself, and in which such a subject potentially *recognizes* itself.

From this standpoint, the classical theory of mimesis, especially as outlined in the *Poetics*, can, though formally nondialectical, become uniquely illuminating for dialectical theory and method. Consider, for example, Aristotle’s stipulation, in the second chapter of the *Poetics*, that tragedy take as its essential object of imitation human action, or “praxis.” The *Poetics* already conceives of this, in ways that can appear to anticipate the modern, reified Cartesian subject-object duality, as an external, instrumental relation of imitating subject (the tragic poet) and an imitated object (the action selected for tragic portrayal). However, the separation of mimetic subject and object — a separation already in effect in Plato’s *Republic*, but which Plato still seeks to reverse through state regulation and policing — remains a relative one. The subject whose action is imitated and the subject imitating it, while appearing for Aristotle to be distinct entities, are nevertheless reducible to the same substance: essentially, the subject that is society itself, or *polis*. “Praxis,” that is, at the level of the social “subject/object” comprising poet, tragic action, and audience, imitates *itself* — a dialectic whose political dangers for the Platonic state, have, for Aristotelian liberalism, been reduced

to matters of judgment and good taste. The tragic poem, while asserting its own relative autonomy as a mimetic instrument, cannot, nevertheless, be conceived of outside its *social* immanence — hence its susceptibility to prescription and a kind of theoretical etiquette. It remains, *ultima instantia*, the imitation of an object, outside of whose immanent and essentially local, concrete context, *imitation itself* would lose all meaning or purpose — an object, in other words, that, on the level of the social totality, remains, likewise, *subject*. *Poetics*, like the Platonic theory that it criticized and rationalized, pushes virtually to the conceptual threshold of a Cartesian-like reification, of a purely abstract, instrumentalized theory of representation. But it cannot cross this threshold, and, thus, the mimetic nexus remains, for it, both an instrumental *and* a social one.

But, although the classical theory of mimesis stops just short of falling under its spell, it foreshadows a “praxis” that is “human” (i.e., social) but that is unable to recognize itself as social, to become, as praxis, a conscious “subject.” This is none other than the “social” action of commodities theorized by Marx in *Capital* I, chapter 1, in the section on commodity fetishism.⁹ As, in Postone’s useful phrase, a “form of social mediation,” the “phantom objectivity” of the commodity, or simply of “value,” converts the action of society as a whole into something purely thing-like and spontaneously unavailable to consciousness. I take Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism — *fons et origo* of modern critical theory — to be in no need of further explanation here. Suffice it at this point to observe that the reified object *qua* form of objectivity counts as a “subject/object” as well, but one mediating itself “behind the back” of the subject-form to which it corresponds. As *mediated forms of “subject/object,” that is, value and mimesis are opposite, indeed, antithetical to one another*. The reified society of capitalist modernity fails, as subject, to become aware of itself in the value abstraction, an object that, so to speak, “recognizes” itself only in other such objects. Value, as embodied in the commodity form of the object, thus represents the nonmimetic object par excellence.

With this still, no doubt, highly abstract and speculative thesis — the dialectical contradiction between value and mimesis as socially mediating forms of “subject/object” — I arrive at the fulcrum of the present argument. To take even an abbreviated account of what are, if it holds true, its full implications would far exceed the limits of what I can accomplish here. My method for deriving it, via a pedagogical *in medias res* and an oblique, probably amateurish reflection on the classical theory of mimesis, leaps over what are clearly a whole range of needed theoretical arguments and

clarifications. Not the least of these concerns the concept of mimesis as a *socially* mediating category, something I have postulated here without any adequate context. I am convinced that the deeper, constitutive dimension of mimesis as a social form — a dimension without which its superficial aesthetic, ethnographic, and psychological aspects remain trapped within a descriptive, uncritical, and theoretically impoverished perspective — can be rigorously derived from the mature critical theory of Marx, and the latter’s further elaboration in work such as Postone’s.¹⁰ Yet this derivation is scarcely hinted at in Marx, and, with the partial exception of Adorno, who circles around the question of mimesis and reification without, in my reading of him, clarifying it theoretically, represents an effectively blank spot on the map of critical theory. The one partial exception here may be Benjamin, who seems to have at least glimpsed the contours of this dialectic in “The Storyteller.” What Benjamin alleges there, from the standpoint of a kind of materialist ethnography, as the progressive loss of the spontaneous social capacity to tell stories in the course of capitalist modernization, and which he attributes to a puzzling and theoretically underspecified eclipse of “experience,” nevertheless points, I think, at the fundamental theoretical distinction here: those societies in which the value-form is either absent or lacks any socially mediating function (which would comprise a possible postcapitalist social form) mediate and reproduce themselves *directly* on a plane of conscious, social self-representation and recognition, however indirect and mystified the forms taken by the latter may be. To use the more familiar terms, pre- or noncommodity society not only narrates itself as part of its ideological self-legitimation — something, after all, true of commodity society as well, *qua* ideology. Such forms of society cannot reproduce themselves *except* insofar as they continuously assume “narrative” form in the consciousness of the individuals composing them.¹¹ Commodity society obeys no such reproductive law. (This accords with what is also, *qua* the more fully totalized social form of capitalist modernity, the relatively less self-integrated, ad hoc, spatiotemporal heterogeneity of noncommodity society.) That is, of necessity, nonreified society, along with its corresponding forms of social subjectivity, mediates itself *mimetically*. Value-mediated society does not eradicate such forms of mimetic self-reproduction (“narrative,” story telling, etc.), though it arguably tends asymptotically toward this goal. But it does banish them into marginal, socially nonreproductive spheres. This, rather than Benjamin’s intuitively certain but undertheorized eclipse of “experience” and rise of “information,” is what would account, then, for the decline in the social ability to tell stories. One knows spontaneously how to tell them — in fact, one does not know oneself socially *except* through telling them — because one’s very social being has,

without them, no other viable form.

But, although such a dialectical typology of social form *qua* mimesis must at this point remain a theoretical postulate, with it the question with which we began, that of the standpoint of immanent critique as “literary” critique, can now be answered: such a standpoint is the contradiction between value and mimesis, or between reified and mimetic forms of objectivity. The progressive tendency of value — of, to use Marx’s term, “asocial societalization” — toward the negation of mimesis as a form of social mediation and reproduction not only condemns the mimetic object — Benjamin’s “experience” and story telling — to an increasingly marginalized existence. It also, by that same logic, confers on such objects a negative social charge. Mimesis is not merely the transparent medium within which a class-bound ideological struggle is waged. Nor is it, as it was for Lukács, confined to the level of a species-being upon whose ground there was then to be erected a realist aesthetic able to “glimpse socialism” — although there may, in fact, still be much to be learned about this category from a critical study of Lukács’s aesthetic theory. Mimesis is *itself* inseparably bound up with a form of societalization of which the value-abstraction is the direct, determinate negation. But insofar as value, in its fully historical and dynamic form as capital, pushes, in accordance with that dynamic, toward a terminal social crisis pitting capital against its own social conditions of possibility, the mimetic object not only preserves, negatively, the outlines of a nonreified form of consciousness. It becomes a standpoint — though certainly not the only one — from which to glimpse, on the hither side of value, the possible shape of things to come.

The fact, meanwhile, that the “literary” object in its essential form as mimetic object finally eludes positive, empirical theorization, presenting to the reifying categories of the latter either what appears to be an irrational imperviousness to theoretical cognition (Benjamin’s term for this imperviousness is “aura”) or, at best, leading it into the antinomies of the “fallacy of application,” sheds its irrational appearance once the dialectical contradiction that grounds this theoretical antinomy — the social and historical antithesis of value and mimesis — is itself clearly theorized and brought to bear via a second reflection. What has now become, with the decline of “story telling,” the irreducible negativity of mimesis as a social form of objectivity constitutes the necessary blind spot of conventional, reifying theoretical consciousness *because* such a form of objectivity corresponds directly, albeit negatively and *in potentia*, to a form of nonreified consciousness, to a mimetic form of *subjectivity* outside and opposite to the “theory’s” social purview. That is, the object that, in its initial pseudo-empirical form of appearance as “literary” object, eludes positive theorization corresponds on

the level of its underlying categorical reality as mimetic object to the social and historical standpoint from which “theory’s” reifying categories and self-understanding are *themselves* to be critically understood and overcome. Critique is immanent to the “literary” object insofar as and to the extent that such an object, realizing its own essence by conforming to its own negatively mimetic form of objectivity, asserts its incompatibility with *all* reifying forms of consciousness and “theory.” The critical theory of the “literary” object is the *self*-awareness of the mimetic form of objectivity — of the directly, *consciously* social form of “subject/object” — in its negativity.

This leaves entirely unexplored and unresolved, to be sure, the question of the precise, determinate relation between mimesis as what grounds, negatively, the possibility of the “literary” object and the given content — the singularity — of the “literary” object in the form of an individual “text” or *work*. The fact that the critical standpoint from which to undertake its critique resides immanently within the individual work itself insofar as *it* remains, formally, a mimetic object — the fact that a work such as *Beloved* does, to this extent, furnish the standpoint of its own critique — does not of course absolve any work in its turn from the most unsparing criticism. The social negativity of mimetic form cannot, under any circumstances, be ascribed *directly* to individual works themselves. The “work” is not the anticommodity. As mimetic object, its task is to frame and instantiate the negative flux of nonreified consciousness — or what *would be* such a consciousness — and nothing more. It may fail at this task — for this potential for failure, too, is what makes it a “work.” To lose sight of this (in its own right) fundamental principle of immanent critique and postulate a directly aesthetic negativity, attributing either to works themselves, or to art or literature as general categories, a radical agency, is to risk falling back into the frozen antinomies of “theory”: there is a fallacy of “agency” to match every fallacy of “application.” A poem or a novel no more *acts* than a dream or a fantasy does — that is to say, they act only insofar as no *conscious* social action is possible *except* as mediated by such mimetic objects.

It is to this relation of mimetic form to individual work and to the path (the method) leading immanent critique from one to the other — and back again — that I hope to turn in more detail in further elaborations of “Principles of Immanent Critique.” Absent an absolute theoretical and methodological clarity as to the *standpoint* of such a critique, however, this path leads, at best, into fortuitous insights from which it then becomes impossible to trace one’s way back. And, at worst, and most often, it can lead nowhere but back into the reified, critical paralysis of what typically counts as literary and cultural “theory” today.

Notes

¹ Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: U Cambridge P, 1996) 87-88.

² Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* 140-41.

³ I leave aside, here, for purposes of argument, the question of the exact relationship of "literature," as form and category, to "culture," and treat them as isomorphic.

⁴ Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* 21.

⁵ See, for example, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT P, 1983) 17-34; "The Essay as Form" in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York, Columbia UP, 1991) 3-23; and Adorno's contributions to *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (New York: Harper and Row, 1976) 1-86; 105-122.

⁶ "The Idiom of Crisis: On the Historical Immanence of Language in Adorno," forthcoming.

⁷ See Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, chapter 3, 84-120.

⁸ I understand the Freudian category of the "unconscious" as continuous here with the conscious. The "unconsciousness" of the social relations expressed in the commodity fetish lacks — as we shall see herein — this property of continuity.

⁹ "The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers." *Capital*, Vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990) 164-65.

¹⁰ I would include here as well the crucial contributions to contemporary critical theory being made by the movement known in German-speaking circles as "Wertkritik." *Vide* work by Robert Kurz, Roswitha Scholz, Ernst Lohoff, Norbert Trenkl, and others associated with the journals *Krisis* and *Exit!*

¹¹ This is a theory I have already touched on in a preliminary way in the final chapter of my own work, *Determinations* (London: Verso, 2001).

Marxism and Form Now

Mathias Nilges

This introductory essay intends to advance the core arguments of a lengthy interrogation of Marxism and form in the twenty-first century. This shorter version of the project cannot include the set of close readings and detailed examinations of individual forms and texts that conclude the longer version. What I will attempt in what follows is to foreground the basic principles of a Marxist formalist method for the contemporary conjuncture, as well as address the stakes of such a critical project in the context of contemporary discussions surrounding form, genre, literariness, disciplinarity, and reading. Such an analysis of contemporary Marxist formalism must, of course, address the currently vibrant field of new formalism, which, as I shall argue, stands at times in polar opposition to Marxist praxis. This essay therefore has two projects. As indicated by the title of this special issue of *Mediations*, the core of Marxist literary critique is built upon a constant process of negation and sublation, on the need to develop a Marxist critical "now" by constantly revisiting and continually questioning its own method. In this essay I will 1.) illustrate the dialectical connection between literary form and the form of thought that determines how we talk about literature (and form) in the first place, and 2.) gesture into the direction of a Marxist critical method for the twenty-first century that eclipses much contemporary controversy surrounding concepts such as reading, method, literariness, literature, literary history, and form by developing a negative dialectical account of form in historically specific relation to a general process I will describe as capitalism's cultural regulation.

The Way We Talk About Form Now, or “I Placed a Form in Tennessee...”

There is much now-ness in contemporary critical discourse. Over the course of the last few years, literary critics have occupied themselves with questions such as: What is literature now? How do we argue now? What is form now? What is genre now? How do we teach now?¹

Clearly present in this anxious contemporaneity in current critical discourse is a historically and materially specific crisis of futurity that is tied to a distinct sense of urgency on the level of disciplinarity. Rather than actually examining how form, genre, literature, and interpretation function in the now, however, critical output frequently remains preoccupied with discussions of why such analysis is (supposedly no longer) done, who or what has to be blamed for this trend, what the negative consequences for our discipline are, and which lost critical and literary virtues we should return to. As a result, necessary questions regarding contemporary form are replaced with a series of anxiety-laden provocations that provide us more with a series of mournful appeals to return to a lost “back then” than with critical interrogations of our “now.” The true question that underlies numerous versions of this debate is one that criticizes (rather than critiques) the present and nostalgically looks backward, instead of productively forward, a question unable to overcome the stasis of a now that is criticized for a lack of precisely the same critical sublation that we can find in its critics: “what now?” Elsewhere, I show that a similar crisis of futurity in contemporary literary production is a characteristic feature of what I call the periodic shift from postmodernism to post-Fordist culture, that is, the shift from emergent to full post-Fordism.² What I would like to foreground in what follows is the suggestion that the strange temporality underlying much contemporary critical discourse (on the level of both its assumed urgency and its logical constitution) signals a crisis on the level of thought that is dialectically connected to a logically congruent crisis on the level of literary form.

Let me unfold the steps that will build toward this argument by turning first toward the crisis of futurity on the level of thought. Not surprisingly, we do not encounter many dialectical conceptions of the now in the midst of the present onslaught of contemporaneity. The title of this essay and of this subsection fulfills, as is doubtlessly clear by now, a double function, gesturing into the direction of both a current trend in critical production and the material and historical determinations that inform the use of the concept “now” that remain all too often unexamined. Yet, my use of “now” is not simply facetious. Rather, it constitutes a call for negative dialectical critiques of the concept of now-ness as employed in critical discourse, which allows us to launch an inquiry into the materially and historically specific structures

that inform today’s approaches to questions of interpretation and disciplinarity in general and of form in particular. The most recent representative example can be found in the discussions that made up the 2008 Modern Language Association Presidential Forum (“The Way We Teach Now”), published in *Profession 2009*. In particular, the contributions that deal with the question of “reading(s)” are notable for our purposes. Mark Edmundson’s “Against Readings” is arranged to present a counterpoint to David Steiner’s essay “Reading,” yet the only true opposition between the pieces is contained in the essays’ titles. Both pieces are indicative of current critiques of the “now” and lament the lack of disciplinary skills and the growing inability to recognize literature’s individual status. While Steiner quotes Gerald Graff to mount a critique of contemporary literary critical flatness that allegedly merely asks students to “take sides in debates between formalist and new-historicist interpreters,” Edmundson speaks out against “readings” that simply throw random theoretical models (the differences between which are negligible, according to Edmundson) at literary texts in order to categorize and “judge” their quality in reference to an external set of theoretical categories that do not really have anything to do with individual works of literature.³ Edmundson’s solution to the problem of the now is to stop producing Derridean, Foucauldian, or Marxist readings of Blake and instead teach Blakean readings of Blake, an argument for the resurrection of literature’s lost status of independence and autonomy, a praxis of diversity-politics criticism that tolerantly aims to “befriend the text.”⁴ Steiner, in turn, argues for a practice of reading that ultimately ends up foregrounding the experience of reading a piece of literature and a practice of teaching that enables students to “move beyond resistance to understanding and from understanding to pleasure and even love.”⁵

What is interesting for the problem at hand, however, are not the surface arguments. After all, neither characterization of contemporary critical praxis and its problems delivers a convincing or sufficiently complicated account of the most pressing crises our discipline faces. Yes, throwing theory at a literary text to see what sticks and reducing the literary text to the level of an example than can prove or extend an external theoretical notion is not what literary criticism should do. Yet, despite the fact that we all know that such “readings” are executed on a daily basis, this reductive use of both theory and literature is so fundamentally flawed and simplistically uncritical that it can be dismissed without warranting much further discussion. Of true interest here is the logical basis upon which both Steiner’s and Edmundson’s essays’ surface arguments rest. Both essays construct their project similarly. That is, both essays describe a literary-critical now that is characterized by the supposed loss of those traditional values and methods that end up robbing it

of its own disciplinary identity (and we can easily see how the reduction of structural discussions regarding critical methodology and praxis to the level of identity must inevitably produce troubling logical positions). The solution to the problems of the present that are, in characteristic fashion, described as either brought about by the struggle between formalism, deconstruction, and new historicism on one hand and the influence of interdisciplinarity and cultural studies on the other (Gerald Graff's contribution to the forum addresses this second facet in more detail), is a return to past practices and values. Ultimately, thus, both essays end up in the same logical terrain that stresses in Schillerian fashion the experiential, formative, and educative value of literature itself (of course, this assertion of the autonomy of the work of literature is in itself a theoretical position with a long tradition and its own praxis of reading). The way to fix the problems of the present, it seems, is to move ahead into the past.⁶

My argument here is, of course, not that looking to past practices is not a worthwhile endeavor. My argument is not that the past has nothing to offer us. Rather, my argument is that current critical praxis tends to antidiialectically reach back into the past, attempting to resurrect critical methods and concepts for the now in ways that divorce thought from history. Moreover, we will see that this tendency to divorce thought from history for the sake of resurrecting lost critical projects must itself be historicized, since it is indicative of a form of thought that is gestated under specific material and historical conditions. To illustrate this point, let us turn toward the current debate surrounding new formalism. The key text in this discussion is doubtless Marjorie Levinson's essay "What Is New Formalism?," which is remarkable for its clear and extensive mapping of the debate's main positions.⁷ While, as Levinson suggests, critics such as Ellen Rooney warn that an overly nostalgic "longing for the lost unities of bygone forms" may end up undermining the "reanimation of form in the age of interdisciplinarity," there remain two main positions of new formalism, both attached to the past. On one side, Levinson writes, we have a strain of new formalism dominated by those who "want to restore to today's reductive reinscription of historical reading its original focus on form (traced by these critics to sources foundational for materialist critique — e.g., Hegel, Marx, Freud, Adorno, Althusser, Jameson)." On the other side, we find "those who campaign to bring back a sharp demarcation between history and art, discourse and literature, with form (regarded as the condition of aesthetic experience as traced to Kant...) the prerogative of art." "In short," Levinson concludes, "we have a new formalism that makes a continuum with new historicism and a backlash formalism."⁸ Once again, what is interesting here is not necessarily what we say about form now, but how we talk about it now. That is, the

significant determination is that between form of thought and our discussions about form. Instead of maintaining the distinction between "activist formalism" and "normative formalism" that Levinson and a number of other critics adopt as labels for the two main strains of new formalism, it is important to note that both strains stand in troubled relationship to the past and therefore to the now.⁹

What, from a Marxist perspective, might at first sight appear to be a refreshing willingness to take seriously the true contributions of the Marxist tradition to literary study (without falsely and in ideologically suspect fashion characterizing it as a vulgar form of simple, inflexible materialist and political determinisms, as critics such as Edmundson still do) reveals itself upon closer inspection as an antidiialectical form of thought that runs counter to the logical core of the Marxist method.¹⁰ As a result of the much-professed need to return to Adorno and Lukács and resurrect a Marxist account of form, the logic of activist formalism is indeed logically congruent with normative formalism's intended resurrection of Kant and Schiller. The frequently encountered idealization of Marxist formalism rests on a logical paradox and assumes a situation of historical discontinuity that only makes sense if constructed from an utterly un-Marxist position that at its core precludes recourse to the logical form that constitutes the very basis of Marxist praxis: the dialectic. It is surprising, yet, as we shall see, historically coherent that even those new formalist arguments that advocate the return to dialectical critique display fundamentally antidiialectical logic. It is, however, not surprising that the result should cause Levinson to characterize new formalism fundamentally as a "movement rather than a theory or method."¹¹ Levinson herself anticipates this argument when she writes:

Because new formalism's argument is with prestige and praxis, not grounding principles, one finds in the literature ... no efforts to re-theorize art, culture, knowledge, value, or even — and this *is* a surprise — form. That form is either "the" or "a" source of pleasure, ethical education, and critical power is a view shared by all the new formalism essays. Further, all agree that something has gone missing and that the something in question is best conceived as attention to form But despite the proliferation in these essays of synonyms for *form* ... none of these essays puts redefinition front and center.¹²

Consequently, Levinson argues, the work of the movement consists principally in "rededication," that is, in the attempt to "reinstate the problematic of form so as to recover values forgotten, rejected, or vulgarized."¹³ Taking Levinson's argument to its logical conclusion, we must note

that the recovery project aimed at returning Marxist attention to form to the center of our discipline runs counter to Marxist logic. The logical error in such projects, the same error that relegates new formalism to perpetual status as a movement and precludes its development into a method, is the assumption that there is such a thing as Marxist formalism.

To be sure, it is also not true to say that there is no Marxist formalism. The logically coherent formulation characteristically thinks both positions in one thought (a thought that gives rise to a series of negative positions, as well as that temporality we can understand as the history of Marxist formalist thought). The initial mistake is a traditional one, namely the false assumption of the identity of thing and concept. Yes, there is Marxist formalism, yet it has no positive value and it is precisely this positivistic assumption of a transhistoric stability residing in the idea of Marxist formalism or the concept of form itself that reveals itself to produce the antidiialectical logic, which (re)produces the stasis that in part constitutes the strange now-ness we examined above. To clarify this, let us turn toward Adorno's famous reformulation of the Hegelian dialectic that strips it of the positivistic remainders contained in the standard account of a dialectical synthesis. In his *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, Adorno extends Hegel's assertion of the need to conceive of the whole of thought as both result and process, that is, of the necessity to foreground progress and action without which the aim remains a "lifeless universal."¹⁴ A proper dialectical method, according to Adorno, is based on a dialectic of "nonidentity," on,

a philosophical project that does not presuppose the identity of being and thought Instead, it will attempt to articulate the very opposite, namely the divergence of concept and thing, subject and object, and their unreconciled state.¹⁵

Thinking takes place via concepts. Form is one such concept. One way to interrogate such a concept would be to compare and contrast it to other concepts — content, for example. Yet, concepts make claims toward unity. That is, each concept contains a variety of elements, and in order to arrive at conceptual unity, we take from each of these elements those parts they all have in common. Those common parts then become the concept. Yet, Adorno stresses, we also "necessarily include countless characteristics that are *not* integrated into the individual elements contained in this concept."¹⁶ It is for this reason, that Adorno famously stresses that concepts are always at the same time smaller and larger than the characteristics that are subsumed under it. And it is for this reason that we must at every moment not simply study the contradiction between different concepts (say, the contradictions

between the use of the concept of form in activist formalism as opposed to its use in normative formalism), but we must also study the contradictions within the concept itself. If, therefore, we speak of the concept of "Marxist formalism," we must do so bearing in mind the negative dialectical account of concepts. The concept of "Marxist formalism," just as the concept of form itself in proper Marxist analysis, has no positive and certainly no transhistorical content. Rather, form in Marxism is in its totality an infinite series of negative relations without positive terms (that is, without positivistic synthesis). Nostalgically idealizing Adorno's or Lukács's notions of form and formalist methodology empties these concepts of the dynamic core the methodology rests upon and, by ignoring one of Marxism's central lessons — the study of an object's immanent contradictions — resurrects Marxist formalism as an antidiialectical, *a priori* concept. And it is on this level that we find another explanation for the tendency of seemingly opposed levels of argumentation (in our case, reading and not reading, activist and normative formalism) that ultimately find themselves in the same logical universe: Kantianism. One result of the lack of negative dialectical, immanent critiques of the concept of form itself is new formalism's characteristic production of an unhistorical, oppressive now-ness.¹⁷

In the context of this messianism of form(alism) that, as with all forms of messianism, must remain a temporally troubled and antidiialectical movement hoping for the spontaneous emergence of (disciplinary) reform out of the empty shell of a method, the way we talk about form becomes of vital importance and reveals its dialectical connection to the things we say about form. Fredric Jameson famously gestures into the direction of the connection between analyses of form and form of thought in the classic *Marxism and Form*. Dialectical thought in Hegel, Jameson writes, "turns out to be nothing more or less than the elaboration of dialectical sentences."¹⁸ Such dialectical sentences are missing from the dominant current discussions about form, and it is this lack we sense in the undialectical awkwardness of the use of the concept of "now" in current sentences and titles.¹⁹ It is once again not simply the movement or project that matters, but, in the face of a missing dialectical method, the call for a return to Marxist formalism disappears into its own temporal and logical incoherence. After all, as Jameson suggests, "any concrete description of a literary or philosophical phenomenon — if it is to be really complete — has an ultimate obligation to come to terms with the shape of the individual sentences themselves, to give an account of their origin and formation."²⁰ This line of reasoning is extended in Jameson's interpretation of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* as a key text for literary critique. While seemingly mainly concerned with political and philosophical problems, Jameson argues, Lukács works through epistemo-

logical problems that take on a central role in discussions surrounding literary form. *History and Class Consciousness* indicates that critiquing literary form is always dialectically connected to a process of critiquing both the concept of form and forms of thought. It is Jameson's linking of Marxist formalist critique and Lukács's critique of a form of thought connected to the famous Kantian "thing-in-itself" that becomes of vital importance to our current project of examining contemporary forms of thinking about form.

Jameson shows that Lukács's critique of Kantian descriptions of the relationship between subject and external reality, out of which emerges the famous notion of the noumenal, assumes that the notion of the "thing-in-itself" constitutes an optical illusion that arises from a particular form of thought. This optical illusion emerges as a result of a "prephilosophical attitude toward the world which is ultimately socioeconomic in character: namely, from the tendency of the middle classes to understand our relationship to external objects ... in static and contemplative fashion."²¹ In other words, the inability to conceive of external objects as anything but static noumena is dialectically connected to a historically and materially specific form of thought that remains unable to grow "aware of capitalism as a historical phenomenon."²² The Kantian problem of the thing-in-itself therefore presents itself as a socioeconomically specific one in which a purely contemplative form of thought is produced out of, and, in turn, produces, middle-class social experience and understanding of the capitalist structure. The trademark of such a purely contemplative attitude is the elimination of history from concepts, that is, the idealization of either timeless or transhistorical concepts, which, in the absence of change, are turned into noumena. Lukács's famous critique of Kantian thought that short-circuits the dialectical connection between form of thought and historically and materially specific structural forms is to insist upon a definition of Marxist praxis that conceives of objects in terms of change. It is here that (despite the great number of differences) we find a logical link between Adorno's negative dialectical notion of concepts and Lukács's understanding of objects, reality and totality as process and progress. Both positions stress the centrality of contradiction and negation without relying upon positive terms.

If this is so, and if the critical discussions we concern ourselves with here are similarly characterized by contemplation, stasis, and the reduction of method to movements (tellingly movements without progress), what is it that determines the form of thought that characterizes current discussions? What explains the static and purely contemplative nature of new formalism, especially on the level of its arguments about form, and what are the structural forms whose reified manifestations we find in current forms of

thought about form? Especially in the context of new formalist debates we get a glimpse of a specific contemporary segment of the liberal tradition of thought, which shines through in arguments that advocate the return to the mythical time in which literary scholars still talked about form and provided a stable basis for a disciplinary identity. Such arguments remind us of Jameson's famous critique of liberalism as bankrupt yet pervasive, and of its focus on the individual case, rather than on a complex network of relations.²³ It is impossible to develop here an adequately complex description of the current socioeconomic juncture as employed in my general analytic framework. I begin to sketch out such a description in a previous issue of *Mediations*.²⁴

For the moment, let us simply focus on one aspect of the current historical moment, which I develop from the basis of French regulation theory that provides us with a valuable economic model which helps us extend the dialectical connection between structural form and form of thought with which we are concerned here, namely its study of capitalist history as a result of its social regulation. The Regulation School establishes a dialectical connection of capitalist structure (Regime of Accumulation) and its social dimension (Mode of Regulation) and foregrounds moments of crisis as the motor of capitalist development that produces productive disturbances on both levels of the equation: Regime of Accumulation (ROA) and Mode of Regulation (MOR). Doubtless, the most prominent crisis today is the crisis of neoliberal capitalism, whose end is already being celebrated by a great number of scholars and commentators.²⁵ The structural crisis's effect on the social dimension is on the level of thought with which we are all familiar, that is, a form of thought that, on the level of philosophy, effectively and once and for all buries the postmodern project. The free-market project has failed, many argue, and after a period of free-market anarchy, chaos, and the tearing down of the safe regulatory structures of Fordism that gave way to post-Fordism's chaotic system, it is finally time to return to (frequently Rooseveltesque) traditions of capitalist regulation. It is not hard to spot the logical congruency between those advocating the return to capitalist regulation in times of free-market chaos and those calling for the return to traditional, stable disciplinary structures in an age of interdisciplinarity-induced instability.

On the level of cultural production, we frequently encounter descriptions of the present moment that are characterized by what William Gibson in his 2007 novel *Spook Country* calls "the terror of contemporaneity."²⁶ What was once perceived as the liberating free-market narrative of post-Fordist structures whose rise was supported and made possible by the philosophico-cultural project called postmodernism, is now often represented as a form of

oppression resulting from the standardization of difference and diversity. (Especially in the case of the latter concept, whose signification and socioeconomic function have changed radically over the course of the last few decades, we can once again see that it operates in materially and historically specific fashion.) Cultural production experiences a much-publicized crisis of futurity that is most clearly visible on the level of utopian form. Jameson already anticipates this trend in his 1996 *The Seeds of Time*, an argument publicized by Slavoj Žižek in the documentary *Žižek!*. Both argue that we have seemingly lost the ability to represent small changes in the socioeconomic structure; yet, we have no problem imagining scenarios of complete global devastation. What they consider a crisis of imagination reveals itself here as the reified form of a troubled relationship to the structure of contemporary capitalism, which in its insistence on deregulation and productive chaos complicates the project of identifying dialectical contradictions that can guarantee future progress. A notable example is the proliferation of postapocalyptic narratives as critiques of the present socioeconomic situation whose inability to recover futurity via dialectical sublations of the “now” always seems to require a system-reboot via narratives of destruction that allow for the recovery of traditional values and forms of subjectivity. In a recent commentary on the contemporary economic situation, Robert Kurz describes the idealized return to governmental regulation of economic structures as a “backwards flip” that tends to treat neoliberalism as a mistake, which can be fixed via the return to Keynesian values. Yet, Kurz stresses, what we are looking at today is neoliberal Keynesianism and, as such, not the same as Keynesianism “back then.”²⁷ What we are looking at, thus, is not a return, but instead a different stage of neoliberalism. Yet, just as in the discussions that dominate our discipline, the central characteristic of an argument in favor of neoliberal Keynesianism is the inability to come to terms with the changing nature of the concept of Keynesianism itself, hence, similarly dooming itself to a frequently static existence in an awkward “now” that cannot find a way to produce the new.²⁸

I also suggested above that, in addition to linking form of thought and structural form, we can dialectically link form of thought and literary form. Lukács’s great contribution to literary study in *History and Class Consciousness*, according to Jameson, is that he resolves the problems of nineteenth-century philosophical thought not on the level of philosophy. Rather, Jameson argues, “the ultimate resolution of the Kantian dilemma is to be found not in the nineteenth-century philosophical systems themselves, not even in that of Hegel, but rather in the nineteenth-century *novel*.”²⁹ It is not in scientific knowledge, Jameson argues, that Lukács finds his answer to the

problem of the noumenal, but in literary plot and in the novel’s formal arrangements that include the formal composition of characters. It is precisely such an analysis that once again resolves the impasses on the level of scientific thought in general and of new formalism in particular.

The Seeds of the Real: Cultural Regulation, Form, and Literary History

As in the case of the critique of new formalism and contemporary critical now-ness, I can here provide only a few brief examples that indicate the direction the full analysis of literary form and Marxist formalism take, as presented in the longer version of this essay. What, then, are those developments on the level of literary form that can allow us to work out some of the problems on the level of philosophical and disciplinary thought? The last twenty years or so were an eventful time for American literature. Postmodernism and its trademark formal experimentation effectively exhausted itself at the moment at which its sociopolitical, philosophical, and cultural core revealed itself as a short period in sociopolitical and philosophico-cultural history whose productive output significantly contributed to resolving the structural crisis of Fordism and facilitated the transition into a new mode of development: post-Fordism. It is at this point — Fordism’s structural supersession and the transition into full post-Fordism, at which postmodernism and its cultural forms develop their full functionality in regulation of the post-Fordist structure — that we begin to witness a large-scale crisis of literary representation that registers especially significantly on the level of form. Contemporary U.S. literary production is characterized by what is frequently described as the renaissance of older forms. Most notably, as a number of critics have argued, we have witnessed a widespread return to realism, American naturalism, and the historical novel. The examples of this return to realism are countless and include works by authors such as Annie Proulx, Richard Russo, Jonathan Franzen, Chang-Rae Lee, Cormac McCarthy, Geraldine Brooks, and Bret Easton Ellis, as well as the recent novels of William Gibson, Kim Stanley Robinson, Thomas Pynchon, and Don DeLillo. To be sure, this formal shift is not specific to literature and can also be observed in other media, such as film, TV, photography, and installation art. Does this development, then, constitute a “return” to forms such as realism and an attempt to turn back the clock to the times before the emergence of postmodernism’s formal experimentation that evolved parallel to post-Fordism as a result of the structural crisis of Fordism beginning in the 1960s?³⁰

Of course, we know by now that the answer to this question must be a resounding “no.” Instead, we have to understand this development on the

level of culture as logically congruent with the regressive ideology of neoliberal Keynesianism. In *A Singular Modernity*, Jameson likens postmodernism to a failed revolutionary project, undermined by nostalgia, fear of true revolutionary innovation, and the persistent, bourgeois attachment to tradition. What he calls “the return of the language of an older modernity” is for Jameson, hence, a distinct sign of the postmodern and of its inherently bourgeois character.³¹ I would argue, however, that we can more accurately understand postmodernism as a successful, and not as a failed, revolution, and that the return of the “languages of an older modernity” that Jameson associates with postmodernism is, in fact, indicative of postmodernism’s exhaustion in particular and the completed sociocultural and economic shift into full post-Fordism in general. The return of past forms that we currently witness, in other words, does not constitute a failure of a revolution of the kind described by Marx. To be sure, it is easy to put together a long list of contemporary works of literature that wholeheartedly embrace the nostalgic idealization of a mythical lost time that provided stability and protection (and that was characterized by a literature that formerly corresponded to such values), thus paralleling the antidialectical nostalgia of those mourning the loss of old economic structures, social values, and disciplinary identities. Yet, such works that coherently reproduce on the level of form the regressive and statically ahistorical attitude of new formalism are not very interesting to study. Yes, there is coherence we could point toward in order to further the line of argumentation introduced above. Much more interesting, however, would be to ask the Lukácsian question: are there works of literature that formally resolve the crisis of futurity we witness in so much mainstream cultural production and thought?

In the longer version of this essay, I illustrate why the answer to the above question must be an excited “yes” by turning in part toward the work of William Gibson. Yet, Gibson’s work, arguably among the last few decades’ most valuable objects of study for analyses of the dialectical connection of literary form, form of philosophical thought, and capitalist structure, has been receiving a considerable amount of critical attention. Instead of discussing Gibson’s latest novels, therefore, I will here take the opportunity to foreground the importance of the work of Kim Stanley Robinson, which is of similarly high value for the discussion at hand. Robinson is most well known for his complex interrogations of the concept of Utopia, usually via the vehicle of hard science fiction. *The Mars Trilogy* and *The Three Californias* (sometimes also referred to as *The Wild Shore Trilogy*) are usually considered the key works in his *oeuvre*. Critics have not devoted much attention to his most recent trilogy, the *Science in the Capital* trilogy, in part, because it does not quite seem to fit with Robinson’s previous

work. Instead of grappling with speculative fiction and narratives set in the future, Robinson has recently turned his attention to realism and narratives of global politics in the present. Hence, one could seemingly argue that Robinson has abandoned his traditional concerns and has fallen prey to the contemporary crisis of futurity that makes the production of utopian representations of a future that has not yet come to pass impossible. A more precise way of reading the formal shift of Robinson’s fiction, however, arrives at the opposite conclusion. Switching to realist form is a continuation of Robinson’s ongoing exploration of the dialectical relation between form and socioeconomic history by means of radical shifts in formal register. As do other authors such as Gibson, Octavia Butler, Cormac McCarthy, and Colson Whitehead, Robinson presents us with a novelistic form that addresses the currently pervasive crisis of futurity in an attempt to wrest a utopian impulse from the grip of the current structural and epistemological impasse.

In order to illustrate this point, let us briefly look at the characters that dominate Robinson’s latest novels. If we study characters in contemporary novels, we can relatively easily complete a process of simple pattern recognition and arrive at a series of characters that remain coherent within the structural logic of post-Fordist capitalism. In a previous issue of *Mediations*, I illustrated that the figure of the absent or troubled father is one such character that mediates the struggle between anti-paternalistic structure and its social dimension in post-Fordism.³² Yet, such an analysis only tells part of the story. That is, it only reveals those narratives that are congruent with the crisis we are examining here. What is missing from such an analysis is the examination of those kinds of works of literature that dialectically resolve the crisis. For Lukács, the difference between Zola’s and Balzac’s ability to resolve the problem of epistemological stasis through realist form registers in part on the level of characters. The key difference in this distinction for Lukács lies in the notion of “typicality,” which, as Jameson stresses in his analysis of Lukács’s argument, allows him to distinguish between characters that indicate a form of thought directed at historicity and historical change, as opposed to a static form of thought that reduces characters to types and, as such, to “mere illustration[s] of a thesis.”³³ In other words, Lukács faults Zola for constructing characters that in their typicality resemble archetypes of the now, while Balzac’s characters are “not typical of a certain kind of fixed social element, such as class, but rather of the historical moment itself,” thus generating an appreciation of historical change through contradictions (as opposed to perpetuating the stasis of the now by means of its typicalization).³⁴ In our case, it is easy to find contemporary versions of Zola — authors who may well understand some of the

pressures of the now, yet who remain unable to transcend the process of representation as typicalization, consequently freezing history instead of dialectically driving it forward.³⁵

The great value of Robinson's novels is that they resist precisely such typicalization and instead thematize it in order to supersede the crisis that produces the general tendency toward typicalization in contemporary cultural production. Rather than telling the story of the now through characters that represent Robinson's preexisting thesis regarding the present, he provides us with a matrix of conflicting positions. *Science in the Capital* may be frustrating for the reader who expects to find a Marxist character who provides smart answers to present problems. Yet, this was never a characteristic of Robinson's fiction and of his affinity with dialectical thought. If such a character existed in his novels, Robinson would not just be guilty of the same typicalization as Zola, but also of the same antidialectical logic we find in new formalist attempts to resurrect Marxism. More rewardingly, Robinson provides us with a wide selection of characters: many display various shades of (neo)liberal thought, luddites, empiricist positivists, Buddhist monks, (fiscal) conservatives, and libertarians. What his novels leave us with are sets of negative relations, networks of contradictions that set up the most significant political and philosophical tensions that determine our present. These negative networks, in turn, resist static, purely contemplative typicalization and instead set up a dialectical relationship between characters and the now. We find the same formal strategy on the level of plot, where dialectical contradictions drive forward a process that never suffices itself with positivistic (or satisfying) resolutions: libertarians struggle with neoliberals who struggle with neoconservatives, Buddhists struggle with humanist leftists, philosophers struggle with scientists, capitalism struggles with sustainable development, and luddite politics compete with the ideal of terraforming. Plot and character development are driven by contradictions, that is, by constant change arising from the network of negative political and philosophical positions without clear positive terms resisting the static typology we find, for example, in the work of Jonathan Safran Foer and Dave Eggers and which corresponds to the antidialectical conception of form in new formalism. Instead of providing us with a host of characters that represent the predetermined positions authors such as Bret Easton Ellis mobilize for the purpose of social critique, positions that are inevitably reduced to petrified fragments of a world frozen in time, Robinson's characters remain at every point connected to an unresolved, dialectical multipositionality. Far from abandoning it, Robinson reconstructs Utopia as the dialectical process it is and mobilizes it in historically specific form in ways that allow us not just to thematize but to begin to work through the

epistemological pressures of the now. Reading *Science in the Capital* means to dissolve what we conceive of as paralyzing impasses (politically as well as formally) and show them, as Lukács would have it, as the multipositional processes they are.

This line of argumentation is, of course, connected to a fundamental concept that informs the Marxist critical method: the problem of mediation. In the context of his analysis of Sartre, Jameson channels his account of the concept through the following set of questions: "How do we pass ... from one level of social life to another, from the psychological to the social, indeed, from the social to the economic? What is the relation of ideology, not to mention the work of art itself, to the more fundamental social and historical reality of groups in conflict, and how must the latter be understood if we are able to see cultural objects as social acts, at once disguised and transparent?"³⁶ This set of questions is of vital importance to current discussions about (Marxist) formalism. That the political is firmly located in the cultural is a common suggestion by now. Yet, this is only a part of the whole problem, and even as such, is never explored to the full level of consequence it indicates. Following the logical determinations of the arguments above, it becomes clear that we have arrived at a definition of culture that locates it at the heart of the dialectical interconnected of material structure and the sociopolitical force field that is as much produced by this structure as it, in turn, produces, or, more accurately, regulates, this structure itself. Put in terms of the Regulation School, culture is located in the center of the dialectical struggle between Regime of Accumulation and Mode of Regulation and can be represented in the following manner:

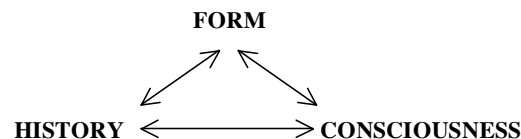
ROA ↔ CULTURE ↔ MOR

I would here disagree with Jameson's suggestion that culture can serve as an "introduction to the real," less complex than the economic, which it "reduce[s]" and "simplifie[s]."³⁷ In our current juncture, culture must rather be seen as the area in which both the economic and the social are gestated in dialectical fashion. Culture, in this sense, is the battleground in which structure and social dimension meet in dialectical struggle. Hence, culture is neither mirror nor hammer, but the very thing that allows the dialectical struggle between structure and social dimension to take on concrete forms. Culture is the fertile ground which sprouts the seeds of the real that grow into the perpetual process of the dialectical struggle between structure and society. The economic writings of the Regulation School hence provide us with a productive basis for tying together the separate levels of argumentation above and illustrate the degree to which capitalist structure

historically progresses as a result of crises, that is, as a result of the dialectical struggle with its social dimension. This formulation illustrates the dialectical connection of structural form and form of thought, the tension between which presents itself to us as one of the motors of history. Furthermore, we have seen that crises are carried out on the level of culture that includes the dialectically connected levels of literature and theory (theory is thus far from exterior to literature — instead, it is part of the large realm we call culture).

This all leads us to a final conclusion, which is that, especially in times of full post-Fordism (of which cognitive capitalism, immaterial production, consumer capitalism, and Media Society are individual facets rather than alternative concepts), the Regulation School's notion of the social regulation of capitalism has to be extended. Full post-Fordism is characterized by capitalism's cultural regulation. The concept of cultural regulation must be understood in the context of the logic that stresses the nonidentity of thing and concept, of subject and object. Furthermore, the concept of cultural regulation includes a negative dialectical understanding of form that stands in immediate relation to history, that is, as filled with historically specific and perpetually moving, yet structurally specific, contradictions. Consequently, the problem of form is best examined in relation to a process of cultural regulation; in the case of the argument at hand, this is exemplified by the social, structural, and cultural "standardization of difference" that has become a trademark of post-Fordism.

My Japanese teacher used to tell me that, when trying to pronounce an "r" syllable, I should utter a mixture between "r" and "l" and think of a "d" (unfortunately, one of the few lessons I still remember). This is exactly the way in which we need to think literary history: we always, at the same time, need to say "history" and "consciousness" while thinking "form." Marxist accounts of form are also accounts of literary history, and the Marxist method is based on a dialectical triad that periodizes by linking history-form-consciousness in a mutually informative manner:



This formulation links critical and literary form, theory and cultural object, history and criticism, and assigns formal change a vital function in the supersession of moments of structural crisis. Literary history, by extension, is

the history of the cultural regulation of capitalism that progresses through crises and registers on the level of form. Form is the manifestation of the cultural regulation of capitalism that is itself a network of negative relations. All that is not capital can on this account be understood as culture. In full post-Fordism, culture has no other besides capital. We are, therefore, not confronted with the subsumption of culture under capital in the context of full postmodernity. Rather, we witness the full development of the dialectical relation between capital and its social dimension as a battle carried out on the field of culture. Full postmodernity or post-Fordism is the full transition into the cultural regulation of capitalism. It is in this situation that a rigorous focus on negative dialectics in analyses of form is endowed with particular urgency.

Notes

¹ In addition to the texts discussed below, see Amanda Anderson *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), whose title I rhetorically invoke, volumes 37 and 38 of *New Literary History* (2007), which are dedicated to the problem of "literature now," volume 61 of *Modern Language Quarterly* (2000), which is dedicated to the problem of form today, and Mark David Rasmussen's collection *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) that likewise contains a number of essays concerned with the question of form now.

² See Mathias Nilges, "'We Need the Stars': Change, Community, and the Absent Father in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*," *Callaloo* 32.4 (2009): 1332-52.

³ See Mathias Nilges, "'We Need the Stars': Change, Community, and the Absent Father in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*," *Callaloo* 32.4 (2009): 1332-52.

⁴ David Steiner, "Reading," in *Profession 2009*, ed. Rosemary G. Feal (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009) 53, and Mark Edmundson, "Against Readings," in *Profession 2009*, ed. Rosemary G. Feal (New York: Modern Language Association of America) 61.

⁵ Edmundson, "Against Readings" 64.

⁶ Steiner, "Reading" 55. Of course, this position is not new. Yet, what is interesting about such critiques of and fixes for contemporary literary studies is both their proliferation at this particular moment in history and their diachronic and synchronic location in critical discourse. A more detailed analysis would, therefore, map this line of argumentation in diachronic location to affective categories that formed one of the bases of the beginnings of the postmodern turn (see, for example, Susan

Sontag's *Against Interpretation*) and in synchronic relation to the current proliferation of another affective turn. Such a project of mapping would, at least in part, study those structural and epistemological forms that dialectically determine the turn toward affective criticism that reconstructs literature as an ahistorical entity (and arrive at not very surprising results, as this essay indicates). Yet, I should also mention one further position here, and I am indebted to Emilio Sauri for referring me to the essay that exemplifies this position. Lindsay Waters's "The Rise of Market Criticism in the U.S." (*Context* 20) constitutes an impressive and very interesting misreading of Walter Benn Michaels's recent scholarship. To be sure, Michaels's work neither requires nor invites (and maybe does not even deserve) defenses. The productive dimension of Waters's essay for our purposes is his misreading of Michaels's, at this point, well-known attempt to illustrate a distinct historical shift that assigns arguments that in the 1960s and 1970s may have served a radical agenda, an instrumental role in the context of neoliberalism. To Waters, Michaels's suggestion that yesterday's radicals are today's neoliberals is an instance of either (or possibly both) empty logic or a populist right-wing agenda (and, at times, it also seems to be a sign of Michaels being simply mean and a bad, bad person, which ironically anticipates the argument for affective criticism that is to follow). Again, it is not my intent to defend Michaels's argument. It is also impossible to elaborate upon the precise logical downfalls of Waters's essay at this point. I would, however, like to suggest that Waters's lack of recourse to dialectical thought is a sign of the current confusion surrounding both politics and the principles of literary study that, in his case, does not allow him to develop a clear analysis of the structural determinations that assign political as well as critical concepts a precise historical and material function — a shortcoming that is directly linked to the troubled conceptions of literary form I discuss in this essay. The result of this lack of dialectical critique of the historical function of concepts ends up conflating the positions of Waters, Steiner, and Edmundson (who want, yet cannot occupy, very different logical and political positions) and transforms Waters's misreading into an example of Michaels's point, who in turn himself remains unable to theorize the fact that we have already spun the wheel of material history past the position he examines in his own version of undialectical materialism. What we are left with is scholarship whose seemingly argumentative heterogeneity is transformed into the homogeneity of materially productive ideological positions to which I will below refer as "neoliberal Keynesianism," a context in which necessary political and material critique is emptied out in the optical illusion of the same catch-22 Waters thinks to be able to trace in Michaels's arguments. Michaels himself would likely and correctly suggest that he is well aware of the undialectical nature of his thought. Yet, as I suggested above, such a choice comes with a set of distinct consequences, in part endowed with a particular sense of urgency by the various levels of crisis we associate with the now of contemporary literary and cultural critique. Working through the logical and historical (and material/functional) determinations of these

consequences is not simply a question of theoretical gusto, as the example of new formalism I discuss here indicates. All I can suggest at this point, is that undialectical accounts of concepts such as form, formalism, medium, and literariness are as much a threat to contemporary literary critique as they are characteristic of it, perpetuating the very crises they intend to solve. Especially since Michaels's critique of a set of logical positions and its structural and functional evolution is supposed to contain a historical and material level of critique as well as the formulation of a transition that is contingent upon a historical change, the decision to opt out of dialectical critique produces in part the same problems we locate in the historical and logical contradictions of new formalism and other current disciplinary debates. This, in turn, causes critics to misjudge the effects of logical arguments that, in spite of their very project, become complicit with the positions they intend to undermine and reify the moments of stasis and exhaustion they lament.

⁶ Steiner's version of an urgent appeal to restore the good old days of literary study is introduced (with much unapologetic pathos that, of course, compliments the unapologetic embrace of a time in which pathos signaled a desirable aspect of literary study) as follows: "The Emersonian fusion of classical humanist hopes for the redemptive power of literature ... with American pragmatism offers not only a recovery from the arid wilderness of poststructuralist, postmodernist, postcolonialist, counterhegemonic discourses but also a path back to the glory days of F. R. Leavis and I. A. Richards, when the undergraduate study of English literature was second to none in the pantheon of the academic disciplines. Few undergraduates indeed can be expected to master a chapter of Rodolphe Gasché's painstaking exegesis on the Derridean arche-trace — yet many would surely resonate to the invitation to heal themselves through the transformational magic of literature" (51). Edmundson, in turn, as illustrated above, intends to rescue the independent standing of literary texts, which is threatened by theoretical exegesis. For Edmundson, the current praxis of reading a literary text (which he associates with reading a text theoretically, a process that flattens the distinction between theoretical positions that are called upon to enact readings), "means to submit one text to the terms of another; to allow one text to interrogate another — then often to try, sentence, and summarily execute it" (61).

⁷ See Marjorie Levinson's "What Is New Formalism?" *PMLA* 122.2 (2007): 558-69. The longer version of this essay deals in detail with a larger range of essays, in particular, those contained in the "form" issue of *Modern Language Quarterly* 61 (2000), Cary Wolfe's essay "The Idea of Observation at Key West, or, Systems Theory, Poetry, and Form Beyond Formalism" in *New Literary History* 39 (2008): 259-76, and Terry Eagleton's essay "Jameson and Form" in *New Left Review* 59 (2009): 123-37.

⁸ Levinson 559.

⁹ Susan J. Wolfson first develops the "normative/activist" distinction in her essay "Reading for Form" *Modern Language Quarterly* 61 (2000): 1-16.

¹⁰ As we will see, Edmundson's flawed characterization of what he would consider a Marxist reading is indicative of his missing the dialectical core of Marxist critique that does not lend itself to constructing the text-theory or thought-object distinction Edmundson's argument rests upon. What could be considered a properly Marxist "reading" is an interesting question that I shall explore elsewhere in greater detail. Let it suffice to suggest here that it is inextricably linked to the negative dialectical account of form and the link between form and text that I will explore below.

¹¹ Levinson, "New Formalism" 560.

¹² Levinson, "New Formalism" 561 (emphasis original).

¹³ Levinson, "New Formalism" 561.

¹⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2008) 5 and note 8, p. 212.

¹⁵ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 6.

¹⁶ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 7.

¹⁷ This now-ness can be understood as the result of the return to a static, purely contemplative notion of the relationship between subject and object that Lukács associates with Kantianism. Contemporary returns to such formulations of art resurrect inevitably the same set of problems and the ahistoricity that Lukács associates with bourgeois liberal thought reaching back to traditional Kantianism.

¹⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) 12. We should also note that this formulation is also key in a description of Marxist "readings," since it stresses the dialectical connection of reading for form and form of thought.

¹⁹ A fitting example for this point can be found in Bertolt Brecht's poetic version of dialectical critique that Jameson celebrates in his recent *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009). The first stanza of Brecht's "Hollywood-Elegien" presents us, according to Jameson, with such a dialectical sentence, prompting one of the few passages in *Valences* that Jameson concludes with an exclamation point: "A true dialectic; a true unity of opposites!" The stanza Jameson quotes reads as follows:

The village of Hollywood was planned according to the
notion
People in these parts have of heaven. In these parts
They have come to the conclusion that God
Requiring a heaven and a hell, didn't need to
Plan two establishments but
Just one: heaven. It
Serves the unprosperous, unsuccessful
As hell. (410)

The important point here is, of course, not solely the dialectical contradiction contained in the section's content. More important is the dialectical connection

between content and form of thought, which ultimately determines Jameson's analysis of the passage via dialectical sentences that formally mediate the passage's content. In other words, we see an example of Hegel's classic illustration of the dialectical connection between form of thought and aesthetic form. In order to illustrate this point further, it is worth quoting a representative passage from G. W. F. Hegel's *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (New York and London: Penguin, 2004), in which he establishes the basic principles of the methods of aesthetic science, at some length. The following passage illustrates the dialectical connection of content and form, as well as of the dialectical idea and the form of Hegel's writing, which structurally reproduces the dialectical movement carried out on the level of thought. In order to arrive at the final assertion of a dialectical scientific method, Hegel takes Plato's insistence upon the necessity to perceive objects not in their particularity but in their universality as a point of departure:

Now, if the beautiful is in fact to be known according to its essence and conception, this is only possible by help of the thinking idea, by means of which the logico-metaphysical nature of the *Idea as such*, as also that of the *particular Idea of the beautiful* enters into the thinking consciousness. But the study of the beautiful in its separate nature and in its own idea may itself turn into an abstract Metaphysic, and even though Plato is accepted in such an inquiry as foundation and as guide, still the Platonic abstraction must not satisfy us, even for the logical idea of beauty. We must understand this idea more profoundly and more in the concrete, for the emptiness of content which characterizes the Platonic idea is no longer satisfactory to the fuller philosophical wants of the mind today. ... The philosophic conception of the beautiful, to indicate its true nature at least by anticipation, must contain, reconciled within it, the two extremes which have been mentioned, by combining metaphysical universality with the determinateness of real particularity. Only thus is it apprehended in its truth, in its real and explicit nature. It is then fertile out of its own resources, in contrast to the barrenness of one-sided reflection. For it has in accordance with its own conception to develop into a totality of attributes, while the conception itself as well as its detailed exposition contains the necessity of its particulars, as also of their progress and transition one into another. (25-26)

Notable here for our purposes is the dialectical connection between form of thought and sentence form. Hegel's unfolding of the logical steps that arrive at the ultimate insight into the dialectical connection between universal and particular is itself mediated in the dialectic between content and form and ultimately between form of thought as expressed in the content of the passage and the form of Hegel's sentences. It is here that we see the importance of Jameson's suggestion: the dialectical form of Hegel's thought necessitates the construction of dialectical sentences and dialectical

paragraphs, that is, paragraphs that are driven by positing and subsuming contradictions in order to arrive at a logical and syntactical conclusion. To be sure, it is this important lesson from which we must methodologically extrapolate when addressing the problem of form today, since it reminds us that arguments about form can be separated neither from the very form in which they are put forth, nor from the form of the progress of ideas and concepts they presuppose.

²⁰ Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 12.

²¹ Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 185.

²² Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 185.

²³ Jameson, *Marxism and Form* x.

²⁴ See Mathias Nilges, "The Anti-Anti-Oedipus: Representing Post-Fordist Subjectivity," *Mediations* 23.2 (2008).

²⁵ Neoliberalism, especially on the account of regulation theory, can itself be understood as a crisis. However, in the context of contemporary capitalism, the concept of crisis itself takes on a specific function. A satisfactorily complicated discussion of this argument can thus not be carried out here.

²⁶ William Gibson, *Spook Country* (New York: Putnam, 2007) 29.

²⁷ Robert Kurz, "Neoliberaler Keynesianismus," *Exit Online* <<http://exit-online.org/textanzl1.php?tabelle=autoren&index=20&posnr=416&backtextl1=textl1.php>>. (translations mine).

²⁸ Telling in this context is therefore Andrew Hoberek's contribution to *Profession 2009*, in which he characterizes Stanley Fish's approach to teaching as "Taylorized." See Andrew Hoberek, "'We Reach the Same End by Discrepant Means': On Fish and Humanist Method," *Profession 2009*, ed. Rosemary G. Feal (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009) 79.

²⁹ Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 189-90.

³⁰ To be sure, formal experimentation is also a distinct characteristic of modernism. Yet, in contradistinction to modernism, postmodernism's formal experimentation is dialectically connected to the crisis of Fordism and the beginning of the deregulation of socioeconomic structures. That is, in the context of post-Fordism's emergent stage, formal experimentation takes on a decidedly different (cultural, structural, and epistemological) function than it does in modernism.

³¹ Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002) 7.

³² See my "The Anti-Anti-Oedipus."

³³ Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 195.

³⁴ Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 195. Of course, as Jameson suggest in this extended passage, the notion of typicality itself has a troubled history. Often mishandled in vulgar Marxist practice, typicality can take the form of "reducing characters to mere allegories of social forces" (193). However, typicality is to be understood not as a "matter of photographic accuracy" but instead as "an analogy between the entire plot, as a conflict of forces, and the total moment of history itself considered as a

process" (194-95). In part as a result of the interesting contradictions inherent in the term "type" itself, there exists, therefore, always a doubled notion of typicality in Lukács: the typicality that produces rich, living characters who develop in relation to the dynamism of history; and its emptied-out counterpart, the typicality that produces the opposite of such characters, namely static types that resemble stereotypes or archetypes. It is this negative definition of typicality, the static opposite of the form of typicality Lukács advocates, I discuss in this passage, since it is precisely such historical and developmental evacuation on the level of literary characters with which authors such as Robinson are concerned. It should be noted here, that a more precise distinction would include a detailed discussion of a wider terminological framework Lukács himself offers, which would distinguish between dialectical types and static typicalization Lukács describes in his discussion of the novels of Willi Bredel as "Chargen," a term borrowed from theatrical language loosely translating from its usage in a German context to "stereotypes." See *Essays on Realism* (Cambridge: MIT, 1981) 24-27.

³⁵ Examples include the work of Chuck Palahniuk, Bret Easton Ellis, Jonathan Safran Foer, Richard Russo, Annie Proulx, and Karen Tei Yamashita.

³⁶ Jameson, *Marxism and Form* xiv.

³⁷ Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 10.

One, Two, Many Ends of Literature

Nicholas Brown

What does it mean to talk about the end of literature? Literature is built around an impossibility, an impasse internal to it. But this means that the end of literature is, in fact, a condition of its possibility. If the representational problem at the heart of the literary were solved (rather than abandoned in its literary form, which is always a possibility), we would no longer be talking about literature; we would be gods or, no less fantastically, we would be in possession of Borges's Aleph. The contradictions internal to literature (as with those internal to capitalism) are immanently its end in that their resolution would entail its supersession, but they are also the precondition for its functioning. The end is, in that sense, the a priori; in other words, to indulge in a paradox, the end is in fact the beginning: which is to say that literature's conditions of possibility and its conditions of impossibility are one and the same.

To speak a little more clearly, I would say that the institution of literature, only a little more than two centuries old, is structured around a central dynamic, namely a dialectic that plays out between an impulse toward the sublime (an anti-representational practice that, because it forswears representation, remains true to its object at the cost of losing it as object) and an impulse toward allegory (a representational practice which, because it is representational, in taking hold of its object deforms it absolutely). Borges, in "El Aleph," was fully aware of this dilemma; possession of the Aleph does not make its owner a better poet. It seems to me, though I don't have time to more than gesture toward it here, that this dynamic can be played back from the beginning, like an algorithm, in a number of different contexts and situations, and that in each case it will have a definite endpoint, an impasse internal to it which finally cannot be superseded.

Needless to say, a logical end to literature is quite different from an historical end to literature; needless to say, even an historical end to the institution of literature in the esoteric sense I am using it today wouldn't mean the end of literature in the exoteric sense. But what I would like to emphasize before getting underway is that the claim of the historical end of literature should not be seen as a radical or exorbitant or attention-seeking one; like all art forms, what we call literature had a beginning, to which I will return shortly, and it will have an end.

With that out of the way, I want to say something very simple, probably too simple, about literary criticism and Marxism, and that is that the forms of attention required by literary analysis are particularly congenial to Marxism. Why would this be? It would not be outrageous to claim that literature in the modern sense and the dialectic were born in the same place, at the same time (Jena, at the turn of the nineteenth century, in the circle around the Schlegels and their journals and, in the case of Hegel still feeling his way through the Jena "system-drafts," decidedly at its margins). So a genealogical case might be made (but it would be far beyond my competence to make it) that in the twentieth century these sibling rivals discovered themselves to be long-lost brothers. But the case I'd like to sketch today is different, though not incompatible with this, namely that both are what I will call formal materialisms. Marxism is also a materialism in a different sense with which we are all familiar, even if its exact meaning is far from straightforward, and which I'm tempted to call a real materialism or a materialism of content. Let me return to the question of the origins of literature to explain what I want to convey by the idea of a formal materialism.

I'll take it as uncontroversial that while objects worthy of and appropriate to literary analysis have appeared at many places and times, the discourse that construes certain objects as literary and opens them up to a certain mode of analysis (what I referred to a moment ago as the institution of literature) has a definite, and even relatively recent origin. I'll leave aside questions about the historical determinants of such an emergence. (Though I might telegraph for those who are interested that Lukács's brief comments on Schiller in the reification essay provide a model from which one would not have to stray far.) I will turn rather to Schlegel's *Athenaeum* fragments, written over the turn of the nineteenth century. I've written about this elsewhere (and draw heavily on others for my understanding of this moment) and I don't want to belabor it, but we remember that for Schlegel the emergence of literature is already bound up with the fate of philosophy, and, in particular, to its historical and logical end: "Where philosophy stops, poetry has to begin."¹

But the interesting thing about this emergent discourse on literature is its

relationship to another thing, no longer philosophy but something much more like what we think of as theory. First: "poetry should describe itself, and always be simultaneously poetry and the poetry of poetry."² In other words, poetry (understood in the broadest sense) must also always be a theory of poetry. Conversely, however, critique must always be "poetical through and through and at the same time a living, vibrant work of art."³ Although at first glance the emphasis is on poetry, something very interesting is happening here. A reflexive moment is required of poetry itself, while the discourse on poetry is required to be poetic. Very well. But what we note, then, is that the literary object is incomplete without this reflective supplement. Thus, literary theory is invented at the same moment as literature itself.

But, also, theory is incomplete without literature. This seems tautological: of course literary theory would be incomplete without its object. But we can say of a discourse like, say, physics (or philosophy in the old systematic sense) that the ideal, the horizon of totalization, is a theory that completes itself such that the object is no longer, from the point of view of the discourse on it, necessary. Here, however, theory (and this is precisely the point of thinking it in fragments) is always incomplete, always receptive to something: the text. Adorno says somewhere that there can be no "gapless" theory of literature, and this is the thought that I am trying to get at. Any literary theory must be completed, every time, and revised in the light of, every time, a thing that it waits for. This is what I mean by a formal materialism.

This structure is obviously not something nobody has noticed before. I take Neil's citation a moment ago from Moishe Postone to be saying much the same thing about *Capital*, and indeed I imagine, though it would take a lot more thinking to ascertain it, that what I am saying here could be very neatly integrated with Neil's elaboration of the problem of immanence, though it might be useful to think his subject-object backwards: it is not only that what is "out there" in the text is also "in here" in the subject, but also that what is "in here" in my experience of the object is also "out there" in the text. Or, at any rate, it must be "out there" in the text if it is to count. If I'm understanding things right, this is precisely what it would mean for the literary text to be necessarily its own theory. I take this also to be a version of Hegel's intervention into philosophy, although there are a lot of different ways to construe this, my favorite of which is that Hegel is the first philosopher to introduce time as a solution rather than as a problem. But perhaps that is a reduction of what I am about to say. Now, clearly, a certain Hegel, the Hegel of the *Logics*, is a philosopher of system, and I am far from wanting to dismiss that Hegel. But the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* is something different: in the Introduction, Hegel lays out an absolutely

minimal framework, and then ... waits for an object.

The framework itself works something like this. You know something, but you know you know it in error. Very well. We can think of that knowledge as phenomenal, and what remains inaccessible to it as noumenal. We can be sure of not making any mistakes in that way, since we will always understand that what we know is known through our categories and our instruments, and is not the thing itself. But wait, says Hegel. The noumenon is the solution to a philosophical problem. Thus it is, by definition and absolutely, accessible to thought; it is, that is, nothing other than a product of thought. What we have, then, is two modes of appearance of the same object. One is the object that I know, and that I know that I know in error. The other is the object that I know that I don't know. But suddenly now not only is the object internally split between the object I know and the object I know I don't know, but so is the subject, because there are two I's here, one that corresponds to the subject that knows the object, and another that corresponds to the subject that knows that that object is known in error, and is already looking towards another object, or towards the other, unknown aspect of the same object. Thus, there is in Hegel not a subject/object split but a split that runs through both subject and object. Thus, most importantly, temporality, this internal unrest we call History, is introduced into the heart of the subject and the object alike, not as another problem to be worked out once the thing has been understood, but as something that has to be thought alongside, or rather integrally to, any other thought.

Now, the point is that this is absolutely minimal, and it doesn't take much longer for Hegel to say it than I did just now. And then it's a matter of waiting for an object. (The first object this framework encounters is sense-certainty, which one would expect to function as a foundational moment, but is instead ruthlessly shown to be self-contradictory.) Now, it's not that a tremendous amount of rhetorical and narrative work doesn't go into arranging these contents and systematizing them after a fashion. The point is rather that, given the motor of the dialectic in the preface, you never know in any case how it is going to work, and despite various family resemblances, not to mention stereotypes (of which thesis-antithesis-synthesis is only the most notorious), it almost never works the same way twice. There is, then, a Hegelian dialectic, in that Hegel has a minimal account of what's at work in all the individual moments of the text. But once things get going, all there are are dialectics, plural dialectics. Each object requires its own theory, in fact, immanently contains its own theory (Neil's subject-object again). You don't get out of Feudalism the same way you get out of the Greek polis; you don't get out of sense certainty the same way you get out of the Hebrew sublime.

Now we all know that Marxism is a materialism, even if we probably

don't all agree on what that means in any strict theoretical accounting. But I think, I hope, we can agree that anything that finds it important to call itself Marxism will return stubbornly to the question of mode of production, which might sound more congenial to ears outside this room by paraphrasing it, without any violence, as the mode of the production and reproduction of human life, and which, however you slice it and whatever you call it, has been capitalism for quite some time and on a worldwide scale. But Marxism is also a formal materialism, in that it is not, and cannot become, a system; it is, instead, a network of interpretive machines (some of which have for good or for ill fallen into desuetude and disrepair), built on a common axiomatics. A couple of years ago this group seemed receptive to the idea, which I haven't worked out any more thoroughly since, that this axiomatics is essentially twofold: the suture of thought to history (Hegel) and the suture of history to the production and reproduction of human life (Marx). On this view, such key ideas as the labor theory of value or the centrality of the industrial proletariat might be more or less basic, more or less common to all the machines in the network, but they are already products of these two axioms which have been put to work on historical and social material, and not axioms themselves. Now, again, needless to say, there have been self-described Marxisms that have done without one or another of these, and I wouldn't want to say they were deluded and not Marxisms at all. Or perhaps, on the contrary, more than two axioms are required. Perhaps, indeed, there is also a larger network of Marxisms. But I think it might not be too quick to say that all Marxisms share this, that they begin from a few basic axioms and then wait for material to work on. *Capital*, of course, as we just heard Postone remind us. But think of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*. Or of Roberto Schwarz on the Brazilian 1960s. Benjamin on technology and fascism. Jameson on postmodernism. Fanon on the postcolony. It is always this moment, this crisis, this problem that has to be understood, and not the system as a whole that has to be elaborated. In this, the early Hegel, literary theory, and Marxism are not exactly anti-philosophies since, despite innumerable skirmishes, the latter two are not interested enough in philosophy as a discipline to seek to destroy it, and the first of course sought to become it. (In this, on second thought, Hegel perhaps initiates an anti-philosophy after all, since what an anti-philosophy really demands is to become what it opposes.) Rather, all three require a mode of thought, a mode of attention to the texture of the material, which is, I think, already familiar to us all, if not always thought about in precisely this way.

What this might concretely mean for literary theory is even less straightforward than it is for Marxism. Can the various "schools" be boiled down to sets of axioms? It might be a useful experiment to try: some of these

would be obviously illegitimate if stated clearly (whatever pockets of “reflection theory” still remain) and some would be merely implausible (the various arguments to readerly sympathy as an ethical value). Meanwhile, the “axiom” of immanence, central to Marxist critique as many of us practice it, is, insofar as it is an axiom, a violation of itself since it is not immanent to any text; or to the extent that it is immanent, it is not an axiom. In fact, the imperative to immanence is (as Neil has shown today, and as I have tried to find in Schlegel et al.) immanent to the text, and is therefore not an axiom; but its legibility depends (as Neil has also shown, and which I think is implicit in Schlegel et al.) on its axiomatic positing outside the text. The status of the historical axiom (the materialist axiom essentially specifying what we mean by history) is similarly complex. History is, of course, immanent to the text, any text. And yet it is precisely in entering history that the text’s own meanings begin to escape intention. The meaning of a text hinges, in effect, on its relationship to the present, which both is and isn’t given by the text. It is, in the sense that its own historical intervention is fixed; it isn’t, in the sense that the present is not fixed. Thus, the historical meaning of the text is both immanent and, apparently paradoxically, mutable.

My point today is not to try to draw out a set of axioms that would establish a theoretical starting-place for Marxist literary interpretation; rather, my point is that thinking of Marxism as an axiomatic machine might go some way to explaining why it sits so easily with the practice of literary interpretation. We can think of this as a problem: Marxist literary criticism is “just” literary criticism, after all. But like so much else that appeared for the first time at the end of the eighteenth century, the conceptual institution of literature is not so easy to supersede, even if we don’t call it literature and even if it doesn’t look like literature anymore but rather like film, television, pop, photography, or whatever. It is not at all obvious that Marxism should be expected to revolutionize literary criticism while social life is as dominated by capital as it ever was; it might be more reasonable to expect it to be no more than a mode of literary criticism, but no less than a mode of literary criticism oriented towards the end of the domination of social life by capital.

I would like to say one thing more about the end of literature. Mathias has done something very important in bringing to our attention the significance for literary study of a fundamental insight of the regulation school, which is simply that the real subsumption of labor under capital can never actually take place. That is, capitalism depends on a non-economic environment, a set of institutions and norms that, were they to become directly economic, would inhibit the reproduction of capital. Foucault’s lectures on neoliberalism confirm that this insight was central to early

neoliberal thought as well: the *ORDO* group understood that the free market was a delicate flower that could only flourish under specific conditions, and that these conditions could not be guaranteed by the market and would, in fact, be destroyed by exposure to the market. To be sure, when Marx drew the distinction between the formal and the real subsumption of labor under capital, he was not talking about a global subsumption, but rather about the way capitalism colonizes particular industries; and in this sense, of course, real subsumption is a recurrent feature of capitalist development. There is no reason that cultural labor cannot be so subsumed, and of course Adorno’s designation of the “culture industry” names just such a subsumption. The problem is that if such a subsumption were actually to occur (and to the extent that it has actually occurred, as in Adorno), culture would no longer be culture; that is, it could no longer be, in Mathias’s terms, the mediation between the mode of regulation and the regime of accumulation for the simple reason that it would be completely assimilated to the regime of accumulation. It would be design, or pornography, or advertising: a mood-altering commodity and nothing more, and there would be no particular reason to study it, or at least no reason to focus more attention or, more to the point, to focus different attention on it than we do on design, pornography, or advertising.

Now, the “something more or different” beyond the commodity has been a part of the ideology of the aesthetic from the “beginning,” by which I mean the relatively recent beginning I am assuming today. It has always been a tricky matter to explain why the commodification of art is a problem if art was a commodity before that was a problem. Adorno cites, I believe on more than one occasion, an anecdote about Beethoven, who hurls aside in disgust a book by Walter Scott, muttering “this fool writes for money!” or words to that effect. Adorno then reminds us that at that very moment Beethoven was busy looking for buyers for his late quartets. Needless to say, Adorno was not saying that Beethoven was a hypocrite. Scott, trying to write his way out of debt, was writing directly for the market; Beethoven was in effect, if I understand correctly the political economy of chamber music at that time, looking for a kind of *ex post facto* patronage.

Art can then only be more than a commodity when there are two markets: in Bourdieusian terms, a “restricted” market of cognoscenti and artists, supported by money but essentially a prestige economy more than a market in the strict sense, and the “general” market proper. The restricted field is by no means aloof from the dynamics of capitalism; on the long view, the general field subsidizes the restricted field, and from the perspective of the former, the latter is little more than a loss leader. But the restricted field is then only formally subsumed under capital, while the general field is really

so subsumed. Jameson's thesis about postmodernism is essentially that postmodernism marks the point where the formerly restricted field is really subsumed under capital, and the key insight of that essay is that this has profound repercussions for literary form. Essentially "style" can only have meaning within the restricted field, when a single game is being played, and each "style" is a solution to a formal problem tacitly agreed upon by all players. But as time goes on, and each solution is shown by the next to be nothing more than an instance of the problem — each beginning being implicitly an end — the game becomes increasingly difficult to play. The austerity of late-modernist style (in music, narrative, drama, poetry, sculpture, easel painting, and no doubt others I have forgotten to mention) is as much a matter of the paucity of remaining moves at the endgame as it is a social symptom. Under these circumstances, one can see how, in all the arts, the possibility of renouncing the restricted field is an extraordinarily enticing possibility. If the game is renounced, all of the old "styles" and strategies will become available again for use, precisely because their status as superseded moves will become irrelevant.

Of course, as postmodern practice realized early on, the renunciation of the restricted field immediately entails the subsumption into the general field and therefore the renunciation of much else besides, not least the "critical distance" cited by Jameson. If this renunciation is in earnest, the 200-year-old imperative at the heart of the concept of literature (but which also, I think I can say without substantiating it today, is operative in the other arts as well) is abandoned. Literature in the esoteric sense is at an end.

But if autonomy was no more than modernism's spontaneous ideology, there is no reason to be any less suspicious of the apparent ground of postmodernism; why should we believe that heteronomy is any more than postmodernism's spontaneous ideology? As an ideology, it accounts for something real, namely the real intensification of capital penetration into heretofore "cultural" zones of experience. (Which, by the way, is not necessarily a matter of capitalism's triumphant march, but equally possibly a function of the desperate search for profits once industrial modernization has exhausted itself. Only time will tell.) But its reference to the real does not make it any less a wish fulfillment or fantasy that makes sustainable a certain kind of attitude toward the world and activity within it. The belief in artistic heteronomy, in the real subsumption of artistic labor under capital, makes postmodern eclecticism possible; but the interest and dynamism of that practice does not make the belief true.

Adorno called our attention to "the ruse of the work," by analogy with Hegel's ruse of reason. It is not so easy to go against the tide of history; it is not so easy to renounce the game of literature. That is, the renunciation of the

game can become — and for Adorno, must become — a move in the game. (I believe Adorno was asserting just this about Brecht.) Think about postmodern eclecticism for a moment. In theory, it is radically heteronomous, renouncing all claim to transcendence with regard to the social field. But in this, it is no different than any arbitrarily delimited chunk of daily life, which is already a mishmash of incompatible styles, as a walk down the block or fifteen minutes on the Internet will confirm. The postmodern work of art is, however, not (or at least not only) a walk down the block or fifteen minutes on the Internet; it is a simulated heteronomous space, and therefore involves a principle of selection. Postmodern pastiche already contains, in its very principle, a moment of transcendence or autonomy with regard to the social field.⁴

Which is to say, of course, that it has a readable form; the principle of selection becomes the legible element in postmodern eclecticism. The meaning of form itself, even in its most abstract outline, is, however, radically different than it was for modernism. Modernism's insistence on autonomy did, in retrospect, legitimate a "critical distance" that made possible all sorts of political positions (Left, Right, and peculiar) within modernism. The insistence on form today is, as it was then, the insistence on a moment of autonomy. But now, heteronomy is the ideology not only of postmodernism (now surely at an end, as Mathias insists), but also of the victorious Right, in the insistence that there is nothing outside the market; that, in essence, human nature is the Market. In the new dispensation, any commitment to form is a commitment to the regulative role of culture, and is, I am tempted to say everywhere and always, on our side.

Notes

¹ *Ideas* 48 in Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1991). For a discussion of the emergence of the institution of literature and the place of Schlegel's *Athenaeum* fragments see Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), especially 12-25, available in full text at <http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s8067.pdf>.

² *Athenaeum* fragment 238 in Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*.

³ *Athenaeum* fragment 67 in Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*.

⁴ In music, think of Beck as an example of postmodern eclecticism in which the principle of selection is not apparent or is apparently mere whimsy. The appropriative excitement of the initially flat irony quickly gives way to an attitude of superiority towards all styles, which is nothing more than an expression of the desire for transcendence without the will to attempt it. With The White Stripes, it is immediately clear that behind the apparently similar eclecticism is a project, even if the principle of selection only becomes clear gradually. The repeated return to various iterations of blues form gives the clue to this project, which turns out to be a sort of partisan genealogy of rock music. As with the great Brazilian songwriter Caetano Veloso, who operates in a similar mode but works a different seam, there is no irony here in the appropriation of styles. It's true that it doesn't matter if a given form is considered degraded or canonical, but both are treated with equal seriousness. As with most such deliberately assumed games, the only rules are negative ones: no historical dead ends, and no songwriting. (If it is not immediately obvious why rock and songwriting define contrary poles, listen to the first two minutes or so of John Mellencamp's "I Need a Lover," which Mellencamp himself would be the first to admit reach a rare height of absurdity. It is worth noting that jazz recognizes no such polarization between the blues and songwriting; if this is not immediately obvious, listen to Oliver Nelson's *The Blues and the Abstract Truth*, which leans equally on blues form and Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm.") Now it is a matter of stripping a set of styles down to their sinews for analysis, a kind of musical comparative anatomy. In retrospect, Beck's forays into blues form seem to indicate a similar impulse, which, however, he did not carry through.

Postscript: Meanwhile, Adorno remains ahead of those of us who would try to "read" the products of the culture industry proper. A film like *Avatar* is no more "about" peak oil or Iraq than it is about space travel or the Mohicans; topical references are as desultory as the promiscuous citations from the history of science fiction film. The only thing a film like *Avatar* is "about," besides the box office, is the stimulus provided by the images themselves, which is, of course, prodigious.

Crisis of Representation in Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*

Aisha Karim

Speaking of Wole Soyinka's deployment of Ogun as a central trope in his work, the preeminent critic of Soyinka, Biodun Jeyifo, observes that "the 'tormented figure' of the god seems appropriate to the 'trouble-torn' personality of the writer," and that it is also "eminently apposite to a trouble-wracked, post-independence Africa."¹ Whether the analogy between Ogun and the writer works, it is extremely suggestive for our reading of Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*, the very novel that Jeyifo singles out for harsh criticism. If Ogun is the god of creativity and of destruction, and if Ogun is also the individualist, acting on behalf of the community, the impulse of our novel in question is precisely to *reenact* the Ogunian feat of eking out a path of communal restitution, destroying aesthetic norms in the process. Accordingly, it should go without saying that the novel is certainly uncharacteristic of Soyinka's oeuvre, and, as it were, takes on a life of its own, fluttering out of the author's grasp. We may more accurately describe this novel as not representing, but rather, transcending the poetics and politics that are at the heart of Soyinka's work. This transcending includes, as I will argue later, escaping Tejumola Olaniyan's charge that Soyinka deprioritizes class in favor of individual will: "For Soyinka, the motive cause of history is not class or group but the lone individual hero who acts for and catalyzes the community: the Ogun, the Atunda."² While this charge may be accurate for the rest of Soyinka's oeuvre, I will argue here that *Season of Anomy* is not representative of Soyinka's work, and, in fact, abrogates individual will in favor of collective mobilization.³ Adapting Jeyifo, then, we might say that the "tormented figure" of the god is appropriate to the novel itself — that here it is the novel itself that is tormented, in its struggle to

break away not only from Soyinkan practice, but also from its own formal limitations.

Indeed, both of Soyinka's novels, *The Interpreters* and the later *Season of Anomy*, tend toward questioning of this role of individual will as the agent of social transformation — a role that is generally affirmed in Soyinka's prolific dramatic output. In following the lives of a group of friends, their drunken bouts, their individual love affairs, and their idiosyncrasies, *The Interpreters* launches a supremely witty critique of Nigerian society, steered by a corrupt, laughable, and self-hating elite. On one hand, the novel preempts any possibility of social transformation as coming from this elite: one has only to glance cursorily at Soyinka's excoriation of this elite present at Professor Oguazor's party to be disabused of any such notions. On the other hand, the novel also deliberately eschews presentation of its four individual protagonists as agents of any transformation. The journalist, Sagoe's, "dissertation" on the voidante's manifesto reveals not only Soyinka's mistrust of collective activity, but also of these new interpreters, the novel's protagonists. By the end of the novel, when the epic painting by one of the protagonists, Kola, is finally revealed, we find the Ogun figure "distort[ed]."⁴ Another of the protagonists, Egbo, describes Kola's Ogun as having been presented, not in his heroic aspect, but "frozen" in Kola's depiction of one single myth associated with Ogun, during which he, "at his drunkenest, los[es] his sense of recognition and slaughter[s] his own men in battle"; he is presented only as "a damned bloodthirsty maniac from some maximum security zoo."⁵ Though Egbo sees this depiction of a distorted Ogun as Kola's failure, the drunken Ogun also refers us to the drunken bouts of this novel's protagonists, in a self-critique of the Soyinkan practice of valorizing the Ogunian individual will and agency.

But this project of questioning Ogunian agency is only begun in *The Interpreters*; it is the later *Season of Anomy* that takes up this project in a sustained manner. For this reason, we will restrict our discussion here to *Anomy*, seeing in *The Interpreters* an embryo of the will to transform reality that becomes the hallmark of *Anomy*. It is noteworthy here that separating the two novels is the Biafran war of independence. If *The Interpreters*, written before the atrocities of the war, is trenchant in its critique of Nigerian society, it is also a playful text, a testament to the author's satiric prowess. *Anomy*, on the other hand, written after the civil war, has done away with "mere criticism" and now seeks solutions. In this sense, *Anomy* decisively marks the end of the honeymoon period of decolonization, when national turmoil reveals itself as too ghastly to provoke even the most cynical laughter, and manifests a shift towards an attempt at interpreting and changing reality. The bulk of the novel centers on the protagonist, Ofeyi's, attempt to develop a

workers' vanguard. When the novel speaks of land and people ravaged by the Cartel and the Mining Trust, the "state within a state," it also attempts to posit the question: who will oppose the monopoly of the cartel?⁶ Who is the agent of change? Indeed, this novel almost follows the unfolding of a conversation between two possible agents. On one hand is the agent posited by Ofeyi, with his vision of a workers' vanguard, leading and recruiting by edification, reason, and example. On the other hand is another character, identified as the Dentist, with his method of surgical removal, of decapitation of the Cartel's power, even though the Dentist is conspicuous by his absence from large portions of the narrative. In other words, the two possible agents are either mass mobilization led by a vanguard of the men from the village commune of Aihero, or a band of an enlightened few waging guerilla warfare, and acting on behalf of the community. But, as I shall argue in the rest of this paper, *Anomy* posits these two as possible agents of social transformation, only to retract them. In other words, I will argue that the novel recognizes its structural failure to resolve real contradictions: seeing itself as a "failed text," the novel reviles the resolutions it posits as wish fulfillment — "merely representational" — because these resolutions are not possible on the real plane. In yet other words, *Anomy* constitutes a refusal to be satisfied with providing an alternate reality in art; indeed, the novel self-consciously posits itself as part of a real-world totality in which it is but a moment. With this recognition that it is a "failed text," that texts alone are unable to effect changes in the realm of the real, there comes a realization on the part of the novel that real-world agents, its readers, must be interpolated into the world and the ethos of the novel. In attempting this, the novel effects a reverse interpolation, that is, of inserting and placing itself in the realm of real agents. In the final section, I will argue that if, in the first moment, *Anomy* seeks to act on behalf of real-world agents that it deems absent, it also sets up its readers as possible agents. In this sense, then, we might say that this novel dialectically transcends the Ogunian dilemma of acting on behalf of the community, and seeks communal participation.

The monumental criticism on Soyinka has noted the striking concern with social transformation in Soyinka's work.⁷ In excavating this social content, such criticism has tended to seek answers to textual questions in authorial biography. Within this trend, critics have also seen Soyinka's work as either expression or disavowal of negritude, while comparing Soyinka with other African authors such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o.⁸ Others have focused, in cogent ways, on Soyinka's representation of social and political unrest besetting modern Nigeria, and have tended to see in this representation a grappling with, and resistance to, dictatorial regimes.⁹ Still others have dealt with the ways in which Soyinka has excavated folklore and mythology

in order to create a mythic system that specifically explains and remakes the realities of colonial subjugation and postcolonial nationhood.¹⁰

What is remarkable, however, about *Anomy* in particular is its overt preoccupation with agents and processes of social transformation. At the very outset, the novel raises what is for the corporate state the threatening specter of a distinctly African socialism. In presenting a picture of the ideal community of Aiyero, the Soyinka novel provides political representation to a vanguard agent that seeks an alternative world. Aiyero, described as a socialist utopia of sorts, has already done away with the institution of private property, and has so far existed in isolation from the encroaches of corporate competition and expansion, and the institution of private property that underpins this drive to competition. The community holds everything in common as collective property; but it is able to do so “due to its three quarter century of accidental isolation,” and only insofar as it “posed neither threat nor liability to the various governments that came and went.”¹¹ Moreover, as opposed to the Marxist logic that describes the institution of private property as collapsing only after capitalism has developed the productive forces — to the degree that capitalist relations of production become fetters on further development of productive forces — this community is described as a throwback to a “primitive” past.

But we are soon notified of the precariousness of this specter as a threat. We get a sense that this ideal community, born of rebellion, is under encroachment by the outside, that the corporation has taken note of it as a “new market for cocoa-bix and cocoa-wix.”¹² And this is not the only threat; the seeming peacefulness of this community is paradoxically described in terms of a curious scene of predatory violence and scavenging:

Gun-bursts, tang of powder, angry dispersion of kites. The hunter groups filled their guns with wild metal, shot down branches and pulped the fibrous trunks, filled the air with rubble as they fired into wall-corners. A coconut disintegrated driving white-fleshed shrapnels over rooftops. A pawpaw turned to red mash. The kites circled the hunters from a safe height, swooped down as they disappeared and snatched up the shreds of red-headed lizards.¹³

Even before the corporation takes note of this as a new market for its products, the novel has signaled the unsustainable nature of this ideal community in isolation; for insofar as it exists as an island of peace amid a sea of chaos, it needs to defend itself from that surrounding chaos. Thus we see, though momentarily, a futile attempt on the part of the novel to explain away the presence of guns and hunters in this otherwise peaceful and

insulated community: Ahime informs Ofeyi that guns appeared early when the community asked itself how it will defend itself against slave-raiders. In time, the community becomes a center of smithy, where “men come from all over the country to seek the best” of guns from this community.¹⁴ At the same time, this community evolves from merely a fishing economy to encourage hunting. But the novel is not particularly convinced by its own explanation. For it is with a sense of foreboding that we see the scene above, where hunters shoot with wild abandon only at “wall-corners,” but the pawpaw is nevertheless turned to red mash, the coconut is “disintegrated” into “white-fleshed shrapnels,” and the lizards turn into reddened “shreds” that the kites scavenge upon. The attempt to provide an alibi for this violence as provisions for self-defense, then, ends up as a foreboding for the genocidal violence later — or, as the narrative voice warns us, “the climax of bright red sluices.”

Furthermore, this alternative world of an authentically African socialism is poised for an incestuous implosion. Ofeyi is puzzled about why the men of Aiyero always came back. He sees it as a problem: “your children travel the whole world, achieve all sorts of experience in their own right and still return to the tiny pond to settle. It’s admirable, but ... it encourages in-breeding. They seem untouched by where they have been, by the plight of the rest of mankind, even of our own people.”¹⁵ It is not simply that this community makes its people unable to comprehend the plight of the rest of the world. What is concomitant with this lack of understanding and growth of the individuals from this community is also a larger sense of an implosive destruction. For Ofeyi thinks of this insulation of Aiyero as leading to stagnation and death: “The waters of Aiyero need to burst their banks. The grain must find new seminal grounds or it will atrophy and die.”¹⁶ In this, Ofeyi merely reproduces what is already a recognition of the “need for new blood” on the part of the Custodian and of Ahime; they see Ofeyi as the answer to their dilemma, and court him as a prospective member of this community.

Ofeyi’s induction into the community highlights the novel’s preoccupation with the idea of a workers’ vanguard. Although Ahime sees Ofeyi as an answer in the sense that he expects Ofeyi to move to the community, Ofeyi has other plans: “The healing essence which soothes one individual or some stray dog that happens to wander into Aiyero is not enough for the bruises of others I know of. They require a different form of healing.”¹⁷ This different form of healing that Ofeyi envisions requires the emigrant men of Aiyero to infiltrate the land beyond Aiyero, across the river, in order to proselytize others outside of this community. Ofeyi wants the rest of the world to partake of that mysterious substance that the children of Aiyero are fed, and that

“inoculates them against the poison of places like Ilosa,” against the temptations of the world of commodities.¹⁸ According to Ofeyi, the men of Aiyero, when they go to their new communities, would entail “sowing a new idea.”¹⁹ This project is described as sowing a “new concept of labouring hands across artificial frontiers, the concrete, affective presence of Aiyero throughout the land, undermining the Cartel’s superstructure of robbery, indignities and murder, ending the new phase of slavery.”²⁰ While Ahime thinks of this sowing with a bit of alarm, it does not take Ofeyi much persuasion to get Ahime to concede to his request. When Ahime does concede, not only are the men “lent” to Ofeyi for two years, but they are also now to send their surplus earnings to Ofeyi for use towards this project. Henceforth, Ofeyi must persuade these men, who have never “joined a political party even out of curiosity,” that his “idea fulfils their own constant readiness for service.”²¹

At first, it appears as if Ofeyi’s project is succeeding: the working class is beginning to forge the unity to transform social conditions. When Ofeyi and Zaccheus visit the Shage dam project — the site of Ofeyi’s experiment in building working-class solidarity by introducing the workers from Aiyero among the workforce in order to defeat the hold of the Cartel — we see also a building of hope through the approach toward the project. We see Ofeyi calming down during the drive towards the Shage dam project with the approaching “deciduous landscape” of llanas tangled in the treetops, forming “dense, seemingly impenetrable ceilings in the forest.” Ofeyi suggests that he wants to visit the dam because it “may clean [his] mouth entirely of that last encounter,” during which he witnesses a ritualized mutilation and killing of a fellow human by a group of “hunters.”²² Although no work is being done on the dam project because of the generalized ethnic conflict represented by the torture and killing of the human transformed into a creature, the Shage dam project was “the one place the [cartel’s] animals could not touch because the union here was strong. They had a meeting here and they decided to suspend work at the first sign of victimization.”²³ At the approach to the Shage dam, Ofeyi offers news of working-class solidarity, in response to Zaccheus’s sense that “it feels so spooky. There isn’t a living soul within miles.”²⁴ Ofeyi explains that the site is deserted because the workers had “stopped work here days before the troubles began.” The workers from Cross-river, who “had been brought into the Cartel plans,” had reported the plans to the Aiyero leaders. Indeed, the workers had finally closed down the entire works two weeks before the “Cartel turned their jackals loose.”²⁵ The solidarity of workers here, for Ofeyi, is what kept the workers from the generalized state of scapegoating and victimizing that had beset entire villages and towns.

But this turns out to be a mistaken notion on Ofeyi’s part: the message of solidarity and brotherhood does not win out in the end. Ofeyi’s visit to the

Shage dam project provides what seems to be the final comment. What follows next signals the shutting down, not only of the Shage dam project, but also of Ofeyi’s project of building a workers’ vanguard. And if the inscription on the sign board at the approach to the dam itself — “TO DAMN” — does not clue him to the impending scene of doom and desolation, he is soon disabused of any faith in solidarity and brotherhood. As soon as he opens the door, “the stench was the first to hit him, a wet slap of putrefaction in the face.”²⁶ It is at this moment that he realizes that the otherwise deserted project site is littered with human remains:

From that height the even mist was shredded, he now perceived, in a hundred places, opening patches of the lake to the light, to a display of floating bodies so still that they seemed anchored. There was the marvel, although the bodies were swelled and the faces decomposed there hung about the scene a feeling of great repose. Perhaps the shroud of miasma dulled all sense of horror, or the abnormal stillness of giant machinery made it all a dream, a waxwork display of shapes, inflated rubber forms on the rafts in motionless water, perhaps it all seemed part of the churned up earth, part of the clay and humus matrix from which steel hands would later mould new living forms.²⁷

As this passage shows us, the “slap of putrefaction in the face” does not completely wake up Ofeyi. Indeed, the narrative voice itself refuses to acknowledge what it has already described as the still-floating bodies as human forms. Instead, the sense is that of a “feeling of great repose” that can be gleaned only if the floating human bodies are not realized, on the ultimate level, as dead humans, but as “a waxwork display of shapes,” or as clay “from which steel hands would later mould new living forms.” The novel comments on Ofeyi’s attempted, but failed, rationalization of this scene to conform to his idea that this loss was not tantamount to the “total erasure of the essence of [his] idea of solidarity between the immigrant men of Aiyero and the local ‘Cross-river comrades.’”²⁸ And, in commenting thus, in showing Ofeyi himself suggesting that “he is lying to [himself] ... seeking barren consolation,” the novel distances itself from Ofeyi’s feeble attempt at denial, and considers the development of this vanguard as a failed resolution.²⁹ And if the novel’s disillusionment resonates with the reader, it is because it encapsulates the revulsion at the degeneration of the African socialist project into one-party states, authoritarianism, and repression.

If Ofeyi’s project of building a worker’s vanguard seems to have failed against the repressive regime of the Cartel, the novel is not convinced about the Dentist’s project of decapitation, either. At first glance, it seems that the

novel does posit guerilla warfare as the more effective option: Ofeyi is finally rescued from prison by the Dentist, who takes the jail warden hostage. In the end, though, this is not what the novel sees as a satisfactory solution; the novel ends on an ominous note: “Temoko was sealed against the world till dawn.”³⁰ All that the combined efforts of these characters have been able to retrieve from this netherworld three-in-one prison house, lunatic “asylum,” and leper colony, is the limp figure of a comatose Iriyise, a breathing body but without life; all Ofeyi can do by the end is ask, “what ravages had induced this deep refuge in her volatile self.”³¹ And here, Ofeyi is not simply commenting upon Iriyise; indeed, Iriyise becomes the crystallization of a much more generalized condition, marked by an “abdication of the will, resignation, withdrawal ... the ultimate condition of the living death.”³²

It is not simply that the novel sees its particular agents — vanguard party or guerilla warfare — as ineffectual. Rather, in representing these political endeavors as failed attempts, and in retracting these as solutions, Soyinka’s novel also signals its own self-consciousness about its inability to tackle a causal problem that it has already identified, but which it sees as too overwhelming to represent. Indeed, the problem lies almost outside of representation, for it is outside the problems of the novel’s world, that is, the problems confronting the characters in the novel — the hold of the Cartel. The novel views the problem as not restricted to the geopolitics of an unnamed Nigeria. For the problem is not simply the cartel; the cartel is one link in the chain. Ofeyi is fired after having been chided by the government mediator in the Corporation Chairman’s office in response to the “sinister reports [about Ofeyi] which began to come in on [his] account of [his] activities.”³³ Ofeyi counters with his complaint that even though he knows where the profits go, he does not know “where the workers disappear to, the so-called agitators.”³⁴

Ofeyi’s dispute with the Corporation, then, turns out not to be only that. In taking issue with the Corporation, we see that he has confronted the entire government and corporate machinery. For here we find out that the Cocoa Corporation is not a self-enclosed, isolated whole, carrying out its work of accruing profits on its own. Indeed, the Corporation is inextricably tied to the government, as becomes clear at the supposed mediation by the government official during the dispute between Ofeyi and the Corporation, an “industrial dispute between employee and employer.”³⁵ Ofeyi notices that the government mediator continues to refer to the Corporation as “we.” Moreover, in response to Ofeyi’s complaint about the health benefits of the cocoa products, we are told that the products have been examined by “analysts, chosen and approved by the Government ministry. And we choose to accept their report rather than that of some disgruntled backroom chemist whose

qualifications were probably obtained in Moscow.”³⁶

This reference to Moscow alerts us to yet another link in the chain. For what the government representative indicates here, in the negative, is also his own government’s alliance with the other pole of the Cold War, that is, the United States. This association is reinforced when Ofeyi is summarily given a leave of absence, and sent abroad by the Cartel superiors, as a preemptive response to the first sign that Ofeyi might be an “agitator” among the workers. The alibi is that Ofeyi’s subversive jingles and advertisement campaign are losing their edge. And it is here that the U.S. makes its first appearance as the prime site for Ofeyi’s rehabilitation. One of the cartel “bloodhounds” advises Ofeyi to take a leave of absence, travel, and learn especially from the Americans, who have “the greatest advertising know-how in the world”; indeed, they “are such a prosperous nation” because they “really understand the profession.”³⁷ This casual reference to America as the optimal location for honing Ofeyi’s advertising skills, for “obtain[ing] the best possible results from [his] talents,” is only superficially casual.³⁸ Ofeyi is not only to be sent away for a duration suitable for his rehabilitation as an advertising genius, but also for a political agent to be reformed into an obedient and “happy...employee.”³⁹ And since the “Americans have the greatest advertising know-how,” this purpose will be best served by a visit to America, prime among the stops on Ofeyi’s itinerary.

And if this location of America as the site for political rehabilitation is not clear enough, America rears its menacing head again when Ofeyi’s partner, Iriyise, is to be “disappear[ed] for a while.”⁴⁰ Chief Biga, one of the four pillars of the Cartel, threatens her with getting “scarred for life” in the event that she does not accept his offer of disappearance. Here again is another political agent prime for reformation, and the car that is to carry her is a Pontiac: “Alone of all the cars that came into that area only the long American amphibian risked its fenders and paint on the ninety-degree turn through narrow wall corners into the court-yard.”⁴¹ The risking of fenders and paint, the danger in the invasion is compounded by the description of the car and its horn as breaching the harmony of the working-class courtyard, or, as Ofeyi calls it, the early “Petty-Traders’ Pause” and the later “White Collar Silence.”⁴² In this attempt at Ofeyi’s and Iriyise’s rehabilitation also lies a generalized disruption of the workers’ lives and activities. And given that this is precisely the disappearance from which Iriyise emerges only as a destroyed consciousness with a comatose body, this reference to America as the privileged location for reformation becomes a reference to its destructive potential to reform beyond recognition, to beat into submission. This is precisely where the novel, through a series of deferrals — from the Corporation, to the national government, to the U.S. — uncovers the system of

imperialism, and makes a connection between the problem and the solution.

Once the novel has discovered this connection, it finds the problem too overwhelming, too large to tackle by itself. Indeed, the novel self-consciously abandons its search for revolutionary agency and turns inward, surveying the social decay that overwhelms efforts at resistance, while meditating on the function of art and itself. The novel's comment upon itself comes through the figure of Iriyise, the Cocoa Princess, as herself an object of art — her face and dancing body, choreographed, objectified in the advertisements for the cocoa products. Iriyise's body-as-art becomes the sign of the exotic, the regional flavor for sale on the world market. The description of Iriyise dancing the cocoa dance, rising from a pod, brings home the failed nature of narrative as a political act, especially if we keep in mind that this performance is itself a promotion for the cocoa products:

The pod lifted slowly, guided by unseen forces Iriyise ... floated out on a layer of palm oil under her skin, [and] stepped onto an earth-covered stage ... into a thunderstorm of applause ... but Iriyise saw nothing of the thousand eyes [She was] deaf to every cue Palm oil ran freely in her veins until, exhausted, she gathered herself for the final leap Back within her shell, lathered, she felt, not in sweat, but in rich black oil she waited again to be freed.⁴³

This containment in art form becomes central to understanding the novel. Iriyise, arrested in the shell, encapsulates the novel's statement upon itself — that art in this world, of oil and cartels, is arrested, waiting to be freed from its reified existence. And here is where the novel's double-bind appears. On one hand, Iriyise had been the space of subversion: when Ahime lures Ofeyi to Aiyero, setting the stage for potential resistance to the Cartel, he does it through Iriyise. On the other hand, if Iriyise, at this moment of performance, can show the abandonment of an artist, seeing and hearing nothing, absorbed in her performance, herself as the object of art, this object is confined, arrested, and, as such, commodified. It is no coincidence that after Iriyise is disappeared by Chief Biga for her part in Ofeyi's subversive activities, she reappears by the end of the novel in a coma. What is now, in this scene, a momentary confinement in a cocoa "shell," becomes revealed later as an intensified state of confinement in a comatose, "crumpled form" — an almost dead object produced by the arts of state and corporate repression.⁴⁴ At the heart of the novel is this very realization, that art in the world of cartels and profits is reduced to a possible, but failed, political act.

What we have laid out so far are the ways in which the novel grapples with the problem of finding revolutionary agency. But this aspect of the

novel is also what has garnered the most criticism. In a comprehensive appraisal of Soyinka's work, Biodun Jeyifo argues cogently for the centrality to Soyinka's project of "the elaboration of a distinctively African literary modernity through a poetics of culture and a revolutionary tragic mythopoesis which is also neo-modernist."⁴⁵ Jeyifo astutely observes that Soyinka's writings pivot around the "notion of an inviolable, infrangible self" that refuses to be subdued — modeled on the heroic Ogun figure who alone, of all the gods, traverses the abyss.⁴⁶ Precisely in its action on behalf of the rest of the community, this self also acts as a "'representative' self, a self that aspires to speak and act in defense of a whole culture or community."⁴⁷ Jeyifo sees *Anomy*, however, as uncharacteristic of Soyinka's writings. In his landmark study of Soyinka's oeuvre, Jeyifo claims for Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* the status of a unique failure. Calling the novel "Soyinka's greatest artistic flop," Jeyifo suggests that the novel is marred by implausible narrative and characters: if Ofeyi and Iriyise seem hollow and "unconvincing" "as symbols of revolutionary renewal in the revisionary version of the Orphic myth deployed in the novel," the representation of the Cartel bosses as symbols of "incarnate evil" also lacks credibility.⁴⁸ Jeyifo claims further that the representation of the cross-river terrain and the people, as the "natural habitat of incarnate evil," is inflated. Jeyifo's point is that the characters and events become simply types in a schematic allegory and lack the ambiguity and subtlety that otherwise characterize Soyinka's oeuvre.

But what if we turn the tables here and see this novel, not as attempting to conform to the rest of Soyinka's oeuvre, but as exceeding the limits of the oeuvre? What if we see the novel as not only a critique, but, more importantly, as an attempt to move beyond the parameters of the mythic system that the rest of the oeuvre has created — in particular, the myth of the individual hero acting on behalf of the community? Seen in this light, then, the novel is structurally determined to fail since it attempts what it cannot do, that is, transgress the limits that the form of the novel imposes. In doing so, it attempts to challenge the very notion of representation. The story of national regeneration, then, cannot be told through the exploits of the hero who brings the culprits to justice. Indeed, the story of national regeneration cannot be told, period, precisely because the form of the novel itself acts as a barrier: the plot is narratable only through the events as they relate to individual protagonists, but whose individual stories are not adequate to the national story, let alone remake the national story. Indeed, the individual "hero," Ofeyi, is anything but a tragic mythic hero; however much we may identify with him, he becomes the sign of an impossibility. In the face of systemic nationwide and worldwide corporate domination, the attempts of the individual protagonists cannot but seem and *be* puerile, ineffectual. In other

words, the question here is: what if, ultimately, the subject of history in this novel is not the individual protagonist, but narrative itself?

In order to continue this exploration, a comparison with Soyinka's plays is instructive. For if the creation of this representative and tragically heroic self is a signature of Soyinka's artistic prowess, *Death and the King's Horseman* serves well as our point of comparison. Perhaps one of the most discussed of the plays, and widely acclaimed for artistic merit, *Death and the King's Horseman* depicts a struggle between indigenous tradition and an uncomprehending and bureaucratic colonial rule.⁴⁹ According to tradition, Elesin, the King's Horseman, must accompany his liege to heaven when the latter dies. This entails that Elesin must take his own life before the king is buried. But as soon as the District Officer, Simon Pilkings, gets word of this news, he orders that the already reluctant Elesin be imprisoned to keep him from taking his life. In prison, however, Elesin hears that Olunde, his son, has taken the place of his father, and has killed himself in keeping with tradition. The body of the son is brought to Elesin, rolled up in a mat; upon seeing the body of his dead son, Elesin strangles himself with the very chains that are to keep him from doing so. The play ends, though in a bloodbath, with a sense of continuity of tradition: Elesin's young bride who had accompanied him to prison is pregnant with the Horseman's child, and is led away by Iyaloja, who had brought Olunde's corpse to Elesin, in order to awaken Elesin's sense of honor. She leads the young bride away with the words, "Now forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind to the unborn."⁵⁰ Although the play closes with this sense of continuity and hope, this is only a representational continuity: the "dirge rises in volume, and the women continue their sway," but the "[l]ights fade to a black-out," leaving the characters in a blacked-out box, away from the realm of the audience for whom the play is being performed.⁵¹

In this sense, representational continuity bespeaks a strict honouring of boundaries between the world and the text. The integrity of the work of art is kept intact; it does not leak out into the world of the real. This containment issues from an implicit acknowledgment on the part of the play of the primacy of its collective nature, since what is embedded in the performance of the play is direct interaction with the audience. The play, having started out as a primarily collective form, turns by the end into its dialectical other; that is, it requires and posits formal constraints to maintain its boundaries from the world. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., commenting on *Death and the King's Horseman*, sees the play as representative of Soyinka's ability to create a "self-contained, hermetic world, an effected reality" and calls this ability Soyinka's "greatest achievement," for it also bespeaks his ability to "create a reality, and not merely to reflect reality."⁵² For our purposes, here, it

is important to note that the creation of an alternate reality, a "self-contained, hermetic world," is possible for the play precisely because the play is always already, structurally, an interactive form. The play must strive not to overspill the boundaries between the text and the world. In this struggle lies the play's success.

The dynamics of Soyinka's novel, *Season of Anomy*, are qualitatively different from those of his plays. As opposed to the play, the novel, having arisen from the creation of a leisured class under bourgeois society, has historically evolved as a particularly private form. The novel must labor under the burden of its structural hermeticism, and it is this labor — this failed attempt — that certainly makes this novel different from Soyinka's oeuvre. For here what we find is not the creation of an alternate "hermetic" reality, but, rather, a heroic and tragic struggle, on the part of the text, to bridge that gap between the world and the text. More specifically, here, if the play's heroic Olunde, acting on behalf of his erstwhile father, has been able to maintain traditional integrity and defy imminent cultural collapse resulting from the colonial encounter, it is not so much the novel's male protagonist, Ofeyi, but rather narrative itself that undertakes this tragic heroic traversing of the void between representation and reality.

What we have already seen, however, during our discussion of Iriyise's dance, is that the novel also sees itself, and art, as a failed political act, as unable to affect reality, because of its confinement in representational form. But this realization on the part of the novel — of its arrest in art form — is not its final statement on itself. Indeed, this realization engenders an act of will, as it were, to refuse the status of arrest to which it sees itself doomed. This is the kind of failure, then, that turns into its very obverse — success. For the point here is not that *Anomy* is a failed attempt to represent an alternative. It is that the novel itself recognizes its structural failure and attempts to will away the boundaries between the text and the world. In other words, Soyinka's novel recognizes, and responds to, precisely this limitation on the work of art — a limit that the novel views with a sense of frustration. Because the novel recognizes its own structural limitations, that is, its essentially individual character — not only in that its primary reader is the individual reader, but also in that the narrative necessarily unfolds through the exploits of individual protagonists — it nevertheless seeks to overcome this limit. This response is what makes *Anomy* uncharacteristic of Soyinka's oeuvre. If, on one hand, the play, *Death and the King's Horseman*, may be said to belong to the realm of wish fulfillment, wherein the contradictions of an indigenous culture besieged by invading colonial regulations and mores are resolved on the representational plane, the novel, on the other hand, recognizes this as wish fulfillment, and seeks to resolve what it sees as

contradictions of reality on the real plane. The novel undertakes this endeavor via an attempt to demolish the boundaries between the world and the text, between reality and its representation, in order that the represented resolutions may intervene as real resolutions.

In this sense, Iriyise's double-bind, as we had argued earlier, is also the novel's double-bind. This arrest of the spectacle and of the spectator, the object of transformation and the would-be agent, into discrete compartments, becomes horrifically clear during a scene of perversely slow and methodical mutilation and killing by a hunting group of an unnamed human figure transformed into a monkey wearing clothes. The narrative voice shows us Ofeyi and Zaccheus, hiding and watching helpless as the hunters stalk the already maimed human:

A movement from the stunned creature, a stirring in the matted rags, a twig, a tubercular arm scrabbled on the tar ... again all was still. Only for an instant. The eyes of the watching group were suddenly alerted to the evidence that life still existed in him. Again the claw moved on as if it sought to smooth down the protruding pebbles And only then was there animation in the eyes of his hunters who had waited ... just for this moment. As if this flicker of life was a sign, a sanction and a command that must be fulfilled before it again petered out they swept him up, bore him onto the grass verge and held him by his wasted limbs to earth.⁵³

This sacrifice is completed first with the slitting of the throat, and then the cutting of his genitals, which are stuffed into the victim's mouth. Afterwards, aggressors "stepped back and looked on the transformation they had wrought."⁵⁴ If Ofeyi and Zaccheus watch helpless, the narrative voice has also curiously distanced itself from the "stunned creature" on the ground. It has already described the human victim of this sacrificial ritual as a "monkey wearing clothes."⁵⁵ It, too, waits and watches the movements, transfixed, not only like our protagonist, but also like the victimizers.

With these passages, the novel swings from a search for workers' solidarity challenging the power of the Cartel to an exploration of the self-destructive violence of the Cartel's victims — the torture and ritual mutilation of one of their own. Paradoxically, the novel's retreat from social agency emphasizes such agency, by contrasting workers' collective struggle with a passive relationship between the spectacle and the viewers, which form concentric circles. If the hunters watch, they are, also, actors in this scene of inhumane depravity; Ofeyi and Zaccheus watch the hunters and the hunted, helpless but entranced, actors in their inaction, while the narrative

voice watches and relates the narrative, as if in the outermost of concentric circles of viewers, transcribing the events. If workers' self-activity has failed to emerge to resolve the contradictions, African "traditions" do not provide an alternative either. Rather, the continued penetration of imperialism in postcolonial Africa leads to social decay and violence. The novel seems to have reached an impasse.

In this apparent impasse lies the novel's comment about the social function of narrative, and of art — that art necessitates the establishment of a contemplative distance between the viewer and the object of art. The realization is that the object of art is bound to inertia, an arrest, a crystallization into a discrete moment. But also in this very realization that engenders the impasse lies the seed of a further consciousness, and action, on the part of the novel, whereby the novel seeks to bridge that contemplative distance, the void. The impasse is thus dissolved: if it is the case that the narrative voice occupies the outermost of the concentric circles within the narrative, and is most distanced from the narrated event, itself not the participant, the actor in the event, it is also the case that this apparently distanced narrative voice is, simultaneously, the actor of the narration itself. It thus turns out that this construction of concentric circles of narration/viewing is not limited, that this series of circles itself lies within a larger circle in which the real-world reader is interpolated into the actions of the narrative voice. And the implication is that this moment of discrete isolation is continuous with totality as a process; in this further circle, the reader occupies the position that the narrative voice had occupied in the previous, inner circle. In the act of reading — and in this sense, reading itself becomes an act of narration — the reader becomes the actor, the agent that makes history.

Specifically, the novel holds the reader — even the first-world reader — *potentially* responsible for the victimization, in being a silent, consuming party to the victimization. It is in this context of potential culpability that the novel's anxiety about "resignation" or "abdication of the will" is to be read:

Was this what they fought against, abdication of the will, resignation, withdrawal or enforced withdrawal — what did it matter? — the half-death state of inertia, neither-nor, sensing but unaffected, the ultimate condition of the living death? Looking beyond [Iriyise's] body for consolation [Ofeyi] glanced through a barred window, through restricted openings at a handkerchief firmament. A few stars pocked the sky and he wondered whose constellation they might be, the detached movement of worlds which transgressed his present

stagnation from one corner of the window to another, right over the edge of void.⁵⁶

In looking “over the edge of void,” beyond the comatose body and the withdrawn consciousness, beyond the arrest within barred windows, and towards the sky, towards “the detached movement of worlds,” Ofeyi makes a conscious effort to refuse the “abdication of the will.” The sky becomes a firmament, a distant expanse, but it is a “handkerchief firmament,” not so expansive — and something banal, everyday, and, most importantly, something graspable: “the detached movement of the worlds” beyond, the constellations beyond, become not so detached after all. For despite its self-consciousness about its inability, and precisely because of it, the novel strives to connect what may seem detached events and circumstances. It is this sense of looking beyond, on one hand, from an immediate scene of victimization, to the Cartel, and finally to the U.S., and, on the other hand, from represented agents of change, to readers as agents, that the novel reiterates over and over again, along with its anxiety of suffocation and dissolution that is attendant upon the inward look. For if the problem of the nation is variously concatenated, the solution itself must follow the same structure of strategic deferrals, from the activity of the characters in the novel, to the activity of the narrative voice, to the activity of its readers.

Concomitantly, above all, what is to be noted is that despite holding the reader responsible, despite the chastening of the reader, the novel eschews the politics of guilt proper: the novel holds the reader responsible, not for the victimization itself, but for watching the victimization, and as such sees the reader also as victimized. Though the above passage directly refers to Iriyise’s comatose state, “the half-death state of inertia,” of “enforced withdrawal” from the world into a shell, it also voices Ofeyi’s anxiety about his own paralysis: lying near Iriyise’s comatose body in prison, initially, “he did not move from the spot where he had regained consciousness.”⁵⁷ “[E]nforced withdrawal,” then, suggests rather a politics of solidarity. Ofeyi’s own paralysis next to Iriyise’s body in prison, but also in watching the hunters’ mutilation of their human victim, is similar to Iriyise’s “enforced withdrawal” under a “tyrannical hold”; furthermore, Iriyise’s loss is also Ofeyi’s loss.⁵⁸ Indeed, Iriyise’s prison-nurse, who, Ofeyi wonders, may also be the “female warder,” is recalled as “nothing beyond a blur of the frightened woman, cowering beside a tree” — frightened, forced into being the warder.⁵⁹

But though the “madness and general contagion” of the cross-river people is excoriated, it comes along with a recognition of their interests as separate from those of the Cartel bosses.⁶⁰ The charge of complicity certainly

is operative here, especially against “the curtailed bodies and minds who slugged one another over half-chewed meat and buried their teeth in pestilent carrion.”⁶¹ But what is in store for them is nothing more than “half-chewed meat” and “pestilent carrion.” More importantly, the possibility of redemption, through the recognition of conditions in common, is far from foreclosed: Suberu, the mute giant and once-inmate turned prison guard, finally helps Ofeyi escape and himself walks away, leaving the madness behind him. Suberu’s transformation from prison guard to Ofeyi’s helper results from Ofeyi’s attempt to invoke a sense of solidarity in Suberu, to “reach” him through drawing a parallel between Iriyise’s state and Suberu’s state of confinement: “Do you know what it means to be exploited? To be kept in a death row all your life?”⁶² The novel, then, beckons its readers to will themselves to act, and, in the words of the doctor, to “await the opportunity to strike back at their tormentors,” just as Ofeyi had willed himself out of his paralysis: Ofeyi “sat up suddenly as rationality seeped through and he realized that his situation was all too temporary.”⁶³ It is in this way that the novel turns what is at one moment a failure into a driving force in the very next moment: through the recognition of its own failure the novel attempts to interpolate its readers, thus situating itself in the world of real agents, as, not itself the individual agent of change, but a moment in the process of change. In its attempt to engage the reader as an actor in the project of transforming reality, the novel turns its very failure into its strength.

Notes

¹ Biodun Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 30.

² Tejumola Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama* (New York: Oxford UP, 1995) 61.

³ For a discussion of Soyinka’s politics, see Olaniyan’s *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance*, especially pages 43–66. For a more sympathetic account of Soyinka’s politics vis-à-vis class, see Gareth Griffiths and David Moody, “Of Marx and Missionaries: Soyinka and the Survival of Universalism in Post-Colonial Literary Theory,” in *After Europe: Critical Theory and Post-Colonial Writing*, ed. Stephen Slemon and Helen Tiffin (Sydney: Dangaroo, 1989) 74–85.

⁴ Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (New York, Macmillan, 1965) 253.

⁵ Soyinka, *Interpreters* 253.

⁶ Wole Soyinka, *Season of Anomy* (New York: Third Press, 1974) 254.

⁷ See, for instance, A. C. Okere, "Art, Mimesis, Mythography and Social Relevance: The Aesthetics of Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*," *Literary Criterion* 29:4 (1994): 44-54; Chidi Amuta, "From Myth to Ideology: The Socio-Political Content of Soyinka's War Writings," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 23:1 (1988): 116-29; and Irene Assiba d'Almeida, "From Social Commitment to Ideological Awareness: A Study of Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomy*," *Ufahamu: Journal of the African Activist Association* 10:3 (1983): 13-28. In elucidating the implications of an intertextual dialogue between Soyinka's novels, Juliet Okonkwo also notes this concern with social change. See Juliet Okonkwo, "The Essential Unity of Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomy*," *African Literature Today* 11 (1980): 110-21.

⁸ See Eustace Palmer, "Negritude Rediscovered: A Reading of the Recent Novels of Armah, Ngugi, and Soyinka," *International Fiction Review* 8:1 (1981): 1-11. See also Bonnie J. Barthold, *Black Time: Fiction of Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981).

⁹ For instance, see Werner Sedlak, "Wole Soyinka's Cultural Activism: His Representations of Detention in *The Detainee*, *Madmen and Specialists*, *Season of Anomy* and *The Man Died*," *Matatu: Journal for African Culture and Society* 23-24 (2001): 41-54.

¹⁰ Ato Quayson's suggestive discussion notes not simply African, but global concerns in Soyinka's use of a distinctly African mythopoeisis. Quayson sees Soyinka as meditating on his "culture's conceptual system and its place in the world" (210), and as "adopt[ing] both a national and post-national posture in drawing on Yoruba, Nigerian, and even African verities at a world level" (213). Ato Quayson, "The Space of Transformations: Theory, Myth, and Ritual in the Work of Wole Soyinka," in *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*, ed. Biodun Jeyifo (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2001) 201-36.

¹¹ Soyinka, *Anomy* 2.

¹² Soyinka, *Anomy* 2.

¹³ Soyinka, *Anomy* 13.

¹⁴ Soyinka, *Anomy* 13.

¹⁵ Soyinka, *Anomy* 6.

¹⁶ Soyinka, *Anomy* 6.

¹⁷ Soyinka, *Anomy* 24.

¹⁸ Soyinka, *Anomy* 24.

¹⁹ Soyinka, *Anomy* 24.

²⁰ Soyinka, *Anomy* 27.

²¹ Soyinka, *Anomy* 28.

²² Soyinka, *Anomy* 169.

²³ Soyinka, *Anomy* 170.

²⁴ Soyinka, *Anomy* 171.

²⁵ Soyinka, *Anomy* 171.

²⁶ Soyinka, *Anomy* 172.

²⁷ Soyinka, *Anomy* 173.

²⁸ Soyinka, *Anomy* 173.

²⁹ Soyinka, *Anomy* 173.

³⁰ Soyinka, *Anomy* 320.

³¹ Soyinka, *Anomy* 309.

³² Soyinka, *Anomy* 307.

³³ Soyinka, *Anomy* 53.

³⁴ Soyinka, *Anomy* 54.

³⁵ Soyinka, *Anomy* 56.

³⁶ Soyinka, *Anomy* 55.

³⁷ Soyinka, *Anomy* 21.

³⁸ Soyinka, *Anomy* 21.

³⁹ Soyinka, *Anomy* 21.

⁴⁰ Soyinka, *Anomy* 64.

⁴¹ Soyinka, *Anomy* 67.

⁴² Soyinka, *Anomy* 65.

⁴³ Soyinka, *Anomy* 40-41.

⁴⁴ Soyinka, *Anomy* 305.

⁴⁵ Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka* 45.

⁴⁶ Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka* 25.

⁴⁷ Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka* 26.

⁴⁸ Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka* 178 and 190.

⁴⁹ Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

⁵⁰ Soyinka, *Horseman* 76.

⁵¹ Soyinka, *Horseman* 76.

⁵² Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Being, the Will, and the Semantics of Death," *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*, ed. Biodun Jeyifo (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2001) 73.

⁵³ Soyinka, *Anomy* 164.

⁵⁴ Soyinka, *Anomy* 164.

⁵⁵ Soyinka, *Anomy* 164.

⁵⁶ Soyinka, *Anomy* 306.

⁵⁷ Soyinka, *Anomy* 306.

⁵⁸ Soyinka, *Anomy* 308.

⁵⁹ Soyinka, *Anomy* 306.

⁶⁰ Soyinka, *Anomy* 309.

⁶¹ Soyinka, *Anomy* 309.

⁶² Soyinka, *Anomy* 315.

⁶³ Soyinka, *Anomy* 315 and 307.

**The Biopolitical Unconscious:
Toward an Eco-Marxist Literary Theory**

Leerom Medovoi

In keeping with Fredric Jameson's founding claim in *The Political Unconscious* that Marxism provides not just one more hermeneutics of literature and culture, but a project that integrates all other hermeneutics to their historical determination, this essay will argue that ecocriticism, perhaps the youngest of contemporary literary hermeneutics, likewise can and should be dialectically assimilated to the project of a Marxist literary and cultural criticism. In redescribing ecocriticism as the analysis of modern literature's determination by the category of the "environment" within the successive iterations of the capitalist mode of production, however, I will also argue that Marxist literary criticism must be inflected in a new way. Insofar as politics, understood in their broadest sense, designate social struggles over how life (human and nonhuman alike) will be used as a means to a collective end that is *also* life, I will propose that the "absent cause" of history, which in the proverbial last instance determines the form of modern literature and culture, must be understood as a *biopolitical* unconscious.

In recoinning this classic Jamesonian term, I am joining it to Michel Foucault's well-known analysis of the rise of "biopolitics" during the early nineteenth century, the historical moment at which, Foucault argues, life itself for the first time became the object of politics. If, in fact, it was *both* human and nonhuman life that became explicit objects of regulatory or governmental power at around this time, as part of the political reckoning with the demographic and industrial revolutions of the nineteenth century, then for quite some time now we have been facing a political modernity in which life, or "bios," is at the core of capitalism's mode of regulation. What the media typically call the "environmental crisis" is better understood as the

current face of politics itself, namely the many different kinds of geopolitical struggle to reshape the circuits of power that flow between planetary life and accumulation on a global scale. Just as the early industrial phase in the capitalist mode of production established the preconditions for Marx's ability to critique and historicize the key categories of classical political economy, so now the contemporary movement toward a "green" regime of capital accumulation — one that seeks a "sustainable" relation to planetary life — permits us to historicize what Jameson called the "path of the subject," the key concepts, categories, or reading habits upon which ecocriticism depends: the "environment" or "ecology," indispensable abstractions that (like labor or exchange value) have only become generalized concepts through the work of an ensemble of concrete historical processes in need of investigation.¹ A rigorous eco-Marxist literary criticism today will first need to grasp the historicity of these terms, and then retroactively develop a symptomatic reading of literary and cultural texts that attends to their complex determinations by the same biopolitical history of capitalism that (by way of a different circuit) gives rise to the critical apparatus.

The Limits of Ecocriticism

In her introduction to the landmark 1996 collection *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryl Glotfelty proposes that ecocriticism might be defined most simply as:

the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its readings of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies.²

Glotfelty's goal in offering this comparative definition would appear to have been twofold: first, she proposes a commensurability between ecocriticism and feminist and Marxist criticism as parallel and analogous hermeneutical enterprises. But what exactly is the nature of the analogy? To paraphrase Tony Bennett's formulation, we might say that Glotfelty poses each of the three hermeneutics in question (feminism, Marxism, ecocriticism) as organizing itself in relationship to a constitutive "outside" of literature.³ Feminist criticism is "conscious" of gender as it reads literature, while Marxism brings an "awareness" of class and modes of production. The relation is modeled quite explicitly on the phenomenological conceit of

human perception. Each mode of criticism appears to occupy literature as if it were a subject looking outward, seeking to become conscious, or aware of how it registers that which lies *outside* of itself. No doubt it is precisely because what they register issues from an exteriority, that Glotfelty considers them to be no mere formalisms, but political or (better yet) *worldly* criticisms (to invoke Said) that show their concern for something that encompasses the merely literary.

Glotfelty's formulation of ecocriticism faces an immediate problem, however, since the "outside" that it advances to literature — the "physical environment" — appears strikingly vacuous. After all, feminism's "outside" possesses the specificity and substance of a critical political analysis of gender and sexuality, while that of Marxism brings to bear the social relations of alienation and exploitation that accompany the division of labor in the production process. Both feminism and Marxism rigorously theorize the political "outside" of literature before they activate their hermeneutics. But for ecocriticism, what encompasses literature is, well, simply the "environment" per se, which would appear to include anything and everything that encompasses it. This set of all sets of physical externalities to literature threatens to universalize its worldliness to the point where it becomes untheorizable, and hence, unpoliticizable as well.

In practice, however, ecocriticism operates through a kind of contradiction between the relentless universalism of its alleged frame (the limitless domains of environment or nature) and the specificity of the "externality" that actually animates it, and which makes it discernible as a matter of politics: the framing discourse of an *anthropogenically produced crisis of earthly life*. To borrow Glotfelty's own metaphor, ecocriticism has one foot planted in literature, and the other in

the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits ... when ... human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support system. We are there. Either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse.⁴

If actually existing ecocriticism has a theoretical framework for its externality, it most typically lies in the natural sciences, which establish the axiomatic truth of contemporary ecological crisis that grounds its hermeneutical project. To interpret texts ecocritically is to read them in relation to the run-up to a human-generated eco-catastrophe that threatens, not exactly the planet itself, but the "biosphere," planetary life in all its

human and nonhuman forms. For this reason, ecocriticism often takes itself to be both fully historical in its perspective and planetary in the scope of its concern. Its readings of literature in this sense work backward from the crisis-ridden present (either openly or tacitly) to the origins and development of either the human attitudes and practices that have led to the brink of such disaster, or else to alternative human attitudes or practices that might help us to avert it.

Paradoxically, however, as literary scholars immersed in the uses of narrative, genre, and metaphor, ecocritics are often well aware that such proleptic appeals to the catastrophic must themselves be understood narratologically. Both Lawrence Buell and Greg Garrard freely admit (and reflect upon the fact) that ecocriticism's reliance upon the ubiquitous trope of environmental crisis — central to and derived from such canonical movement manifestos as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Paul Erlich's *The Population Bomb*, and Al Gore's *Earth in the Balance* (and, for that matter, ecosocialist tracts such as Joel Kovel's *The Enemy of Nature*) — descends directly from apocalyptic religious rhetorics of the catastrophic end times.⁵ The real question becomes, to what end has this avowedly Christian religious narrative been secularized and imported into the context of environmental criticism? To what histories does this peculiar path of the ecocritical subject allude?

Biopolitical Regulation: Toward a Historicized Externality of Ecocriticism

In his comments on the apocalyptic trope, Greg Garrard briefly observes that the ur-text for this environmental crisis tradition is none other than Thomas Malthus's 1798 *Essay on the Principle of Population*, which famously argued that the outstripping of arithmetic increases in food production by the geometric increases in human population threatened a return to demographic equilibrium only by way of misery and disaster. I would like to press on the deeper significance of this origin. Marx famously attacked the intellectual substance of "Parson" Malthus's account of "population" as a specious abstraction that collapses together (and de-differentiates) the social classes out of which it was composed, while expelling from view the relations of production through which those classes are themselves constituted.⁶ In criticizing Malthus for his *political uses* of the concept of population — preaching it to the workers as a means of discouraging their reproduction — Marx also demonstrated his full awareness that the elaboration of this new category of population had real social effects. A midwife to the birth of what Michel Foucault would call "biopolitics," Malthus's trope of demographic apocalypse stimulated new mechanisms for the governing of human beings

specifically conceived as a species with regulatable rates of birth, health, education, and morbidity. Nor, contra Malthus himself, did it take long for the study and management of "population" to begin differentiating the Malthusian mass into subgroups whose analytic segmentation only aided the regulatory aim.

It was at this precise historical moment — Marx's time — when the study of populations from the viewpoints of class, race, sexuality, gender, and education, became the very stuff of demographic management, insurance systems, public hygiene, education, labor management, and even the modern prison system. Borrowing the analytical terms of the French Regulation School, the birth of biopolitics appears to have announced the advent of a self-reflecting or governmental "mode of regulation" for capitalism, understood here as the deployment of mechanisms and processes that establish the social preconditions for the more strictly economic "regimes of (capital) accumulation."⁷ The problem that biopolitics sought to solve from its inception was how best to manage politically human life in the context of the demographic and urban explosions associated with the industrial era of capitalism.

I recognize that I am reading Foucault against the grain in aligning him so closely here with Marx. Certainly this is not a connection that Foucault himself openly encouraged in his lifetime. But consider for a moment the argument in *The History of Sexuality, Volume One* that power is productive and not simply repressive. If this move is typically read in its antipsycho-analytic sense, as counter to the so-called "repressive hypothesis," it also makes Foucault's histories highly compatible with the Marxist tradition because his genealogies of productive power may be usefully integrated into both our analyses and histories of the *mode of production*. Antonio Negri, for one, reads biopolitics along exactly these lines, as

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.⁸

Following Foucault's general notion of productive power, biopolitics marks the growing *political reflexivity* associated with the active development of capitalism's productive forces, so long as we approach these forces in a rigorously noneconomistic sense, i.e., as inclusive of forces (or powers) that produce the preconditions of accumulation and not only those that become elements in the accumulation process itself.

How and why is this conjunction of Foucault and Marx relevant to the

task of ecocriticism? It is my intention to show that *biopolitics represents the political externality with which this literary hermeneutic, knowingly or unknowingly, concerns itself*. This is so, above all, because biopolitics were not limited solely to the management of human populations. When life itself became a political problem in that historical moment, its target already extended to the *nonhuman* domains of life. This is not a central theme of Foucault's writings, but it haunts them around the edges. In a brief but revealing passage in the *Society Must Be Defended* lectures, for example, Foucault notes that:

Biopolitics' last domain is, finally — I am enumerating the main ones, or at least those that appeared in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; many others would appear later — control over relations between the human race, or human beings insofar as they are a species, insofar as they are living beings, and their environment, the milieu in which they live. This includes the direct effects of the geographical, climatic, or hydrographic environment: the problem, for instance, of swamps, and of epidemics linked to the existence of swamps throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. And also the problem of the environment to the extent that it is not a natural environment, that it has been created by the population and therefore has effects on that population. This is, essentially, the urban problem.⁹

This passage, then, marks the discovery of two other major concepts accompanying that of "population," which, over time, would work together as a unified theoretical field guiding the development of biopolitics. The first of these concepts is the "environment" itself, understood as the milieu within which a population seeks to flourish. As Foucault notes above, the "environment" may be thought of as "natural" (the swamp) or it may be artificially, humanly produced (the city). What is important here is that the environment becomes something that may be studied and manipulated for its regularizing effects in exactly the same way as the population itself. To study the health of the population, one must study as well the "environmental factors" with an eye to governing and adjusting them so as to optimize the population itself as a productive force.

Although this is not Foucault's own claim, I would argue that the population/environment pair effectively worked to translate and displace their proximate political analogs from within the logic of sovereignty. For Foucault to suggest (as he would in his next set of "Collège de France" lectures) that governmentality concerns itself with "security, territory,

population" strikes me as both an error and a failure to press his own insights to a fuller conclusion. Juridical power, after all, rests upon the articulation of peoplehood and territory: those who form the *collective subject* of the sovereign on one hand, and their associated object world, the geographic realm or domain that delimits the sovereign's jurisdiction. Explaining the impetus for the birth of biopolitics, Foucault writes at one point that,

It is as though power, which used to have sovereignty as its modality or organizing schema, found itself unable to govern the economic and political body of a society that was undergoing both a demographic explosion and industrialization. So much so that far too many things were escaping the old mechanism of the power of sovereignty, both at the top and at the bottom, both at the level of detail and at the mass level."¹⁰

Industrial capitalism could not have secured its rate of expansion, without the regulatory interventions of new mechanisms of power. In this context, disciplinary power began to operate at the "bottom" or at the "level of detail" that concerned individual bodies. But it was biopolitics that intervened at the top, on the mass level. In place of the "people," a juridical category that conceives the citizenry as a political body, biopolitics introduced the "population," constituted not by their political belonging but by their biological status as species. The proper triad of governmentality or biopolitics is therefore security, *environment*, population. It is in lieu of the territory, again a juridical space concerned with applications of law and the extension of jurisdiction, that biopolitics introduced the "environment," a space organized not by the law but by the regularities of life and its biological requirements. The *Oxford English Dictionary* confirms that the word "environment" bursts into usage during the 1820s and 1830s as a term for the "conditions under which any person or thing lives or is developed; the sum-total of influences which modify and determine the development of life or character."¹¹

The second crucial concept, alluded to by Foucault's musing but never explicitly named, is the advent of "ecology," which slowly emerges as a kind of systematization of the population/environment coupling. To the extent that, as population, human beings become regulated for the first time as one species alongside others, interspecies relations *within the space of the environment* now emerges as a central problem for biopolitics. How, within their milieus, are living human populations affected by their relationships to nonhuman life in its many guises, as food, contagion, competition, or resource? Of course, it is not that these things were never thought of before

or never treated as a problem. But now they became at once a scientific and a political problem, a matter of *rational governance*. Like disciplinary power, which targeted and pacified the individual body or organism in order to maximize its productive force, so, too, biopolitics names the strategies deployed for maximizing the productive forces unleashed by demographic or aggregate relations, both between human beings, according to class, race, gender, sexuality, and between human beings and other species. The O.E.D. informs us that “ecology” first appears as a scientific term in the 1870s, and that its definitional meaning is in fact predicated upon the invention of our prior two terms, for ecology is quite literally the branch of biology that “deals with the relationships of living organisms and their environment.”¹² By the first decade of the 1900s, it would also become a sociological concept that dealt analogously with “the study of the relationships between people, social groups, and their environment; (also) the system of such relationships in an area of human settlement.”¹³

Consequences for Ecocriticism

This may appear to have been a long detour from the subject of ecocriticism, but it is in fact an absolutely necessary one if we are to be able to historicize the “environment,” which functions as the field’s reigning abstraction. Like “population,” the “environment” is a category that cannot be taken for granted as something to be universally generalized throughout human history. It is true that human beings have always made their lives under the conditions established by their necessary relationship to the land, waters, climate, and other species with which they cohabitate. But the discovery of the environment as a statistical set of factors amenable to political intervention quickly placed it at the center of the first genuinely reflexive mode of regulation in the history of capitalism, one that at its core sought to govern the effects of both natural and social surroundings on the productivity of the population that drew life from them.

This point is crucial because it upends completely the founding (and deadlocked) idealistic binary of all hitherto existing ecocriticism, namely that between “man” and “nature,” “humanity” and the “environment,” or the “anthropocentric” and the “ecocentric” perspective. To the extent that ecocriticism’s animating assumption grew out of the political tradition known as deep ecology, it explains the escalation of environmental damage as a direct effect of human beings’ failure to appreciate the “intrinsic value” of a nonhuman world (the environment, ecology, nature). In this view, if ecocriticism can inculcate an appreciation for the intrinsic value of the environment, its transformation of people’s “hearts and minds” promises to

liberate nature from our degradation of it. The canonization of nature writing by ecocriticism directly reflects this search for intellectual and artistic traditions within which this intrinsic value of nature is recognized and honored. As Lance Newman points out, this philosophically idealist conception of historical change stands in utter contradiction to ecocriticism’s allegedly materialist concern with the environment.¹⁴ Ecocritics who attribute environmental degradation to our wrongheaded ideas about dominating nature in fact resemble nobody so much as the young Hegelians of the early nineteenth century, whom Marx and Engels roundly attacked for expecting that the world could be changed simply through a change in our “consciousness [which] amounts to a demand to interpret reality in another way.”¹⁵

So far, my point has been to argue that a historical materialist ecocriticism must study literature’s relationship, not to our ideas about the environment, but rather to the *material relations* that have historically produced the “environment” as an operative biopolitical category. Both the “population” and the “environment” are not merely ideas, doctrines, or ideologies, although they certainly do approach human beings and their milieus through an act of abstraction (their statistical or demographic character). Rather, they are concrete mechanisms through which those bodies and places are governed. To use Althusser’s term, they are *apparatuses* that serve to reproduce the capitalist mode of production. Above all, the history of biopolitics teaches us that ecocriticism’s binary opposition of man and environment (aligned with bad anthropocentric and good biocentric thinking, respectively) is utterly ahistorical. The historicizing alternative to such metaphysics would be an ecocritical inquiry into the materially specific (and recent) invention of the “population/environment/capital” triad, a systemic exercise of political power that only some two hundred years ago began to develop strategies for pacifying, harnessing, and reorganizing the mutual relationships of human and nonhuman life toward the end of optimal capital accumulation.

This system of biopolitics remains a human creation, as does capitalism itself. But to borrow Marx’s words, these are powers that, though “born of the action of men on one another, have till now overawed and governed men as powers completely alien to them.”¹⁶ In making such a point, Marx and Engels themselves draw upon a Darwinian understanding of the “natural history” of humankind as a species that, though possessing consciousness, has had many modes of producing its needs out of its physical environments, yet often (like other species) without grasping their operations nor the possibilities of alternatives to them. Yet even if grasping these operations remains an urgent task, it would certainly not be enough to understand them.

Any meaningful struggle over environmental politics must ultimately intervene at the level of the mode of production itself, engaging in the many different kinds of struggles to deinstrumentalize life as a strategy of capital accumulation. When the biopolitics of population and environment are considered together, it becomes much clearer why the various histories of environmental degradation — the impoverishment of the land, the extinction of “surplus” animal or plant life, the squalor of the city, the pollution of water and air — are deeply coarticulated with class struggles, racialization processes, sexual and gender normalization, and, in general, with the conversion of humanity into a biological population whose life processes are managed as one more natural input of production to be maximized.

Marxist Ecocriticism: The Biopolitical Unconscious

A fully historicized criticism dealing with the relationships of literature to the environment will need to reckon with the fact that, at bottom, it studies the relationship between literature and *the mode of production at the level of its biopolitical self-regulation*. But while this means that ecocriticism must come to terms with Marxism, it must be stressed that ideology critique is not the sort of Marxism here being called to task. Neither are we speaking here of a criticism narrowly concerned with representations or expressions of class conflict (though class surely enters into the textualization of what we might call social conflict over “environmentality”). Rather, it is the analytic of the “political unconscious” that offers ecocriticism hermeneutical purchase, since only this approach is adequate to the most challenging of questions: how does the ultimate horizon of human history — the mode of production — pass into textuality?¹⁷

It would seem, on the face of it, that environmental biopolitics could manifest themselves at any of the three successively deeper semantic horizons that Jameson proposes: that of 1.) political history (text as narrative or symbolic solution to an openly articulated political problem of its time), 2.) sociality (text as an ideological speech act within the larger social codes of a language striated by class antagonisms), or 3.) the mode of production itself (text as the ideology of literary form itself in its unconscious relationship to transitions between modes of production).

This last and deepest level raises particularly interesting questions for the study of literature and the environment for at least two reasons. First, it would seem evident that, as capitalism mutates from one regime of accumulation to another (monopoly/imperialism capitalism, Fordism, post-Fordism), so, too, the mode of biopolitical regulation undergoes transformations, and, with it, the way in which it targets, normalizes, and regulates the “environ-

ment.” But the second reason is more explicitly literary, for it concerns Jameson’s interest in the “ideology of form,” which he further explains as the “determinate contradiction of the specific messages emitted by the varied sign systems which coexist in a given artistic process as well as in its general social formation.”¹⁸ Without a doubt, the great weakness of ecocriticism as a hermeneutic enterprise has rested in its utter incapacity to theorize itself as anything other than a *thematic* criticism that passes ethical judgment on the depictions of either nature or built environments. In this respect, ecocriticism has barely moved beyond a kind of Marxist criticism that looked only at the portrayal of classes, or a feminist criticism that studied images of women. In insisting that “environment” must be understood historically as a constitutive biopolitical element in the mode of production, I view ecocriticism as needing to imagine “environment” as a problem of *form* that must be diagnosed in terms of the biopolitical unconscious of literature.

I wish to end with the suggestion that a Marxist literary criticism attentive to ecocritical questions (or an ecocriticism that becomes Marxist by rigorously historicizing both itself and its literary object) would analyze the political unconscious of *setting* in its dialectical relationships with other structural literary elements such as character, plot, and genre. Ultimately, such an ecocritical analysis would share the broad questions of a Jamesonian Marxist criticism that analyzes the codes offered to us by the historical “Real” through which we, in turn, come to structure our imaginary relations to that “Real.” However, the key contribution of a Marxist ecocriticism, or an ecocritical Marxism, would be to focus attention on the recodings of setting as a mechanism through which the biopolitical environmentalization of actual spaces (as governable milieus for life) might pass into the literary.

This question would seem to be analogous to that of how the category of population reconstituted the formal logic of literary character. In both cases, the problem may be posed in the following way: the objects of biopolitics (whether environment or population) manipulate statistical norms that can be asserted only on an aggregated level, but that dissolve at the local or individual level (the place, the organism) into the aleatory. At the level of the individual person or place, therefore, what does it mean to become subject to a macro-procedure of knowledge/power whose operation comes to undergird some accumulation regime? How is genre itself reconstituted by the contradictions that this introduces in the textualization of place and its relationship to personhood?

These questions suggest a certain critical project that would explore how genres are refunctioned through the reconstitution of settings in response to the history of biopolitical environmentality. For example, we might begin with romantic poetry, at the very dawn of biopolitics. To what extent can

romantic poetry be read symptomatically as the refunctioning of the pastoral genre in relationship to an incipient “environmentalization” of the countryside? The Inclosure Acts converted land into a new kind of private property, but simultaneously into “environments” whose productivity would be calculated as surely as the productivity of workers (as laboring populations) would come to be measured. One could ask how pastoral nostalgia (for land) and the grandiosity of the romantic self (as the subject) operate as a kind of symptomatic reaction to the emergence of the (rural) capital/environment/population triad? It might also be the case that what romantic poetry reveals symptomatically is a psychic clinging to the land at the very moment that “environment” (which first emerges as an issue for agrarian capitalism) is separated from population, the disposed masses who are (invisibly from the viewpoint of romantic poetry) forcibly relocated to the cities.¹⁹ If Romanticism follows the path of environment, then realism (either Balzacian or Dickensian) can be said to follow the population, playing out the aleatory effects of the arrival of the countryman to the city.

Some one hundred years after the Romantics, now well into the biopolitical age, the generic mutation of “naturalism” evinces on its discursive surface an urban setting explicitly modeled upon the biopolitical concept of the “environment” as a calculable milieu. Naturalism, we might say, is a breakthrough genre that introduces both population and environment simultaneously into its literature, taking for the first time the “built environment” of urban life as a kind of ecological system that has quantifiable consequences for the populations that live within it. Ethnicity and race now begin to constitute formal elements in the sizing up of characters as quanta in a statistically analyzable population. Narrative paths of self-destruction (think Maggie in Stephen Crane’s novella or Hurstwood in Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*), though conveying individual fates, carry something of the “statistical” about them as well, so that either’s suicide might, for example, be read as an implicit micro-narrative counterpart to Émile Durkheim’s study of the statistically amenable macro-question of *Suicide*. How different in kinds are the “quantitative” logics of these literary suicides from (for example) that of Goethe’s *Young Werther* (for example) in the late eighteenth century.

From an ecocritical viewpoint, however, it is vital to remember that narratives responding to such calculations of life and death in the population are, in fact, also referencing the meaning of an urban environment that often also serves as their setting: the city as a completely monetized space of economic survival, the “eco-logics” of adjoining immigrant districts, class antagonisms, and, finally, the most straightforward of environmental issues such as sanitation, public health, education, quality of food, and the calculations of

injury in the workplace. In keeping with Jameson’s notion of “cultural revolution,” we might say that naturalism thus appears at a moment of transition between the urban environment, born of an industrial accumulation regime, and the ongoing development of a statist and welfare-driven approach to that environment’s biopolitical regulation, which will itself ultimately lead to a transformation in the mode of production itself. The era of the naturalist city is also the reform era for public health, public schools, and public safety. It also bears witness to new environmental interventions into the management of class conflict, including (in the narrower sense of natural environment) both the development of urban public parks and the wilderness preservation movement that will lead to the national park system, with its implicit notion of environmentally produced patriotism. By the mid-twentieth century, these various developments will coalesce into the biopolitical framework for a new Fordist regime of accumulation, organized around the construction of a *suburban* environment whose synthesis of urban space and wilderness as a “garden city” seeks to pacify and enlist the ethnic, working-class population in a system of mass consumption that articulates tightly with a Taylorized mass production system. The various mid-twentieth-century literatures of discontented suburbia, conformity, and mass consumption — from the Beat writers onward — all bear the symptoms of this transition.²⁰

I end my short cycle of illustrations with a brief mention of Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, situated in the transition between a still-dominant Fordist regime and emergent gestures in the direction of a globalized post-Fordism. From the perspective of setting, DeLillo’s novel locates itself firmly in a Fordist suburban space, surrounded both in a mass consumerist and a racial sense by the “white noise” that explicitly names its seemingly “reformed” environmentality, a consumer universe that safely regulates and protects life. But this setting is satirically treated in every possible way: work, family, product, setting, and, finally, biosecurity in its pure form. Protagonist Jack Gladney’s labor is absurdly unproductive, as a phony scholar in the unimaginable field of “Hitler Studies.” His apparently Fordist nuclear family camouflages actual divorces, stepchildren, mysterious former wives, and distant, foreign-raised children who visit only occasionally. Meanwhile, the pastoral, suburban “College-on-the-Hill” is just a short hop from Iron City, an environment of savage deindustrialization that represents a “return of the repressed” vis-à-vis naturalist urban violence. But from an ecocritical perspective, the striking narrative device is the so-called “airborne toxic event,” a pollution spill to which Gladney is inadvertently exposed, thereby placing him under a medical death sentence. Like a naturalist character, DeLillo’s protagonist appears as the chance victim of a calculable

environmental risk. But *White Noise* generically encodes this biopolitically quite different moment — the breakdown of Fordist regulation — in the form of satire, offering a comically masochistic narrative pleasure in shattering the illusory security of the suburban milieu as an environment designed to eliminate risk from the life of the social body. Engaging what to this day remains a still-unresolved biopolitical trajectory, the novel's ironic stance anticipates the last few decades of environmental instability, amidst inconclusive struggles over the regulatory framework for a new "green" regime of accumulation that would seek to stabilize what is still an elusive post-Fordist alternative to a now rapidly receding Fordist golden age.

The ecocritical project that I have mapped out in this essay is a far cry from the celebration of nature writing that launched this hermeneutic. It has more in common, to be sure, with what Lawrence Buell calls "second-wave ecocriticism," which takes an open interest in urban environments, third world literatures, and a much wider range of genres.²¹ But what I hope here to have provided is a rigorous externality that justifies this opening up of the ecocritical archive, and that puts to new work the same imperative guiding Marxist criticism at large: always historicize. But if that is the goal, then we must return at last to the apocalyptic language of eco-catastrophe with which I began this paper, and which I termed the putative "externality" of ecocriticism. If a certain disavowal has animated ecocriticism's ahistorical relation to its own categories, it has to do with an inability to relinquish its apocalyptic claims. One might note that, at every single step in the history of biopolitics, the trope of eco-catastrophe serves as a mechanism for insisting upon biopolitical reform, calculated change to the environment (and/or to the population) before it is too late. This was true for Malthus, for the late-nineteenth-century reformers, for the environmentalists of the 1970s, and is also the case today. In each case, the motif of eco-catastrophe facilitates some kind of regulatory transition between accumulation regimes. We must therefore think of eco-catastrophe as itself a standing trope of the biopolitics of environmentalism, as its discursive norm, much as the discourse of reform has always accompanied the modern institution of the prison.

Many ecocritics will surely be appalled by this argument, and insist that turning to the question of the mode of production in this way simply distracts us from the all-too-real endangerment of the planet, of human and nonhuman life as it is threatened by anthropogenic climate change. The point, however, is not to deny that massive climate change is highly likely, any more than Marxism has required us to deny the very real risk of nuclear war. What we must recognize, rather, is that climate change is not going to happen because capitalism has *ignored* the environment or because nobody *cares* about nature. On the contrary, the point is to stress just *how much* the environment

has mattered to capitalism throughout its history, how central a role it has played, precisely because "environmentality" is the mechanism through which the milieus of life are assessed and transformed, and rendered more productive. Much of the rhetoric of ecopolitics today in fact works precisely in this historical tradition, arguing that we will have to "green" our relationship to the environment in order to make capitalism more sustainable. The political goal of a properly Marxist ecocriticism will not be to save the environment. It will be to abolish it.

Notes

¹ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) 9.

² Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1996) xix.

³ Tony Bennett, *Outside Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 2-10.

⁴ Glotfelty, *Ecocriticism* xx.

⁵ See Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996) 285, and Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 85-93.

⁶ For Marx's critique of Malthus's concept of "population," see selections from *The Grundrisse* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978) 276-77. For his ferocious critique of Malthus's class hypocrisy in preaching his dogma, see *Capital, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977) 766-77.

⁷ For a clear exposition of the critical analytics of the "regime of accumulation" and the "mode of regulation," see Robert Boyer, *The Regulation School: A Critical Introduction*. (New York: Columbia UP, 1990) 15-47.

⁸ Antonio Negri, "The Labor of the Multitude and the Fabric of Biopolitics," *Mediations* 23:2 (2008).

⁹ Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003) 245.

¹⁰ Foucault, *Society* 249.

¹¹ "Environment." *Oxford English Dictionary*. 16 July 2009.

<http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/cgi/entry/50076498?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=environment&first=1&max_to_show=10>.

¹² "Ecology." *Oxford English Dictionary*. 17 November 2009.

<http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/cgi/entry/50071982?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=ecology&first=1&max_to_show=10>.

¹³ "Ecology," OED.

¹⁴ Lance Newman, "Marxism and Ecocriticism." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* 9:2 (2002): 2-3.

¹⁵ Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology." *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978) 149.

¹⁶ Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology" 164.

¹⁷ Lawrence Buell has proposed as an ecocritical rubric a concept of the "environmental unconscious," but his reference is so loosely analogical and uninterested in Jameson's actual theoretical argument as to lose its entire force. For Buell, the "environmental unconscious" has nothing whatsoever to do with the mode of production. It is not even clear that it serves as a hermeneutical strategy for the historicization of texts. Rather, it is just a way to talk about any kind of "distortion, repression, forgetting, inattention" of a physical environment as it manifests in a literary text. See Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and the Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Boston: Belknap, 2003) 18. Even as an attempt to provide ecocriticism with Freudian insights into the hermeneutics of absence, this is fairly weak stuff. I propose instead the term "biopolitical unconscious," as a way of keeping ecocriticism focused on the *historical specificity* of literature's relationship to the environment, and to indicate its inseparability from literature's relationships (in growing concentric circles) to population, processes of political regulation and antagonism, and, finally, the mode of production itself.

¹⁸ Jameson, *Political Unconscious* 99.

¹⁹ The exceptional text in this regard might be Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village," which visibly marks the absent population as a frame for its pastoral nostalgia, and in doing so brings its biopolitics close to the textual surface.

²⁰ My book, *Rebels*, develops the literary and cultural terrain of this historical juncture in great detail, and in ways compatible with the project I am here delineating. See Leerom Medovoi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005).

²¹ Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (New York: Blackwell, 2005) 19-24.

Creative Labor

Sarah Brouillette

This essay compares two influential conceptions of contemporary labor, which emerge from and contribute to radically divergent interpretive traditions, but share common ground. First is the largely celebratory idea of a "creative class" branded by Richard Florida, management professor and globe-trotting consultant to government and industry. Second is the account of "immaterial labor" assembled by a group of thinkers tied to *autonomia*, a radical Marxist formation with origins in the Italian workerist movement. This group, now in a "post-workerist" mode, includes Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Maurizio Lazzarato, and Paolo Virno. I will refer to them as autonomists, a poor but convenient shorthand. Florida's research has influenced recent government policy and management literature in which individuals appear as born innovators, the origins of enterprise, naturally predisposed to be against what exists and to try to perfect it through invention; and in which the economy discovers this pre-existing tendency and then nurtures it into an engine for ceaseless renewal. The autonomists' theories, which imagine a resistant subjectivity that is at once subsumed within, outside of, and the source of liberation from capitalism, are hardly equivalent to Florida's. Nevertheless, I suggest they are likewise more symptoms than diagnoses of the pervasive vocabulary that fathoms creative expression as an essence of experimentation emanating from an internal and natural source, and that finds one of its models in idealized apprehension of artists' ostensible resistance to routine, to management, to standardization, and to commodification. For Florida, the fact that this vocabulary is one that contemporary capitalism clearly requires and reinforces is not a problem: his creative subject is the fruit of the progress of modernization, of the spread of self-reflexivity and freedom. The autonomists' case is more difficult. They

themselves tend to lament that the expressive self-realization at the core of their theory is the same one nurtured and expropriated by capital, yet they do not offer any alternative to this conception of human motivation and behavior. Instead, their immaterial producer, her character assumed rather than interpreted, appears largely destitute of any significant history.¹

To begin, Florida and the autonomists broadly agree that over the past few decades more work has become comparable to artists' work. For Florida this is a positive development. For the autonomists it is ambivalent, but they state with little equivocation that the kind of aesthetic expression subsumed within capitalist production is not real creativity, but rather its codified and corrupted appearance in commodity form. Still, both camps imagine creativity as located within individuals' uncontainable experimental energies and self-expressive capacities. In Florida's work, these capacities are often facilitated and liberated by development of one's career within an expanding marketplace for creative work. For the autonomists, they are instead threatened by such incorporation. In fact, they are quashed by the sheer process of individuation, since that, too, has by now been subsumed into capitalist relations, until only a "monad" of pure "potential," existing somehow before socialization, can be the source of real creativity. Nevertheless, this "potential," imagined as an inherent germ available for development, is for the autonomists also crucial to capitalism's demise. New currents in production trigger the rise of "the multitude," and with it, in time, the fruition of something resembling Marx's postcapitalist "social individual": the worker who does tasks that a thing cannot do, whose work is so satisfying it will be done for its own sake, under no distant compulsion or direct domination.²

For Florida, under capitalism's benevolent watch, the ideal of non-alienated labor, performed by the "whole person" en route to self-development, has passed out of the realm of utopian fantasy and into the workplace. A once-tenable distinction between bourgeois and bohemian values has collapsed into the "shared work and lifestyle ethic" that Florida calls "the creative ethos."³ Like bohemians before them, the creative class values diversity, openness, and nonconformity, eschewing "organizational or institutional directives" and embracing city living as freedom from the tradition.⁴ However, like the bourgeoisie, they are also quite willing to connect self-worth to career success, and they feel little "distaste for material things" — not because they wish to grow rich per se, but because they are living in an era of "post-scarcity."⁵ Whereas the bohemian artist suffered for her work, members of the creative class tap into creativity precisely to the extent that they are free from worry about poverty.⁶ Indeed, a successful creative career is important because it means being granted the freedom to

pursue creative inclinations without too much concern for market necessities. Thus materialistic motivations exist in tandem, rather than tension, with the desire for self-expression and personal development; the wish to do creative work and identify with a community of creative people is perfectly reconcilable with the desire to live in prosperity. The creative process need only be organized in such a way that its essential indivisibility is respected, its autonomy assumed and structured into the workplace.

For the autonomists, meanwhile, via immaterial labor — the post-factory work which "produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" — capital is busily orchestrating the incorporation of creativity into itself.⁷ It is doing this by treating all social experience as a factory, in which the universal inclination toward creative play becomes the laboratory from which new products emerge. The personality of the worker, including her desire for variety and self-expression, are made "susceptible to organization and command."⁸ Thus, when we are all enjoined to explore our subjectivity that by no means does away with the "antagonism" between "autonomy and command," instead, it simply "re-poses the antagonism at a higher level, because it both mobilizes and clashes with the very personality of the individual worker."⁹ The shifting world of available ideas, which the autonomists call "the mass intellect," is something capital is always trying to access and capture, so it creates spaces where novel agglomerations will emerge and be accessible. In this, the "struggle against work" is simply useful. Immaterial production "nurtures, exploits, and exhausts" its labor force by ongoing affective social production of self-sacrificing and self-motivated workers, people who freely offer their labor because it is experienced as non-laborious pleasure or as moral compulsion.¹⁰ Key here is capital's desire for a worker-subject in whom command can simply "reside": workers may disobey command, but disobedience is a prerequisite for productivity.¹¹ For the autonomists, then, Florida's mistake is seeing the commingling of capitalism and creative expression as a benign or even ideal realization of the end of soul-destroying labor. It is, rather, an intensification of exploitation, though it is often experienced as the opposite.

In tandem, as the distinction between work and leisure is eroded, what one experiences and consumes "outside" of labor time becomes part of the production of commodities.¹² As immaterial labor is a matter of social relations *in toto*, and its economic value stems from this fact, for the autonomists the consumer, too, "is inscribed in the manufacturing of the product from its conception."¹³ Consumption doesn't just "realize" the product. It is itself the product, as at once the tracked assumption behind the product's creation and as its desired outcome. Thus, the material reworked by immaterial labor is the general world of subjectivity and the environment in

which it is produced; the content of immaterial labor's commodities is the general social milieu. Immaterial workers satisfy a demand and produce it at the same time. The social world, as the factory, is the space in which the worker is reproduced; all the culture that is consumed works to infect and influence and re-create the consumer's situation. In other words, the consumer is thoroughly incorporated into the cycle of production, and the cultural producer is herself conceived as a consumer, as the member of a class defined by the accoutrements of lifestyle and leisure, as one whose habits of consumption do so much to define her, and whose experiences as a consumer are what generate the ideas that are later codified in rights to intellectual property. The process of immaterial production is thus cyclical and all-pervasive, incorporating everyone.

Having painted this portrait, the autonomists are nevertheless careful to theorize the mass intellect as something that cannot be fully incorporated. In trying to explain this resistance, several look to Marx's mention of a general intellect, especially as articulated in the "Fragment on Machines," where, in Virno's terms, Marx argues that abstract knowledge "begins to become, precisely by virtue of its autonomy from production, nothing less than the principle productive force, relegating parcelized and repetitive labor to a peripheral and residual position."¹⁴ In brief, Virno interprets Marx's short text as support for his own claim that it is perverse to hold that knowledge and the worker exist independently of one another: the general intellect is the mutual interrelation of living labor and machinery, which is the fixed capital in which abstracted knowledge about working processes is embedded; and the knowledge held by the general intellect "cannot be reduced to fixed capital" because it is "inseparable from the interaction of a plurality of living subjects."¹⁵

"Mass intellectuality is the composite group of post-Fordist living labor," Virno writes, and it "cannot be objectified in machinery."¹⁶ Indeed, as the general intellect is constantly recombined and reconstituted within the expanse of living labor, whenever it is translated into fixed capital, a conflict emerges. Capital's constant struggle to fix knowledge is met by living labor's lack of willingness to have its knowledge abstracted. For Virno, the general intellect is, exactly, "the intellect in general": it is the basic human ability to think and process information; it is the inherent creativity possessed by everyone, "rather than the works produced by thought." Post-industrial accumulation taps this unending resource; indeed, it requires the inexhaustible resource potential of the creative impulse, grounded fundamentally in the "potential of labour to execute contingent and unrepeatable statements."¹⁷ This is a social knowledge that is the opposite of that possessed by the new "labour aristocracy." It is the "immeasurable" site of

"heterogeneous effective possibilities." It arises from the faculties for thinking, perception, language, memory, feeling, all part of the "fundamental biological configuration" that distinguishes the human animal.¹⁸ It is a never-ending potentiality — in the autonomists' vocabulary, a "virtuality."¹⁹ It is this that capital attempts to transform into productive labor, and that Hardt and Negri have located at the utopian center of the political promise of "the multitude."

It is in understanding the relationship between this potentiality and its transformation through immaterial labor that the autonomists tend to invoke aesthetic models. Virno prefers to figure innovation as the "virtuosity" of the live performer, whose activity "finds its own fulfillment (that is, its own purpose) in itself, without objectifying itself into an end product ... or into an object which would survive the performance."²⁰ It would seem, then, that real creativity cannot survive transformation into "product" or "object"; its rightful aura cannot be preserved or accessed by others outside a singular moment of its own expression, interpreted as "its own purpose." For his part, Lazzarato applies the literary circuit of "the author, reproduction, and reception."²¹ He positions the author as a consumer who puts together a unique amalgam of materials available within mass intellectuality and then offers up that assemblage of her labor to capital. That offering up is the crucial thing; in its absence one remains and continues to perform as living labor or "virtuoso," capital's ceaseless countermeasure, the thing that it will never fully "subordinate it to its own values."²² In other words, to engage in immaterial production is to author something, which inevitably means to work in a way that "distorts or deflects the social imaginary that is produced in the forms of life." At the same time, though, those forms of life are the ultimate and final source of innovation — in the simple process of being alive, ideas occur — and so the actual production of immaterial commodities is dependent and secondary. Everything is, of course, socially authored, since it is "the whole of the social relation," embodied in the author-work-audience relationship, that bring any kind of meaning "into play."²³ But through the author of immaterial products, who possesses what Lazzarato calls autonomous "synergies," capital will "attempt to control" and "subordinate" these irreducible energies to itself.²⁴

Thus, in the case of immaterial labor's theorists, as for the creative class's enthusiasts, ideas about the status and work of the artist-author shape how they present what contemporary labor entails. For the latter, it seems that the old ideal of the artist's aversion to market success no longer holds. The artist has been subsumed into the creative class, bohemian values persist only as lifestyle choices, and creativity and market circulation are synonymous and unfold in tandem. The authenticity and subjectivity of the creative

act are in no way threatened by market circulation. Instead, they are protected by it. For the former, in turn, the artist is the model for the absorption of subjectivity into the market. She is the figure for any worker who “originates” the authored and authorized discourse that is inseparable from capitalism but separate from something else it cannot contain: inherent human creativity, understood as the variability of the human personality’s infinite potential for recombination.

The Floridean and autonomist viewpoints are thus similar in their assumption that creativity and capital are merged now in some novel ways, as the production of various kinds of symbolic content — information, entertainment, art — have ostensibly become economically dominant, and as artists’ vaunted resistance to routine work has been thus generalized throughout the workforce. But the autonomists try to preserve a space between the “mass intellect” and entrepreneurial appropriation of its products for personal gain. Their theories of virtuosity and virtuality constantly return to what authorized speech cannot capture through immaterial production of intellectual property, and so the sense remains that there is some pressing contradiction between creative expression and work. Their writings evince a clear wish to maintain a sublime mass which is at once outside of property relations and the source of everything available for transposition into them. This wish is perhaps most evident in their continual return to oppositions that are resonantly ethical: quantities are pitted against the unquantifiable; actual products are pitted against future potential for the creation of anything; the model of the solo author is pitted against the collective intelligence that is actually held by everyone and merely appropriated for the author’s use; writing and codification are pitted against the universal possession of language that can be constantly recombined and redeployed; intellectual property rights are pitted against the “the commons” and the multitude; and measure and all it implies about quantification and exchange are pitted against immeasure, figured as the endless fecundity of social knowledge and its irreducibility to exchange relations (or, its unavailability for abstraction in machinery).

Thus, where Florida and the autonomists confer, we find an image of an economy in which individual human creativity has become the vanguard driving force and key productive engine. Where they diverge, we glimpse continued conflict over what it means that so much labor is now being called creative, or that respect for the productive powers of creative impulses is now so general. For Florida and his students and allies, artists are models of successful and fulfilling work within the marketplace, while non-creatives are simply a problem. It isn’t that they have nothing to offer — like the autonomists, Florida states that everyone is creative — but that, because they

are trapped in deadening work, their potential isn’t being accessed, which means “wasting that great reservoir of our creative capital.”²⁵ This represents a problem both for them and for the businesses that might trade in their creativity.

In marked contrast, for the theorists of immaterial labor, these non-creatives are actually where true creativity resides, because their ceaseless ability to recombine is the source of all knowledge. These theorists thus transmogrify those who don’t author — or those who “refuse” — into the only source of resistance to capital, a resistance that capital always does and does not incorporate. So whereas the Floridean approach positions creativity as the market meeting minds, for the autonomists it can only be minds as they meet outside of market logic, as the author becomes any figure whose thinking being is exploited by capital, and also, quite simply, capital itself. Both the figure and the system require that whole social world that remains outside of authorship or authored experience, the source of potential which can’t be reduced to capital. In other words, once your labor has become available for this reduction to product, by expropriating potentiality, you’ve become an author. It is only the non-author, in possession of a non-market mass intellect, who holds on to non-market integrity.

Literary scholars have shown how indispensable imagining the subject as “origin of expression” has been to the history of capitalist cultural markets and of private rights to intellectual property.²⁶ In future writing, I hope to show the relevance of their findings to theories of creative labor, while taking my cue from Michael Ryan’s argument that Negri’s valorization of “expressive subjectivity” depends upon omission of the “instrumental and contextual factors” that are its actual conditions of possibility.²⁷ Ryan laments this as an “absolutism of the subject,” and claims that the individual Negri imagines as embodiment of irreducible difference and source of ceaseless experimentation is continuous with the liberal subject as site of personal choice and self-referencing desire.²⁸ Since Ryan’s appraisal, theories of creative production have tended to extend and generalize the approach to subjectivity he faulted, activating particular figures of artist-authors in the process. The continued life of these figures involves a confluence of social and economic forces that are of precious little interest to Florida or to the autonomists, whose theories tend instead to remove the subject they assume from historical comprehension. Lost in both sets of analyses is, thus, any sense of the contradictory, material, and constitutive histories of artists’ labor and of images of artists at work that subtend the conception of subjectivity they maintain. Labor theories of aesthetic production, as part of a broader political economy of culture, should provide an alternative, by considering, for example, the development of the contradictory relationship between

artists and the markets for their work, or the concomitant mainstreaming of the figure of the artist as valorized mental laborer. Accounting for the historicity and the particular emergence and spread of the vocabulary that makes contemporary labor an act of self-exploration, self-expression, and self-realization is an essential task in denaturalizing the character of contemporary capitalism.

Notes

¹ For pressing critique of the theory of immaterial labor, see Timothy Brennan, "The Empire's New Clothes," *Critical Inquiry* 29 (2003): 337-67. For broad treatment of creative labor, see Mark Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work* (London: Palgrave, 2007), and Andrew Ross, *Nice Work If You Can Get It* (New York: New York UP, 2009).

² On the "social individual," see Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 33; compare Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse* [1857-61] (London: Penguin, 1973) 325, 705-706.

³ Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) 193.

⁴ Florida, *Rise of the Creative Class* 77.

⁵ Florida, *Rise of the Creative Class* 194.

⁶ Florida, *Rise of the Creative Class* 81.

⁷ Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, eds., *Radical Thought in Italy* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996) 133.

⁸ Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" 134.

⁹ Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" 135.

¹⁰ Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text* 63 (2000): 51.

¹¹ Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" 136.

¹² Paolo Virno, "General Intellect," translated by Arianna Bove <<http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpvirno10.htm>>, par. 5.

¹³ Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" 141.

¹⁴ Paolo Virno, "The Ambivalence of Disenchantment," in Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, eds., *Radical Thought in Italy* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996) 21. Compare Marx, *Grundrisse* 692-93.

¹⁵ Virno, "General Intellect" par. 6.

¹⁶ Virno, "General Intellect" par. 7.

¹⁷ Virno, "General Intellect" par. 7.

¹⁸ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti et al. (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2004) 98.

¹⁹ Virno, "General Intellect" par. 8.

²⁰ Virno, *Grammar* 52.

²¹ Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" 144.

²² Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" 145.

²³ Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" 146.

²⁴ Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" 145.

²⁵ Richard Florida, *The Flight of the Creative Class* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) 188.

²⁶ Two representative studies are Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993), and Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994).

²⁷ Michael Ryan, *Politics and Culture: Working Hypotheses for a Post-Revolutionary Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989) 46.

²⁸ Ryan, *Politics and Culture* 57.

It's Dialectical!

Nicholas Brown

Valences of the Dialectic, by Fredric Jameson. London: Verso, 2009, 625 pp., US\$49.95, ISBN 9781859848777

Fredric Jameson's *Valences of the Dialectic* is in essence three books: an exhilarating new book on the dialectic, destined to be counted among the central works in Jameson's corpus (Parts I, II, and VI); a virtual third volume of the essay collection *Ideologies of Theory* (Parts III and V); and a peculiar middle section (Part IV), which I will characterize more fully below.

The bracing early chapters of *Valences of the Dialectic* return to us the useful Hegel, not the thinker of the One (of teleology, of identity, of the ultimate return of every difference into the monotony of the same), but rather the unrelenting and almost impossibly rigorous thinker of the Two, of the fundamental unrest and instability (neither the yin and yang of complementarity, nor the static field of binary opposition, nor yet the aporetic abyss of the antinomy, each one of these being rather a disguise for the thought of the One) that dissolves every certainty in contradiction and propels it forward into something else which is not, from its own perspective, conceivable. Of course, these two Hegels, the thinker of the One and of the Two, are the same Hegel, viewed under different and contradictory aspects. Even if we read, as we should, the final chapter of the *Phenomenology* ("On Absolute Knowing") as utterly in contradiction with the only ontological (in fact anti-ontological) claim in the *Phenomenology* (the derivation of dialectical movement in the Introduction) and as a last-ditch attempt to rescue the *Phenomenology* from its most profound implications (from which perspective it can be made to look like a Brechtian happy end, but it is really more like a Hollywood ending: for Lukács, Hegel's teleology was "scarcely

comprehensible in view of his method”) everything still depends on how we read “the identity of identity and difference” (which appears in its explicit and abstract form only later, in the *Logic*).¹

The formula looks like our everyday stereotype of the Hegelian procedure: the submission of Difference to the rule of Identity. But we must also read Hegel’s formulation in the other direction: Every identity contains difference within it; everything that appears self-contained and solid hides a secret self-contradiction. The question is not so much which is the “real” Hegel (both procedures are necessary) but which is the tonic chord of the Hegelian dialectic — or, better, to extend the metaphor, whether the dialectic is, in fact, constructed around a tonic chord, every dissonance and unresolved tension in exile from resolution even when resolution is treated as anathema; or whether, on the contrary, it is constructed around an unresolved dominant, seething with tension and potential movement even when seemingly at rest. Once the question assumes this enlarged dimension, however, it becomes correspondingly more difficult to decide, and Jameson’s answer, bypassing a great deal that might be said in the way of “theological niceties,” is that only the second Hegel is interesting.

The first chapter, “The Three Names of the Dialectic” (a version of which was presented at the Marxist Literary Group’s Summer Institute on Culture and Society in Chicago in 2007), raises three possibilities: “the dialectic” as a system or method, “many dialectics” as a set of operations which can be found across disciplines and discourses, and “it’s dialectical!” as a name for the effect of the dialectic, for the sudden widening of the conceptual field that accompanies the transformation of an apparently discrete phenomenon into a moment within a larger force field. The first of these will be the most obviously problematic — even as the title of the book insists, despite a more ambiguous discussion of the matter in this chapter (11–12), that a sense of “the” dialectic is nonetheless necessary — while the second will demonstrate its own unsatisfactory nature by way of a catalog of “dialectical moments in the work of non- or anti-dialectical thinkers” (15). The key moment here is that of structuralism and the discovery of binary opposition as a generative principle of meaning and, in a negative corollary, as the very form of ideology and error. This then permits a new staging of the emergence of the dialectic. In Hegel, opposition was to be derived from something else, namely *Verstand* or the law of noncontradiction. After the brief reign of the binary opposition and the longer reign of its deconstruction, the dialectic can be revealed to be the truth of that relationship, such that “any opposition can be the starting point for a dialectic in its own right” (19); or, more strongly put, “it is the unmasking of [static] antinomy as [dynamic] contradiction which constitutes truly dialectical thinking as such” (43). Now

a dialectic can be identified in Coleridge, in Mondrian, in the *Aeneid*, in the thought of a Foucault or a Deleuze, and of course the examples of those who are “dialectical without knowing it” (67) can be multiplied almost infinitely; in the hands of a Žižek (on Deleuze, for example) this game becomes almost a sport, though here it is played in earnest. Particularly productive in this section is a kind of typology that emerges, such that several distinct procedures, both within and outside of the explicitly dialectical tradition, can all be shown to be “dialectical” in some substantial sense.

However, what we have arrived at by way of this second moment is nothing less than the singular “method” which was to be avoided in the first, and indeed this immanent method delivers us at the feet of a set of discursive regularities, of laws to be discovered — “laws” being, however, the target of the dialectic from the beginning (in those interminable passages on the physical sciences in the *Phenomenology*) and which only reinstate themselves within it by way of what now seem deplorable — but at the same time almost charming — Engelsisms. In a first approach, the problem can be avoided by returning to a conception of the dialectic as purely reactive, as a practice of disruptive guerrilla raids on *Verstand*, reified thinking, common sense. (And indeed, as with the two Hegels above, the thought of the Two cannot function without the thought of the One; the dialectic presumes common sense; if the latter were really defeated, the former would have nothing on which to operate. The complication is, to get ahead of ourselves, that *Verstand* is not stable but is rather itself implicated in the movement of the dialectic). But this guerilla dialectic begins to look both familiar and harmless; it has become a matter of rediscovering some old tools, providing a new genealogy and perhaps a gratifyingly militant tone for the deconstructive attitude. The difference between the dialectic and this attitude — a difference which becomes obvious in Marx — is, however, already fully present in Hegel, in his insistence that the dialectic was already an operation in the object itself, leaving noumenal squeamishness to the Kantians. This is, then, the explosive force of the central Hegelian claim for the “reality of the appearance,” or that “the essence must appear”: the insight that *Verstand* is not just “in here” in consciousness, but “out there” in the world itself: in more modern terms, reality is itself ideological. The wage relation, for example, disguises the essence of labor-power, but the wage relation is not only an ideological construct but also something objectively “out there” in society. The dialectic does not attack appearances in the name of an essence that lies outside them; nor does it attack them in the hopes of merely loosening their hold on thought; rather, it takes hold of them from the inside in the name of another appearance that is already immanent in them. The

dialectic, the dereification of thought, is also the dereification of the world, the edifice of facts turned into a tissue of potentialities.

“The Three Names of the Dialectic,” however, includes four names, the supplementary possibility being the “spatial dialectic.” The term has caused some confusion and even suspicion; matters can be clarified by understanding first that the spatial dialectic is still historical. We are really talking here more about making space dialectical than about making the dialectic spatial; the point is to outfit the dialectic for a moment when space is a conceptual dominant, for reasons that are entirely historical in the strong sense. When the dialectic stalls in the *Aesthetics*, Hegel often gets things moving by means of a leap from one “civilization” to another — but this leap is often immediate, which is to say, precisely undialectical, so these leaps would be the task of a spatial dialectic to explain, rather than its source. Still, one has only to remember that *Phenomenology of Spirit* itself is far from straightforwardly chronological to realize that the dialectic is there already spatial. Indeed, many of the relationships in the *Phenomenology* are explicitly spatial ones: the recurrent problem of the “beyond,” which it is the particular task of the dialectic to hunt down and destroy wherever it appears; the realms of the netherworld and the city that organize the oppositions in the *Antigone* section (and many of the other dialectical pairings can now be seen to be spatial as well: lord and bondsman, virtue and the way of the world, inner and outer in the observation of nature, and so on); or finally the “typological” reading which the *Phenomenology* permits (the beautiful soul, the unhappy consciousness, the law of the heart, and so on), from which perspective the types can be thought of as locations — or at least temptations native to locations — in social space. And, of course, once we move beyond Hegel (Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Cardoso, Amin...), a spatial dialectic, not named as such but already specifically global, begins to emerge as a mode of thinking in its own right. It has yet to be isolated and theorized under its own name, and Jameson does the former but not yet the latter here. However, the theoretical aim of the diverse projects of the São Paulo “school” — *Valences* is dedicated to Grécia de la Sobera and Roberto Schwarz — in the various disciplines (sociology, history, literary studies, economics, history) is precisely to produce a spatial dialectic, and if one wants to get a sense of what a spatial dialectic would look like in practice, one could do a lot worse than look at the *Dossier: Brazil* issue of this journal (www.mediationsjournal.org/toc/23_1).

The second chapter is equally stimulating but more difficult to summarize. Essentially, it is a guided tour of the *Encyclopedia Logic*, organized through the itinerary of vulgar understanding or *Verstand*, which itself is no stable term but rather assumes various forms as the *Logic* unfolds. Here,

some theological niceties can really not be avoided, particularly with regard to the problem of the “where” or the space in which the *Logic* unfolds: any such homogeneous space will immediately, no matter how interesting the local content, force us back into the bad Hegel of “Absolute Spirit” as omniscient narrator. Jameson’s solution here is, if I am not mistaken, very much in line with his earlier reading of the *Phenomenology*: the space of the *Logic* is heterogeneous from one moment to the next. That is, the movement from one contradiction to another in the text is not so much to be thought of as a movement higher in some absolute space (though Jameson cannot expunge the vertical metaphor altogether), but rather wider with reference to the moment that preceded it. The real innovation here, however, and the meat of the chapter, is to identify *Verstand* with reification, and so to turn the venerable (that is, tedious) question of “Marx’s Hegelianism” on its head: the *Logic*, even more than the Master-Slave dialectic, turns out to give us a clue to “Hegel’s Marxism” (100).

This brings us to “Hegel’s Contemporary Critics,” and the first thing to be said about those critics of Hegel that are worth talking about here — Derrida, Deleuze, Blanchot, and (barely) Foucault — is that they are all dead (though some of them continue to publish), making one wonder whether we are talking about contemporary anti-Hegelians or rather an anti-Hegelian moment whose time has come and gone. To be sure, North American doxa still clings to the insights and arguments of this largely French moment (but the former has for Jameson always been a doxa of “camp-followers,” the worst insult in a deceptively mild lexicon where even “extraordinary” can be intended merely literally), and (this) dialectic will always have its enemies on the Right; just as surely there is and always will be plenty of simply undialectical thinking going on at various levels of real and imagined sophistication (though one of Jameson’s more arresting theses is that the dialectic is a mode of thinking native to Utopia itself, and that the historical moments of its elaboration have been windows onto it). But I have the sense that “our” wholesale critiques of Hegel (critiques directed from a perceptive and intelligent Left) have had their day. The post-Deleuzian neo-Spinozists are perhaps an exception (even if the best of them are “dialectical without knowing it”), but we won’t see an engagement with them until much later in the book. This chapter, then, is as much a settling of accounts — a *What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Critique of Hegel* — as it is a set of arguments. One is treated in this staging to a series of defenses of the dialectic against some of its most worthy opponents, while later engagements with some of the same thinkers will assume a more dialectical form.

It is hard to imagine a mode of summary that would do here: suffice it to say that in these brief encounters (with *Glas*, *Différence et répétition*, and,

less obviously, Foucault's 1966 essay "La Pensée du dehors"), Hegel will generally turn out to have been either summarized where we thought he was being critiqued, foundational to the critique itself, or waiting patiently where we thought something new was being said. But while these engagements take the form of a series of arguments, sometimes clearly exasperated ones, a later chapter on Derrida, which responds to *Specters of Marx*, is both more generous and less direct; indeed much of it is given over to explication and to chasing down the resonances that situate spectrality as central to the Derridean corpus. The strategy there will be twofold: on one hand not to fall into the trap Derrida has laid by attempting to disperse too soon the ghosts of arguments that flit through the text (though brushing away a few misapprehensions cannot be resisted); and on the other to include Derrida's critique within Marxism: spectrality and its cognates are what Utopia looks like when the attempt is made to think it in an historical moment when Utopia itself is unthinkable. (On this account, Derrida becomes a symptom of a situation that affects all Left thinking today in one way or another, non-Marxist and Marxist alike). The full Deleuze chapter, meanwhile, hews more closely to the case made here: that there is an irresolvable tension or antinomy between the monism of desire, avowed as fundamental in Deleuze, and the various dualisms that proliferate in Deleuze's work — but which are also essential, though in a more subterranean way, to the functioning of the Deleuzian machine. Once such an antinomy has been produced, it becomes, as we have seen, ripe for the dialectical picking.

We turn, then, to Part III (the long initial chapter having received a Part of its own), and to familiar material. Chapters 4 and 5 (the commentaries on Derrida and Deleuze mentioned above) appeared in *New Left Review* and *South Atlantic Quarterly*. Chapters 7 and 8 reprint introductions to Volumes 1 and 2 of Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, and are not, to me at least, as interesting as the rest of this section. Chapter 6, which appeared in the first issue of *Rethinking Marxism*, is Jameson's striking solution to the "intersectionality" problem — a problem which is still with us despite having a name that declares itself solved in advance. This chapter is other things as well — a defense of Totality (the concept, not the thing) as well as a reappraisal of Lukács's legacy for aesthetic thought — but, most importantly, it issues a challenge to complete Lukács rather than to repudiate him: that is, not to assail the (narrow-minded, old-fashioned, "workerist") privileging of class standpoint as epistemological fulcrum, but rather to repeat it with race, gender, sexuality, subalternity, or indeed anything else: in other words, to produce the insights to which this or that standpoint provides privileged access. Jameson singles out feminist science studies as the principal example, and Fanon stands in, one presumes, for a whole range of insights which

continue up to the present day (one thinks, for example, of the very different projects of Roberto Schwarz and Paulin Hountondji); the challenge has also been explicitly taken up for queer theory by, among others, Kevin Floyd in a book reviewed in this issue. One might open up possibilities beyond the usual "intersectional" suspects by considering that Pierre Bourdieu's defense of the specificity of intellectual production — established as it was via the particular location of intellectuals in social space ("the dominated fraction of the dominant class") as well as the specific conditions of production that distinguish academic from journalistic investigation (the centrality of a more or less self-regulated "restricted field") — might be recast as an answer to such a call. What distinguishes Jameson's enlarged Lukácsian imperative from the complacent injunction to believe what you believe because it's your belief is precisely the "aspiration to Totality" (Lukács, of course): that is, the posited identity of the ultimate object of all these different analyses or, in an older parlance, a commitment to truth. It is worth noting that at the time of this essay (1988), Jameson was willing to concede that "one does not argue with the *Zeitgeist*" (210), by which he meant that one might make an argument against this or that position against Totality, but that the aversion to Totality itself can only be considered historically, approached as a symptom. My sense is that, more than two decades later, something has changed in that one *can* argue with that *Zeitgeist*, which is to say that it is no longer quite our *Zeitgeist*, that the aversion to Totality is no longer as hegemonic for the intellectual Left as it once was. This reversal would, in turn, have to be approached as a symptom, a project which Jameson does not undertake here — though it would be entirely plausible to relate it to the closure of the world market, which has entered the *Zeitgeist* in the allegorical figure of the globe as an ecological or economic totality.

The next section, "Entries" from some possible dictionary of dialectical thinking, is problematic, though it, too, contains some essential reading. Jameson is not a pedagogue in quite this way, and there is something jarring about seeing dialectical ideas laid out in nondialectical form. (What would Hegel's *Logic* have to say if it really looked like a conventional encyclopedia?) The notes are all there, but the breathing is wrong. Plenty has been said about Jameson's "style," and someone has no doubt noted that his arguments tend to proceed through a series of temporal adverbs: "now," "then," "meanwhile," "suddenly," "immediately," "slowly," "at this point," "initially," "for the moment," "finally." The indispensability of these adverbs is part of the rhetoric of the dialectic, and part also of what makes Jameson so difficult to understand for those who have no sympathy for it: the sentence under consideration is true from the perspective, as it were, of the sentence itself; its content is liable to be overturned in the next one. All this temporal

architecture tends to disappear in this middle section, the major exceptions being the two “entries” on Lenin and Rousseau. The argument about Rousseau is going to show a surprising family resemblance to the one about Deleuze (“dialectical without knowing it”), and the one about Lenin is indispensable reading, both for its clarification of what “the economic” means within Marxism and for the counterintuitive conclusion about what a Left politics concretely entails today. I quote the latter, a truly dialectical proposition, out of context here in the hopes that readers will be provoked to read the essay in its entirety: “We must support social democracy because its inevitable failure constitutes the basic lesson, the fundamental pedagogy, of a genuine Left” (299).

This brings us squarely into the matter of Part V, “Politics.” Here, also, much of the material has been published before. Two of these essays will be familiar: “Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,” which is already a standard reference point, and “Globalization as Political Strategy.”² A relatively unfamiliar essay will probably be the first one in this section, on “Actually Existing Marxism,” an updated version of an article first published in 1993, at the height of American triumphalism over the “death of Communism.” The thesis is one I believe we have seen elsewhere, but fully elaborated here, namely that since “Marxism is the science of capitalism,” Marxism can scarcely be expected to disappear until capitalism does; or, if it did, that it would have to be reinvented. Jameson divides the question into several parts, essentially: What is Marxism today, and what is it not? What is socialism today, and what is it not? What is revolution today, and what is it not? What was communism, and what was it not? And, what is capitalism today, and what does Marxism present as a response? To followers of Jameson’s work there will not be many surprises, though there are enough new epicycles to contemplate with interest; but rarely is Jameson, clear-eyed as always, so forthright and, though the language is dispassionate, so stirring in his conviction about the positions his work both presumes and entails.

The remaining chapter in this section is new: “Utopia as Replication.” It is a brief essay but one with deep roots, revisiting Jameson’s contribution to the concept of Utopia. Jameson illustrates his “method” — “strategy” or even “technique” is closer to the right word — via the two utopias of Wal-Mart and, more scandalous yet, the multitude. The idea is to find a perspective, or produce one, from which an object can be narrativized into an allegory of a transformed world. There are cases when this perspective is given to us with the object itself (a painting by Van Gogh); we have only to look over the shoulder of the allegorizer. With other cases this perspective is only arrived through our own allegorical effort. In the case of Wal-Mart, it is largely a matter of highlighting its unique place in the economy: to simplify

drastically, the fact that its enormous size and power in relationship to its industrial suppliers can condense complex and, in the long view, untenable relationships between sectors into a single figure. With the multitude, it is (on this account) Paolo Virno who is doing the allegorizing; we are looking on as he changes the valences of the traditional conservative critiques of modernity and turns them into harbingers of the future.

One remembers that Utopianism used to be an insult on the Left, referring to radical postures with no practical political program (essentially, no Party in the abstract sense of a mediatory collective) behind them. Jameson’s good Utopianism perfectly “replicates” the old, bad Utopianism; what is different is a political situation that now no longer seems to offer a practical political program of any kind, such that, on the Left, Utopianism has no other. Its only other is on the Right, in the insistence that any radical alternative is either impossible on its face or destined for totalitarianism. In this situation, the preservation of a Utopian vision is, however minimal, the precondition for any future politics: “Such a revival of futurity and of the positing of alternate futures is not itself a political program nor even a political practice: but it is hard to see how any durable or effective political action could come into being without it” (434). The minimal precondition laid out in this form may be misleading, however. What Jameson does not say here, but which is implicit everywhere else, is that Marxism is not Utopian in only this sense, but in another one which already goes beyond it to find a mediating link (Party being only one possible mediation) between the Utopian and the actual. *Hic rhodus, hic salta*: Aesop’s punch line meant different things to Hegel and Marx, but they both understood it to embody something fundamental. We might translate it into our own historical moment as: no matter how long the march, it must start here. The insistence on the national situation that permeates all of Jameson’s work derives from this imperative, because the nation is, for better and for worse, the only form of political collectivity that is actual today; similarly with the injunction to “support social democracy because it will fail,” a Left politics which is far from ideal but which offers, for precisely that reason, the benefit of intervening in the actual. Jameson’s are not the only possible ways to answer this imperative, and not all of them will be compatible (while, on the contrary and much to the point, all Utopian allegories will be: Jameson will endorse the multitude precisely as far as it is an allegorical “reading” of contemporary society, in other words science fiction; beyond that, he falls silent [see 433]). But any framework that leaves out this mediation or, aware of the difficulty, reserves a place for Elijah, is, to revive a cliché, insufficiently dialectical.

There’s a certain logic in the placement of the final chapter, but I don’t see any good reason to postpone the reading of it until after the 350 pages of

the three middle sections, which have a unity that is no more than thematic and can be read in any order; it would be best not to arrive exhausted at this demanding Part VI. I will not be able to do justice to it here, but it seems to me that this chapter (really a short book in itself) strikes out for radically new territory. The first chapters of *Valences* are dedicated in the main to a certain explication of the dialectic and a demonstration of its persistence; this requires taking account of all kinds of new phenomena and situations, but does not itself reach beyond the dialectic as Jameson finds it. The mode in this final chapter is still commentary (the first part is given over largely to a meditation on Paul Ricoeur's *Temps et récit*), but the point is now not to wear down the points of friction between Ricoeur's account of time and a dialectical one, but rather to produce something new from the encounter: a nonvulgar account of time. Opening this chapter with Derrida's "it is always too late to talk about time," Jameson knows that any classical approach to this project will be doomed at the outset: a satisfactory concept of time is not going to emerge. On the other hand, time itself will be made to emerge as an effect of something else. (Though it is not invoked here, something similar happens in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where time does not arise as a problem precisely because it emerges as the solution to another problem.)

What this "something else" might be is prefigured in Jameson's retranslation of Aristotle's definition of time in the *Physics*. Heidegger had, in a typical move, translated it in such a way as to prioritize a phenomenal horizon. In Jameson's translation, Aristotle's definition is flattened into a mere juxtaposition of temporalities: "time is the number of motion in respect of 'before' and 'after.'" This is, obviously, no definition at all, but a list of things required to make time appear: movement (in what we are to understand is a particularly Greek sense), number, and before and after. The discussion here of Aristotle's *Physics* is no more than a prolegomenon, and yet it gives a sense of what is to come, for the project here will be to speak through (and to some extent against) Ricoeur in order to suggest that time is what emerges in the gaps and frictions between different processes, sequences, or temporalities. (These latter terms already presuppose a concept of time: is always too late to talk about time). Such temporal incommensurability can be as familiar as the everyday disjunction between "subjective" and "objective" time, or as elaborate as Heidegger's temporal categories (Jameson counts nine), and several other sets of juxtapositions are mentioned in passing. A privileged example, which foreshadows the concerns of the second part of this chapter, will be the three temporalities that govern Braudelian historiography.

This only gets Jameson half as far as he wants to go: history does not automatically appear alongside time. What is history, and how does one

make it appear? As with the question of time, the question is one of totalization: the assembly of multiple and in themselves disparate temporalities — in Braudel's version, that of the earth, of institutions, of individual actions — into a followable narrative. The processes themselves are of course multiple and shifting, as it is still a critical commonplace to insist. But to do justice to these processes in their radical particularity is not enough to make history appear; rather, the conflict between temporalities has to be narrativized, and this requires a process of totalization to put them into determinate relations with each other. But now this narrative totalization takes place at a scale where the very idea of narrative would seem to be illegitimate — that is, at a scale where to apply the anthropomorphic categories that seem to emerge spontaneously in the discussion of fictional narrative would be "humanist" in the worst sense. This is, indeed, where Jameson parts company most decisively with Ricoeur. The latter collapses history into narrative by privileging the scale of human action. Jameson, however, is concerned to deanthropomorphize the narrative categories themselves (here, Ricoeur's Aristotelian ones: reversal, recognition, pathos), which must now be interrogated and expanded to the point that their fictional application becomes merely a special case.

The illustrations that accompany these conceptual enlargements are fascinating in themselves, but I will pass them over to emphasize the key category of pathos, which is an even more complex matter than the discussions of peripeteia and anagnorisis that precede it. Essentially, here, pathos is coming-to-appearance of plot itself, the "tableau" in which a tragic plot culminates; in an historical register, it is, for example, the Event (but this is only one of several modes) in which history is made to appear. (This may be stretch, but Aristotle is no longer at stake here.) It is, then, a kind of reification of history, a way in which multiple trajectories intersect to produce something that can be assembled into a single narrative. Simplifying a great deal and leaving out at least one fundamental complication, it appears that two modes of such totalization are essential here: history as system and history as event. The first of these is the unification of diverse actors and motives, some of them deeply antagonistic and contradictory, into a massive homeostasis that results at most in a creeping expansion or hardening. The second is also a unification of diverse series, contingencies, and accidents, but here in the mode of will and action; at the limit, of revolution. (In fact, both are separations as well as unifications: the homeostatic system is an array of forces in tension, and the revolutionary event is their precipitation into antagonism. Thus, System assembles separation under unification, and Event precipitates unification under separation.) But it is not enough to produce either one of these totalizations alone. Both procedures are neces-

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sary: “The experience of History is impossible without this dual perspective of system and event. Each without the other falls short of History and into another category altogether: the isolated sense of unity becoming philosophy and metaphysics, the experience of merely empirical events becoming at best existential narrative and at worst a kind of inert or positivistic knowledge” (603).

The grounding of historical thought undertaken in this final section is not just a defense, an explication, a deployment, or an elaboration of the dialectic; it is a profound contribution to dialectical thought. It is curious that neither Hegel nor Marx questions the being of History in this way. But then Hegel and Marx lived in historical times and did not face the task the Jameson has set himself: to make history appear.

Notes

¹ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1971) 147.

² The acknowledgments page gets the title and publication information wrong for this essay, which appeared in *New Left Review* 4 (2000): 49-68. As is hardly uncommon, the index and copyediting could have been a lot better.

A New Direction for Marxism

Jen Hedler Hammond

The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism, by Kevin Floyd.
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0816643962

Two theorists lie at the heart of Kevin Floyd's powerful contribution to the debate of the future of Marxism: Judith Butler and Fredric Jameson. Floyd's project is to put these two in conversation and with them, to include Michel Foucault, Georg Lukács, Herbert Marcuse, Eve Sedgwick, Michael Warner, David Wojnarowicz, as well as reification totality, gender, and sexuality. The project of *The Reification of Desire* is, as Floyd writes, to track the "divergence and convergence" of queer and Marxist theory; what Floyd accomplishes is a lot more complex (9).

At certain moments in the book, one theoretical position is privileged over the other. For example, in his historical reading of masculinity, the rise of Taylorism and consumer culture is used to help explain how new notions of male sexuality, desire, and gender became entrenched within American culture. However, in critiques of totality and reification, queer theory reveals the ways that these terms have stagnated over time and can be revitalized. More than simply showing the reader how useful both queer theory and Marxism are, and how much more useful they are when brought together, Floyd sheds new light on some of the key terms and orthodox arguments of both.

The divergences between queer and Marxist theory are well known, so Floyd starts with where they agree. A shared trait of Marxist and queer theory is totality thinking. In Marxism, this comes as a relentless critique of capitalism's particularizing logic; in queer theory, it comes as an insistence

on the centrality of sexuality to all parts of life. While queer theory has often (and rightly) objected that Marxism's focus on the conditions of production, consumption, and accumulation ignores the centrality of sex to human history, Floyd convincingly shows that the focus of much of queer theory's work is on the impact that heteronormativity has had on those aspects of life, thought, and politics that seem at best tangentially related to sexuality. Both share a desire to understand the social as a whole, rather than as strictly divided between public and private or normal and abnormal. In *The Reification of Desire*, however, totality begins to get slippery, as Floyd uses it also to refer to specific social formations that aim toward totalization; in the final chapter, which considers the fragmented status of queer social movements in the wake of neoliberal privatization, he considers the claims of some queer theorists towards "world-making," defined here as "historically conditioned totalities of social, sexual, epistemological, and critical practice" (210). His attention to the historical nature of these groups indicates a rethinking of totality as stable; it reveals a desire that pervades the text to keep all of the key terms in motion. This slipperiness is not a problem; it fact, it seems central to his project that terms like "totality" and "reification" remain in play. However, more elaboration on the term "totality" in social formations like the queer movement is needed.

Alongside totality must come reification, and it does for both Marxism and queer theory. This term occurs most forcefully in Floyd's historical account of masculinity from the late nineteenth century to the present day. Linking Lukács and Foucault, Floyd argues that the effects of the Taylorist factory on the male body were the same as the effects of psychoanalytic theory on gender and sexuality. In both cases, the process is one of reification. For the laborer, this means that labor time is so abstracted as to separate the labor from the product it makes, eventually displacing all knowledge of production into consumptive knowledge. For the psychoanalytic patient, sexuality is given a special place in the psyche and within the family unit (as opposed to within a social whole). Thus, desire – sexual desire, productive desire, and consumptive desire – become reified: objects abstracted from the site of their creation.

The developments on the shop floor and on the analyst's couch had an incredible impact on gender, an impact that has been documented by both queer and Marxist scholars. However, Floyd's combinatory reading adds a new dimension to this historical development. While masculinity has always been identified with the public world and labor (while femininity is associated with the private home and a different kind of labor entirely) the increasing abstraction of labor time – alongside sexuality's founding as a psychological event – meant that masculinity could no longer be performed

by a body alone. Instead, consumption replaced activity as the defining characteristic of masculinity. Floyd traces the rise of periodicals about leisure time for the male reader, showing that activities like hunting, fishing, and eventually working on cars would suffice as proper "masculine" activities once they were evacuated from labor. As Floyd elaborates in a later chapter, this consumer culture is the basis for the early formation of the queer movement. In this moment, the tension between Marxism (which must find the rise of consumerism and commodity fetishism as negative) and queer theory (which is founded, to some extent, on those networks made available through consumption and commodity fetishism) come out most strongly. In an orthodox queer or Marxist reading of this same period, much of this history would be lost.

This crystallizes in Floyd's reading of Hemingway, in which the author's hypermasculine characters attempt to reclaim the masculine, laboring body. Using an emblematic fishing scene from *The Sun Also Rises*, Floyd notes the way that, despite Jake Barnes's encounter with the natural during trout fishing, Hemingway's catalog-esque style renders the fish as so many mass-produced commodities meant for display. Floyd writes,

Though such escapes from the tedium of de-skilled labor into nature constitute supposed returns to more simple, presumably pre- or extracapitalist forms of work and life, famously sparse descriptions like this one ultimately reify nature, producing a landscape of pure immediacy, a landscape of what we might call, following Lukács, a 'second nature' that only purports to transcend the abstraction of labor capital enforces (106-107).

By tracing the norm of a skilled, masculine labor from the body into the ego and finally into a relationship with nature that has been abstracted and reified, Floyd shows the effect of capital production on traditional notions of masculinity and reveals the way that the totality of capital is, especially at this period in time, all-consuming: not even nature is safe from the process of abstraction and reification.

Having traced the shifts of the normative account of masculine behavior, Floyd moves into his reading of the queer movement of the 1960s and 1970s, one that depends on this abstracted space of masculinity. Floyd here uses Marcuse, in some part because of his centrality to the early queer movement, but also because of Marcuse's new use of reification in *Eros and Civilization*. Here, Marcuse understands the effects of capitalism to be analogous to repression – another reason that Marcuse figures so heavily in a book that attempts to find the convergences and divergences of Lukács and Foucault,

among others – and reification as the way out of that repression. Here, Marcuse tracks the opposition between a body objectified for labor (positive under capitalism) and a body objectified for pleasure (bad under capitalism). Embracing this latter, erotic objectification will undo the negative objectification of labor.

Eros, figured in primarily homoerotic terms in Marcuse's early work, is the opposite of the "performance principle" that dominates capitalist life. Floyd writes, "identifying the reality principles with 'productiveness', and the pleasure principle with 'receptiveness', Marcuse asserts that Orpheus and Narcissus [the mythic figures that are central for Marcuse] represent a passive, receptive relation to the natural world" (138). Both Narcissus and Orpheus reject a heteronormative sexuality: the first withdraws from the world into a state of self-contemplation and the latter, despite the tragic heterosexual love story that is part of his mythos, is identified by Marcuse with nature and his "love for 'young boys'" (138). It is clear how these figures would become central in the queer movement's early days. Rather than imagining homosexual subjects as equivalent to heterosexual subjects, much of the early queer movement attempted to replace a heteronormative state with an (imagined) homonormative state. Just as Marcuse replaced the traditional mythic figures at the heart of philosophy – Prometheus, Oedipus, and so on – the queer movement imagined that through objectifying sexual practices, they might replace heteronormativity in the world.

Floyd here deploys his second reading of fiction with a chapter devoted to 1969's *Midnight Cowboy*. Floyd sets aside the most common readings of the text, which focus on how homosexuality is portrayed between Joe Buck and his clients or between Buck and Ratso Rizzo, to argue that the film is an allegory for the historical shift from Fordist capitalism to neoliberalism. The figure of the cowboy – which Joe Buck believes will entice hundreds of rich city women to pay to have sex with him – has, by the time he reaches New York in the late sixties, been claimed as sex symbol by the queer community. Floyd traces the queer appropriation of traditionally masculine figures, epitomized by the Village People, to "physique" magazines that became popular in the 1950s. These magazines, which feature young men wearing just enough clothing to identify them with masculine labor (the sailor, the construction worker, and, of course, the cowboy), were distributed through the mail, providing outlets for otherwise closeted or conservative gay men and providing income for the photographers, models, and publishers. In this way, the commodity as fetish (perhaps the most literal example of this in Marxist writing) serves a liberatory function at the same time as it shows the increasing reach of capitalism. While these magazines provided the groundwork for an underground gay community that would explode in 1969, they

also showed the way that capitalism, at least during Taylorism, was able to commodify any market, no matter how far outside the mainstream it was. The presence of Joe Buck, as authentic a cowboy as any in New York, shows the similarity, and ultimate tension, between the mainstream and queer versions of masculinity.

This almost unnoticeable difference between the mainstream, heteronormative cowboy and the underground, queer cowboy reveals, for Floyd, the way that either way you cut it, the cowboy is now a commodity. By placing this commodity in the confusing socioeconomic climate of New York in the late sixties, where enticements to spend money are contrasted with Buck's poverty, Floyd argues that the film stages a conflict between Fordist values of production (the American cowboy) and the global space of capital that began overcoming the United States' supremacy during the sixties. Thus, Buck's eventual dustbinning of the outfit is allegorically understood as the end of not only an era of uncomplicated masculinity but also an era of increasing productivity to match the country's ever-expanding consumption.

Here, we enter into what is for me Floyd's most insightful and thought-provoking chapter. He begins by contrasting the Fordist strategy of ensuring social stability to shore up means of production and areas for consumption with the neoliberal strategy that emphasizes widespread social instability. While Fordism was able to bring the world together through consumerism, neoliberalism separates and privatizes consumer groups, effectively preventing the creation of any meaningful social formation. The current political issues facing the queer community, including, but certainly not limited to, the fight for marriage equality and the inclusion in the military, are arguments about equality. In contrast to the radical queer movements of the 1970s, which anticipated a queer planet to overtake the heterosexual one, the contemporary queer movement is concerned with making itself equal, or equivalent, to the straight community. As a result, sexuality, as a marker of difference between queer and straight, has gone back into hiding. This is no more apparent than in New York, the site of both Stonewall and *Midnight Cowboy*, where Giuliani's aggressive cleanup of the city has sanitized what were once openly gay neighborhoods. By closing sex shops, pornographic bookstores, bars, and clubs, while simultaneously pricing out all but the wealthiest gays from traditionally gay neighborhoods, the boisterous and open queer culture of New York has all but disappeared. This prevents any kind of social formation from getting started, as the public space has been replaced with private space. Thus, Christopher Street in New York is home to the wealthy, white queer community, while poorer queers, many of whom are people of color, are separated into other neighborhoods. This segregation

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stalls the formation of a unified movement. While this reading – as the rest of the book does – focuses on the queer community, the impact on other potential movements, be they feminist, race-based, class-based, or otherwise, is unmistakable. As our world is privatized, there is no more public space in which to enact change.

Floyd's *The Reification of Desire* is a valuable addition to the catalog of books that try to make sense of the place of Marxism in neoliberal capitalism. Its analyses of both modes of thought, as well as those terms central to their elaboration, offer new perspectives on terms that most of us take for granted. Women are largely absent in this text, except when their own gendered history is contrasted with that of masculinity. They are entirely absent from Floyd's reading of the AIDS epidemic, which is the only misstep in a work that is otherwise perfectly choreographed. While this is certainly a criticism of the text, and one that could be applied equally to most mainstream queer and Marxist theory, what Floyd offers here is an invitation to create a companion that understands the evolution of the "feminine" in the past one hundred and fifty-odd years of social and economic history. It is a history worth telling, and one that can only add to the work Floyd has here begun.

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Critiques," *Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies* 24.1-2 (Spring-Summer 2002); and "Cold War American Culture as the Age of Three Worlds," *Minnesota Review* 55-57 (2002).

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Marxist. Two of his books have been translated into French as *L'Oeil et la main* (1985) and *Les Idoles de la tribu* (1989), and his essays have appeared in fourteen languages. He has been a visiting professor at Columbia, Oxford, Chicago, Georgetown, Yale and other universities. He is the recipient of the Soros Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award (2003) and the Press Freedom Award (2005). He lives in Budapest.