

Mediations

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Editors' note

One of the key questions in contemporary cultural practice is how to represent the present. Can contemporary art still figure "what is" in the assemblage of disparate and combined fragments that constitutes our globalized space? And more crucially, can contemporary art still present a critique of "what is"? The essays collected in the dossier "Time and the Labor of the Negative" are five attempts at interpreting art works and activities that rise up to this challenge. Initially they were papers presented at the 2012 Institute on Culture and Society that took place at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. They were then, with the exception of Sasha X's contribution, rewritten and revised. Fredric Jameson, whose thoughts on the present are fundamental for all the essays, has kindly written an afterword. It is expected that the "Time and the Labor of the Negative" will prove to be a productive contribution to the struggles on the meaning of the here and now.

"Time and the Labor of the Negative" is followed by Maria Elisa Cevasco's "The São Paulo Fraction: The Lineaments of a Cultural Formation," which traces the origins, interrelations, and contemporary significance of an intellectual circle (several of whom have been published in these pages: see especially *Mediations* 23.1, Fall 2007: *Dossier: Brazil*) that, despite not being housed in any one formal institution, is nonetheless one of the most influential Left intellectual institutions both in Brazil and internationally. Preceding this issue's book review section are two recent winners of the Michael Sprinker Graduate Writing Competition. Julie Fiorelli's "Imagination Run Riot: Apocalyptic Race-War Novels of the Late 1960s" is the winner from 2012; Carolyn Ellerding's "Mass Online Education: Dialectic of Enlightenment 2.0" is the winner from 2013. The sixteenth annual Sprinker Prize competition is currently accepting submissions. The prize, established to remember and further Michael Sprinker's commitment to Marxist intellectual work and to graduate teaching and students, recognizes an essay or dissertation chapter that engages with Marxist theory, scholarship, pedagogy, and/or activism. Submissions will be judged by a committee of the Marxist Literary Group. The winner receives a prize of \$500 and automatic entry of the essay into the peer review process for *Mediations*. Any and all current graduate students are eligible, although submissions must be in English. Membership in the MLG is recommended but not required. Essays or chapters must be unpublished but finished work, and must be an absolute maximum of 8000 words, including notes

and/or works cited. Please include name, mailing address, phone number, and email address on a separate cover sheet. The writer's name should not appear on the essay itself. The deadline for submissions is Monday, May 18, 2015, and inquiries as well as submissions should be sent to Kevin Floyd at kfloyd@kent.edu.

The winner is announced at the MLG's annual Institute on Culture and Society, to be held this year at Georgetown University, June 24-28, 2015. This year's theme — "Marx's *Capital*: The Basement Tapes" — will focus on the posthumous volumes of Marx's *Capital*. In a departure from recent practice, this year's ICS will center on an intensive series of reading groups on Volumes II and III of *Capital* and on *Theories of Surplus Value*. Accepted papers may take the form of considered responses to some aspect of *Capital*, to be circulated in advance of the Institute but intended as preparation for discussion in the reading groups rather than as material for direct discussion. Alternatively, papers may take the more traditional form of round-table presentations of 5-8 minutes, on any topic that bears substantially on issues relevant to Marxist theory and practice, from Heraclitus and the dialectic to race and capital accumulation. Both kinds of papers will be listed on the program by presenter's name and presentation title. Additionally, the Institute welcomes the participation of non-presenters. In addition to roundtable proposals and paper proposals of both kinds, we invite proposals to lead reading sessions discussing particular sections of the posthumous volumes of *Capital*, or questions, issues, problems, or connections raised by them. The aim of this Institute is not only to study these volumes in depth, but to move them out of the exclusive province of specialists and to open them up to a diversity of approaches, interpretations, valences, and relevancies. In recent years articulations with feminism and queer theory have become a particular strength of the ICS, and engagements with research on race, postcolonial history, and other vectors of inequality are warmly encouraged. Please send reading group session proposals (title, section or sections to be discussed, discussion facilitator or facilitators, and a very brief justification), paper proposals of either kind (title and 250-word abstract), roundtable proposals (title, presenters' paper proposals, and a very brief justification), or intention to participate without presenting to MLGICS2015@gmail.com by February 1, 2015.

The Road Is Mapped: Cormac McCarthy's Modernist Irony

Vincent Adiutori

To reduce Fredric Jameson's *Valences of the Dialectic* to a motto may appear unfair, but it would not be the first time Jameson's characteristic complexity was subject to crystallizing clarity. Just as the imperative "always historicize" emerges as Jameson's own branding campaign in the "Preface" to *The Political Unconscious* (1981), the 2009 *Valences* urges its audience to "make History appear." Both imperatives serve as slogans for Jameson's methodology that centers around an allegorical impulse in which anything might be read as something else — insofar as the latter of these is in service of some totalizing dialectical method of reading. Jameson's ultimate desire for History to subsume Time is the allegorization of his desire for the collective to subsume the individual. I want to pause, however, over this directive to "make History appear" and fix my attention on how to make Time appear. Given Paul Ricoeur's argument that "there is no pure phenomenology of time" and its central importance for Jameson's larger historical directive, it is important to see how both Time and History appear within other relationships more resistant to, if not altogether apart from, the dialectical process Jameson exemplifies.¹

I will focus on how one particular contemporary novel, Cormac McCarthy's 2006 *The Road*, articulates what making both Time and History appear looks like in an aesthetic, and not political, form. Indeed, to remain at the level of time rather than history, and aesthetics rather than politics, is to resist allegorical reading more generally. What concerns me is how contemporary aesthetic production can make time, over and against history, appear. Jameson ultimately cares about the articulation of the historical and collective — the moment of the "insertion of the subject into narrative" — and the sublation of individual temporality.² Ricoeur's three-volume *Time and Narrative* illuminates the importance of history against time even if, as Jameson contends, Ricoeur ultimately "refus[es] to theorize any agency on the level of the collective."³ History is the process of objectifying "human or existential experience." According to Jameson's account, Ricoeur's "narrative humanism" prevents him from properly configuring a sense of collective historical narrative, instead "discover[ing]

anthropomorphic characters behind a system that may transcend them.”⁴ If this is Ricoeur’s failure, it is McCarthy’s success. McCarthy’s novel presents “distinct forms of time” under the guise of one form of time represented by two characters’ senses of time and history given their particular existential conditions. Namely, these conditions are precisely those that allow both Time and History to appear at once, which is to say at the moment of their simultaneous conclusion. Such is the benefit of post-apocalypse as narrative device for McCarthy. In part, it allows McCarthy to register the “long countdown towards Utopia or extinction” by offering glimpses of both at the moment in which “the conflation of Good Luck and Bad Luck” happens and arrests their dialectical opposition.⁵ The possibility of thinking “Good and Evil simultaneously” is not the trademark of post-apocalypse per se, but it is the mark of McCarthy’s novel that marks its difference from other likewise imaginings.⁶

At a time when making History appear seems the political task par excellence, to make Time appear—as I argue *The Road* does—is the negative task of aesthetic production read collectively. The novel presents an opportunity to think how the temporal orientation “now,” contrary to what Jameson maintains, can be registered while not remaining “strictly attached to individual (private or subjective) experience.”⁷ To allegorize the man is to desire a winner; to ironize him, on the other hand, is to see how winners lose and losers win.

Despite the social entailments of narrative, it begins with individual experience. For both Ricoeur and Jameson, narrative networks depend upon a time between “existential” and “objective” times. Ricoeur’s “mediatory ‘instruments’” — “the calendar; the succession of generations; and the archives or traces” — provide the framework for how we get glimpses of history (objective time) in everyday individual (subjective time) experiences of temporality. History does not saturate the social; rather it comes in and out of temporality but always depends upon “the possibility of a public space as opposed to a private one, a space in which the intersection of historical and existential temporalities can happen as an event.”⁸ Behind Jameson’s claim that these instruments “presuppose” public space is the stronger claim that these instruments help to constitute such public or social spaces. What is lost if these markers of “universal time” are absent from “lived time” — if the collective instruments for marking time are alienated from the individual’s experience of time? Does History disappear? *The Road* both explicitly and implicitly negates the social functions of these “instruments”; in so doing, how it figures the effects of such absences shows how the novel produces Time without reproducing History.

Contrary to making it appear, history’s *disappearance* arguably serves a better oppositional function in the contemporary period. Allegory “practice[s] interpretive violence upon human life and history...by reading history without density.”⁹ Given this characterization of allegory’s relationship to history, making history disappear more forcefully reveals the realities and possibilities involved in configuring time. Therefore, the proper movement for this critical work is from a collective to the individual rather

than vice versa. On one hand, making time appear works through techniques of misrecognition whereby identifications with collective configurations—or those “mediatory instruments” — of the world break down. On the other hand, making history appear relies on the techniques of recognition that ground both Ricoeur’s mimetic network and Jameson’s methodology of allegorical reading. If we pay proper attention to a negative reading of History then we begin with the individual and sustain intense focus there. My reasons for suggesting so are at least twofold. The first is in the proposal to read the individual as the negative image of the collective. As much as this misrecognized individuality seems to oppose a Marxist approach to reading, it remains a dialectical project that differs from those with political ends in its insistence on the disarticulation of subjective and objective time. The second reason is to argue against the possibility of reading *The Road* as endorsing a kind of “monumental history” that drives the man’s insistence on “carrying the fire.” In so doing, we can refuse at least one strand of allegorical reading that works by invoking a past in order to envision a future beyond the present.¹⁰ For example, Walter Benjamin’s theory of allegory draws a connection between allegory and mourning in the way he thinks about the fragmentariness of allegory and how ruination instantiates nostalgic temporal configurations that resemble those of Nietzsche’s monumental history.¹¹ What is more, I want to exploit the temporal difference between two worlds: historical experience on one hand and aesthetic experience on the other, historical production versus aesthetic production. In contrast to many literary critics, my position is one in which maintaining this demarcation is essential to short-circuiting allegoresis and the mimetic networks in which both Ricoeur and Jameson are invested. In just one recent paradigmatic example, Nancy Fraser’s article in *New Left Review* expresses her interest in the movement from fiction to practice.¹² I, on the other hand, am not interested in bridging this temporal gap between, to put it another way, aesthetic and historical practice. In fact, this gap preserves aesthetic production from becoming a space in which authors enact political fantasies and critics configure political narratives.

Jameson is interested in mediating the temporal and spatial aporias left between individuals and collectives, time and history, bodies and spaces, and aesthetics and politics. In short, these are the desires of cognitive mapping. According to Bill Brown’s 2005 essay on Jameson, allegory is intimately connected to configuring effective cognitive maps.¹³ Jameson becomes the “epic hero” of postmodernity in the attempt to allegorize his individual experience of the Bonaventure Hotel’s uncanny and “absolutely packed” space and render postmodernism legible by drawing most everything under its purview. Or, to put it in other tropological terms and a provisionally dialectical way, Jameson desires allegory because of his final antipathy toward irony, which is to say his final antipathy toward the time of individual experience and the disorientation postmodernism produces and his absolute desire for the totalizing clarity of those objects and experiences of allegory (e.g., cognitive mapping) achieves.

We would be remiss if upon reading the closing sections of *Valences* we did not remind ourselves of Jameson's debt to humanist materialist historiographers like Hayden White, Erich Auerbach, and Giambattista Vico. Jameson's 1976 review of White's *Metahistory* focuses intently on the potential dangers of relativizing history to the degree that all narrative becomes merely text and threatens to leave history in the lurch of individual interpretation rather than the testament to and promise of collective action.¹⁴ It is wrong, however, to confuse the ironic position with one of mere relativity simply because of the centrality of individuality. More appropriately, the ironic position is one that pushes back at the dialectic by indefinitely prolonging the moment of recognition the dialectical image necessitates.¹⁵ It is in the potential moments of recognition provided by dialectical images that we might understand, and therefore evaluate, the propensity to narrate eruptions in both time and space. In Brown's version of Jameson's allegorical moment in the Bonaventure Hotel we see how the body is overcome by bewilderment, but the faculties of "vision" remain. We need not think of the visual faculty literally; rather, we can think of it as the desire and ability to narrate after-the-fact of experience, to provide a means through which a necessary distance from experience is created and maintained. This is the form of the appearance of the process from immediacy to mediation. Jameson's allegory begins with subjective experience; but "allegory exists entirely within an ideal time" we might provisionally relate to "objective time" where the subjective is overcome by a collective sense of temporal intelligibility.¹⁶ Allegory demands mediation, by which I mean narrative. Indeed, Jameson's "leap of faith" here is a leap back to the experience from a certain point of intelligibility only possible once that experience is conceptualized, narrated, and finally enveloped by the historical imperative to totalize subjective time.¹⁷ Each of these processes become ways to think how experience as such, though fundamental to allegory, must be mediated by narrative and collective configurations of time and space if individuality is to function as a means of collectivity.

Irony, on the other hand, resists totalization because it precipitates a permanent stoppage rather than a momentary bewilderment to be overcome by mediation; irony need not return home. Hayden White saves himself from Jameson's critique by understanding his own ironic position, which emerges as a result of White's own recognitive moment. In his own words, White knows "the recognition of this Ironic perspective provides the grounds for a transcendence of it."¹⁸ Insofar as White recognizes his own ironic position he realizes its unsustainability; he has already begun to mediate irony and privilege history over time, narrative persistence over "permanent parabasis."

While not having the space here to give a thorough reading of de Man's writing on allegory and irony, some reference is necessary to make clear the force of my claims. De Man argues "any theory of irony is the undoing, the necessary undoing, of any theory of narrative, and it is ironic, as we say, that irony always comes up in relation

to theories of narrative, when irony is precisely what makes it impossible ever to achieve a theory of narrative that would be consistent.”¹⁹ While de Man’s suggestion that any theory of narrative will “always be undone by the ironic dimension which it will necessarily contain” seems to exaggerate the case, looking at the period between Jameson’s 1976 *Metahistory* review and the final sections of 2010’s *Valences* corroborates de Man’s assertion.²⁰ Add de Man’s description of irony to Hegel’s “infinite absolute negativity” as a condition of the Absolute and we might ask: What is at stake for Jameson in irony’s ultimate sublation? And we might answer it is Jameson’s reassertion of dialectical reading at moments in which time poses its greatest threat to history — where time remains in the ironic moment with no recourse to past or propensity toward future, a subjectivity eternally at a present moment of simultaneous “self-creation” and “self-destruction.”²¹ Irony is a temporal mode of self-consciousness, dislocated from “narrative intelligence,” that desires a subjective experience of phenomenological time unfulfilled by narrative configuration. Put analogously, irony is to time as allegory is to history.

In contrast to Jameson’s allegorical journey through narrative toward mutual intelligibility, we have the endlessly wandering characters in *The Road*. McCarthy is interested in the experience of fact rather than the fact of experience-turned-narrative. The novel imagines the contradiction of being both object and subject — giving the characters a kind of negative freedom otherwise impossible under the constraints of social forms and desires for mutual intelligibility. The experience of fact in such a world disrupts the functions of an allegorical text; which is to say the novel resists figuring a world other than what is given. For McCarthy, what matters “is not the logistics of our demise but the fact of it.”²² In place of logistics, we have the destination of individuals amidst the collapse of collectivity. The novel, in this factual sense, is closed, unable to speak otherwise as a result of how it figures, or more appropriately disfigures, time and knowledge in the world. It fails to function as an Adornian apocalyptic story in which the imagination inoculates. To be factual, in this sense, is a refusal to be allegorical.

What follows is a collection of examples from *The Road* that illustrate how the novel makes time appear. In so doing, at times it inevitably and paradoxically makes history appear as an effect of its disappearance. In order to do so, however, the novel shows ways of experiencing and knowing the world that rely not only on social and historical particulars but also on a metahistorical sense of the human capacity to make the world. McCarthy exhausts history and nature to highlight not history as collective project but the power of an individual’s claims on knowing and unknowing that world. Most evidently, the novel’s premise involves an all-too-perfect “axial event” in which history would have no other choice but to appear. Whatever indeterminate apocalyptic event has happened it leaves the remaining population “creedless shells of men,” nature “motionless and precise,” and space a “cauterized terrain.”²³ Rather than use this event negatively to judge history or positively to envision a collective

project, McCarthy uses it to produce the man's individual problem: how to locate a "lived time" in the now "universal time" after the event. This problem makes evident the differences in experiencing time after the failure of those mediating instruments that translate time into history.

Reading *The Road* from within the confines of the ironic moment highlights its anti-utopian impulse, not by its favoring dystopia but rather by representing the "long countdown towards Utopia or extinction." The novel occupies the ironic mode by both denying and affirming a collective project that is grounded in the extinction of collectivity itself. In a final ironic twist, the metahistorical conception of human action in the world the novel offers is figured by collectivity. Insofar as the novel figures collective action it does so through its negation — that is through its extinction. The father's mantra of "carrying the fire" echoes Vicoean collective human action and wisdom. For Vico, collective action results from the dialectic between nature and history and men projecting themselves as gods. Once this collectivity is established, it is maintained by differentiating the natural from the historical, the unmade from the made. In one sense, irony emerges in *The Road* when the two characters first encounter an individual other than each other. Indeed, it is the first and last real expression of collectivity from the father.

This was the first human being other than the boy that he'd spoken to in more than a year. My brother at last. The reptilian calculations in those cold and shifting eyes. The gray rotting teeth. Claggy with human flesh. Who has made of the world a lie every word.²⁴

This passage undermines any account that aims at reducing the novel to a conflict between good and evil. By positing both identity and difference at this moment of recognition, the novel affirms both judgments. Moreover, the encounter helps to configure the father's ironic position in which the collective human project is at once affirmed and exhausted or produced and consumed. The brotherhood between the father and the cannibal scavenger figures the exhaustion of the dialectic between production and consumption that characterizes social life. The objective world produced by collective human action becomes a lie. A representation of Marx's "civilized person in whom social forces are already dynamically present," the man is "cast by accident into the wilderness."²⁵ The brotherhood marks the exhausted circulation between production and consumption in which only consumption remains — literalized by the human flesh between the scavenger's teeth. The subject is the object in this world; their difference is their similarity. The event makes history appear when at once it denies a future collectivity while it affirms the universal conditions of post-event life for those who are the remaining parts of the human project.

The father's duty is at one time singular and collective; but it is only collective in the sense of being metaphysical and metahistorical. The father's use of the fire ironizes

the collective human project as his experiences negate its future possibilities; in this sense, *The Road* denies the providence of history — the dialectic of winners and losers — by occupying an ultimately ironic position toward future collectivity while also concerning an originary collectivity that defines human action in the world. To clarify, we can revisit briefly McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*'s figuration of fire:

The flames sawed in the wind and the embers paled and deepened and paled and deepened like the bloodbeat of some living thing eviscerate upon the ground before them and they watched the fire which does contain within it something of men themselves inasmuch as they are less without it and are divided from their origins and are exiles. *For each fire is all fires, the first fire and the last ever to be.*²⁶

If we empty the fire as it is used in *The Road* of any possible moralizing effect we better understand the collective human project it symbolizes. But the irony comes clear in the act of erasing a collective historical project in favor of a metahistorical conception of human world-making denied its origin in collectivity, and replaced by the father's singular project to withhold creeping social life. One way to express the problem asks if history can be represented only by an ahistorical concept. Or, that the father ironizes Vico's "eternal history" by using its empty form and erases collectivity through a radical, but not natural, individualism. *The Road* articulates Jameson's critique of Ricoeur in its enacting a "refusal to theorize any agency on the level of the collective" except by way of radical subjectivity.²⁷ The novel replaces the traditions of history with the father's "narrative intelligence" as it arrives at various ironic moments where time and history are both figured in subjective terms. The "old stories of courage and justice" the man tells the boy are replaced eventually by the guilt of "making things up because those things were not true either and the telling made him feel bad."²⁸ *The Road* objects to Jameson's suggestion that the ironic moment is one in which the "die has not yet been cast (and never will be)."²⁹ In fact, the convergence of time and history in their ceasing to be, as lived by the father, produces a split between the subject of experience and the subject of knowledge necessary for irony. This split produces time but closes space. The die has in fact been cast if we trust that the father has nothing to do after the event but contend with what necessitates his piety. It is everything he can do to make time appear when space has finally been closed. The ironic position appears as the sole position that warrants anything like freedom or action in the face of social collapse. The novel suggests that to have any chance of making history appear — once the die has been cast — it need be a result of producing a sense of history negatively by using the ironic tool of ahistorical historicism; that is, an individual turns time into history — ironically, not allegorically — in knowing the challenges collective experience and action face during an epoch of total exhaustion; not simply in knowing the challenges, however,

but in refusing to meet those challenges with more collectivity.

These claims articulate the novel's challenge to readings of history as narrative, providential, or, as Coetzee puts it in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, "the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe."³⁰ In a formulation with which I am entirely comfortable, we might say the father is best described as "anti-imperial," or "anti-evangelical," or "anti-allegorical" in that his existential experience of time is objectively subjective and prefigures or figures nothing other than his sense of piety in the desecrated world of collective history.³¹ Perhaps the strongest sense of irredeemability in McCarthy's novel comes in its refusal to restore human history through natural history. Nature would immediately appear impervious to humanity's designs when at the novel's end it is once to have "hummed of mystery."³² But the novel's final image negates this appearance by threatening the convergence of history and nature: We see both History and Nature as "a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again."³³ The novel refuses the making of history by making subjective time the only way to think objective history. Even the seasons and natural reproduction — those stalwarts of figuring temporality — have reached their permanent disfiguration. Rather than read the final passage as a simple restatement of Vico's *verum factum*, it further invokes Vico's eternal history but finally refuses to promise history the eternal narrative reserve in the natural world.

In concluding, however, it might not be entirely satisfying to end with the exhaustion of the dialectic between nature and history, despite such a reading having the virtue of disrupting the tendency to read allegorically.³⁴ *The Road* begins neither with crisis nor a social problem; but, more forcefully, it begins in literary history and the invention of the human figure. It begins and ends with the problems of temporality and history — how to live in time after history, how to read ironically after allegory. McCarthy's novel performs a thoroughgoing "world reduction" that animates the problems of living historically while it simultaneously lays bare the challenges of doing so with the most basic sense of subjectivity.³⁵ One way to read historical modes in the novel is to focus on character. To do so most thoroughly, the focus must be on the father and the boy rather than privileging either. Looking at the space between father and boy provides the strongest occasion to locate the novel's critical position toward the promises of history and social life.

Perhaps more than Vico, Nietzsche should direct the final reading of time in the novel. Because of his experience of the world prior to the event, the father finds himself between the proclamation "there is no past" and the material remains of the post-event world.³⁶ For Nietzsche, the critical way of reading history requires a human life to "shatter and dissolve something to enable him to live: this he achieves by dragging it to the bar of judgment, interrogating it meticulously and finally condemning it."³⁷ It is "life alone, that dark, driving, insatiably self-desiring power" that finally allows the necessary forgetting.³⁸ *The Road* offers nothing other than the man's desire for life, even as his wife and mother of the boy condemns his actions:

“We’re not survivors. We’re the walking dead in a horror film. [...] We used to talk about death. We don’t anymore. Why is that? [...] It’s because it’s here. There’s nothing left to talk about.”³⁹ We should notice, however, as the man uses the moment to measure the world’s time. The event provides the temporal scale necessary to justify the father’s persistence in the world — if not the world’s persistence. Insofar as this is true about the character, irony becomes the temporal mode appropriate to the novel. For de Man, “irony appears as an instantaneous process that takes place rapidly, suddenly, in one single moment...irony is instantaneous like an ‘explosion’ and the fall is sudden.”⁴⁰ The novel shows the “axial event” almost exclusively through its effects, intimating only a sense of it happening within the temporal space of a moment: “The clocks stopped at 1:17...He went into the bathroom and threw the lightswitch but the power was already gone.”⁴¹ The man’s “empirical” and “ironic” selves — the one who falls and the one who can laugh at himself falling — meet at the event’s temporal point only insofar as the event itself creates the conditions for this simultaneity and the time that promises their eternal separation. The event represents a moment in which the man’s subjectivity meets the world’s objectivity; the difference being, however, that the man recognizes himself as both self and world, subject and object, cause and effect. The collapse configures such recognitions as misrecognitions.

The past comes through in dreams as the father finds himself “walking in a flowering wood where birds flew before them and he and the child and the sky was aching blue” only to condemn the past “siren worlds” as those which keep him from present circumstances. We can read the man’s desire “if he lived long enough the world at last would all be lost” as possible conditions for the critical reading of history.⁴² The father’s ironic position is conditioned not by his refusal to make a decision but as a result of his decision to live now. His decision embraces “life alone, that dark, driving, insatiably self-desiring power.” At the crossroads of history and modernity — the man chooses the latter as “he cruelly treads all pieties under foot” save for that piety, the boy’s protection, caused by the destruction of all other social problems, including the family in either an ideological or biological sense.⁴³

The problems illustrated by *The Road* and de Man’s “Literary History and Literary Modernity” parallel one another. Before coming to the close readings in the second, the first half of de Man’s essay reads like a philosophical counterpart to McCarthy’s novel. De Man, reading Nietzsche, argues that the incompatibility between history and modernity gives rise to “moments of genuine humanity...[when]...all anteriority vanishes, annihilated by the power of an absolute forgetting.”⁴⁴ The father’s judgments on the past are neither an instantiation of merely biological life nor a desire to be a “creature of nature,” as Ricoeur explains, who “cannot be guilty.”⁴⁵ Instead, the father’s decisions and actions concern “the radical impulse that stands behind all genuine modernity.”⁴⁶ His judgment of history effects modernism’s impulse to remain “an incandescent point in time” over and against the “reproducible cliché.”⁴⁷ The man’s actions, moreover, ironize the impulse de Man identifies. The “incandescent

light” and the “reproducible cliché” cannot help but be simultaneously present in how the man allegorizes while ironizing this impulse and its temporal figurations in light and cliché. We see finally in the man the remaining “fashion” of modernism without, however, the pejorative connotations found in de Man’s essay. In this reading, the man in *The Road* becomes “modern man” in that he is “all that remains of an invention that has lost the desire that produced it.” His actions make concrete the ironic allegory of history represented by modernism’s desire for total forgetting. This “reproducible cliché” represents, for the father, the past, as well as future, world. Past worlds that emerge in his dreams, tarnished by the “violence” memory does to their “origins,” signify the “long countdown” toward “giving up” on this “waking world.”⁴⁸ And those possible worlds in the future, represented in one way by the boy’s flute, suffer similar condemnation when the boy decides for himself to throw it away. This gesture confirms the father’s fear that in the “formless music for an age to come” the boy plays it is not the promise of the boy’s survival and another world but “the last music on earth called up from out of the ashes of its ruin.” The father’s final image of the boy is fitting: “The man thought he seemed some sad and solitary changeling child announcing the arrival of a traveling spectacle in shire and village who does not know that behind him the players have all been carried off by wolves.”⁴⁹

While the boy might press the father to see time and space outside of their world, the father’s relationship to history and the ironic position it affords him knows the world of human making finally folded in on itself. For the father there is no “rest of the time” outside of time spent “on the road.”⁵⁰ Or when the boy imagines a spaceship taking them to Mars — the best argument the book gives against spatial closure and for a possible return of a productive spatial dialectic rather than extinction of spatial openness — the father sharply responds “there’s nothing there.”⁵¹ In order to see the novel’s enactment of de Man’s incompatibility between history and modernity we need both characters. The boy as monument to the potential return of a world and a life is unsustainable in the face of the father’s irony. “In some other world the child would already have begun to vacate him from his life. But he had no life other.”⁵²

The boy cannot be the beginning; or, if he might, he can only do so knowing his “new beginning turns out to be the repetition of a claim that has always already been made.”⁵³ In another permutation of his problem being akin to the modernist problem with history, the father conscripts the fire despite the impossibility of the “single instant of invention.” The persistence of history reminds us of “the depths and complications of an articulated time, an interdependence between past and future that prevents any present from ever coming into being.”⁵⁴ Such persistence seems the privileged problem of post-apocalyptic narratives in their deep concerns with a present time’s relation to history. In *The Road*, the man’s character concretizes the aporias between time and history. The most stringent claims against allegory come in his refusals to reanimate the world’s ruins despite their continued presence. Such presence concentrates in the man’s experience of “the charred ruins of a library where

blackened books lay in pools of water.” In his influential “Allegory as Interpretation,” Morton Bloomfield claims that “allegory is...that which conquers time, that which perpetually renews the written word. The age that does not need, or thinks it does not need, the past does not need this kind of allegory.”⁵⁵ Arguably such a world is precisely the one in which the novel puts the man, and the decision given not to “renew the written word” is literalized in space and figure of the library.

The fire, however, seems the animation of a desire for renewal similar to Bloomfield’s characterization of allegory. Yet a difference in temporal scale remains between these two images of renewal. Put simply, the difference is in the making: both who makes and the story of the making. If “allegory always arises from a crisis in representation (a historical and specific crisis, it should be understood, and not some timeless and eternal one)” then the man’s fire becomes the irony of allegory.⁵⁶ Indeed, his is a crisis in representation at the moment in which the “historical and specific” conditions become terminal. By the novel’s conclusion the man has died and the boy is left, however briefly, on his own. Confronted by a stranger, the boy asks if the man carries the fire. The stranger’s confusion marks the idiom’s obscure meaning for anyone other than the man and boy. Upon joining the group the boy is offered another figure of eternity when the woman tells him “the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time.”⁵⁷ The similarities between McCarthy’s use of fire in both *Blood Meridian* and *The Road* and this final image of eternity point up finally the difference in the man’s project from this woman’s. The man becomes here “men themselves,” “divided from their origins” and “exiled”; his fire is “the last ever to be” because, as the boy knows better still, the irony is “ever is a long time” and “ever is no time at all.”⁵⁸ At once, the differences between ironic and allegorical readings appear and disappear against a final identification: neither withstands the romance of first and second nature. Both wish to read “History as a happy end”; both yearn for those victories that yield “a remarkable consolation: namely, to know that this first nature also was, at some time or other, a second nature and that every victorious second nature becomes a first.”⁵⁹ Neither is able to think of the difference it would make to have a world “no longer in time.”⁶⁰

Notes

1. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 6. Jameson takes up the consequences of this claim in *Valences* by pointing to Ricoeur's (and Jameson's own) larger concerns about the "representation of temporality" and the necessary turn to fiction in which "multiple kinds of temporality...can be made to appear." See Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009) 500.
2. Fredric Jameson, *Valences* 546.
3. *Valences* 501.
4. *Valences* 576.
5. *Valences* 551.
6. *ibid.*
7. *Valences* 479.
8. *Valences* 518.
9. Paul Bové, "The American State Allegorizes the Ruins: Henry Adams and Counterstrategy," *A More Conservative Place: Intellectual Culture in the Bush Era* (Hanover: Dartmouth UP, 2013) 44-48, 46. See also Paul Bové's "Misprisions of Utopia: Messianism, Apocalypse, and Allegory," *Field Day Review* Vol. 6 (2010): 70-93.
10. Ronald Judy offers another critique of allegorical readings of history. For fear of taking his comments out of their necessarily particular context of political change in Tunisia, I will simply reiterate Judy's suggestion that allegory turns attention "toward the familiar"; and in this particular case allegory acts as a "counterrevolutionary" force. See R.A. Judy, "Introduction: For Dignity; Tunisia and the Poetry of Emergent Democratic Humanism," *boundary 2* 39.1 (2012) 1-16.
11. The possible dialogue between the works of Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man on allegory is remarkably interesting and certainly too productive to consider adequately in this paper. I hope to make some suggestions about how to continue the thought already dedicated to these connections. For example, see Andrea Mirabile's "Allegory, Pathos, and Irony: The Resistance to Benjamin in Paul de Man," *German Studies Review* 35.2 (2012) 319-33.
12. Nancy Fraser, "On Justice: Lessons from Plato, Rawls, and Ishiguro," *New Left Review* 74 (Mar-Apr 2012) 41-51. For more on an unfortunate trend in left criticism that uses literary representations of the commodity allegorically to construct narratives of labor and the veiled workings of capitalism that extends toward an ethical imperative, see also Bruce Robbins's "Too Much Information" in *Novel* 43 (2010) 78-82. Robbins has used the phrase "commodity recognition scene" to describe such representations and their allegorical potential.
13. Bill Brown, "The Dark Wood of Postmodernity (Space, Faith, Allegory)," *PMLA* 120.3 (2005) 734-50.
14. Fredric Jameson, "Figural Relativism, or the Poetics of Historiography," *Diacritics* 6.1 (Spring 1976) 2-9.
15. For a longer meditation on problems of time and politics as they relate to apocalypse and narrative forms, with a specific focus on Benjamin's dialectical image, see Peter Osborne's *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 2011) 144-59.
16. Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minnesota: U Minnesota P, 1983) 226.
17. Brown, "Dark Wood" 739.
18. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns

- Hopkins UP, 1973) 434.
19. Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minnesota: U Minnesota P, 1996) 179.
 20. de Man, *Ideology* 179.
 21. See Schlegel's *Critical Fragments* and *Athenaeum Fragments* on this sense of irony.
 22. Ben Marcus, "Living in the End Times: Why American Writers Are Obsessed with the Apocalypse," *New Statesman* (18 April 2012) <<http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/culture/2012/04/living-end-times>>.
 23. Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Vintage, 2006) 28, 6, 14. In his incisive essay, about which I cannot say much here, "Value|Theory|Crisis," Joshua Clover appropriates Braudel's phrase "signs of autumn" to read history as crisis and identify the contemporary crisis point in capital. It would seem natural cycle metaphors have captured, paradoxically, the imagination of those who would read history with a narrative inflection and a series of crisis points. See Joshua Clover, "Value|Theory|Crisis," *PMLA* 127.1 (January 2012) 107-14.
 24. McCarthy, *Road* 75.
 25. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (New York: Penguin, 1973) 84.
 26. Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian, Or the Evening Redness in the West* (London: Picador, 2011) 258; emphasis added.
 27. *Valences* 501.
 28. *Road* 41, 54.
 29. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005) 179.
 30. J.M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (New York: Penguin, 1982) 133. I offer one caveat here. I would argue the time of empire concerns crisis not catastrophe. In fact, the distinction between these two terms illustrates well the difference between reading history as narrative or cycle. The former carries sense of endless circulation, while the latter concerns repetition. In his lectures on *Capital* David Harvey casually suggests "capitalism is perpetually on the road." A possible anti-capitalist reading of *The Road* could begin with this insight from Harvey. *The Road* seems to contend with such secular notions of narrative history as providential. Luck appears in at least two scenes. The first, with Ely, has him admit "I don't know what that would mean. What luck would look like. Who would know such a thing?" (174). The other, more ambiguous, scene comes just before the father dies in which he assures the boy "you're going to be lucky" (279). If one were to defend the novel's investment in a providential narrative, this scene would be crucial.
 31. All of these terms play with the importance of St. Paul for contemporary Marxian thinkers and the possibility of figuring revolution and universality.
 32. *Road* 287.
 33. *ibid.*
 34. In his essay "Cormac McCarthy and the Aesthetics of Exhaustion," Andrew Hoberek argues that in light of the natural world's exhaustion the novel privileges those things that "transcend the question of necessity." Making a claim that the father's appropriation of the past to make the new is based on "acts of the imagination" rather than on an "Adamic fidelity between words and the world" grants the order of "second nature" the place in which to find a "meaningful sense of potential" (491-92). These claims give short shrift to the importance of the dialectic between nature and history in the novel. More specifically,

the novel gives the appearance of erasing this dialectic. In so doing, nature's role as "counterpoint to history and understanding" (Hansen, "Formalism" 677) seems exhausted by the novel's final image of trout and nature more grandly. Perhaps more optimistically, on the one hand, this exhaustion leads to the recognition of the radical potential for human making in the world. On the other hand, however, the instantiation of such a world is a negative image of the contemporary world of commodities in which consumption can be figured in nothing but artificial terms. Indeed, we are left with the terrifying image of a world reduced to human imagination without the opposition of the natural world. As Cyrus Console puts it, tracing the "imaginings" of American companies such as Monsanto, "What is the soft drink if not 'the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic' that Walter Benjamin worries about?" See Andrew Hoberek's "Cormac McCarthy and the Aesthetics of Exhaustion" in *American Literary History* 23:3 (Fall 2011) 483-99. See also Jim Hansen's "Formalism and Its Malcontents: Benjamin and de Man on the Function of Allegory" in *New Literary History* 35:4 (Autumn 2004) 663-83. See also "The Matter with Kansas: Ben Lerner Talks to Cyrus Console," *Los Angeles Review of Books* (20 February 2012).

35. See Jameson's "World Reduction in Le Guin" in *Archaeologies* for an extended argument concerning this incisive observation and ironically productive technique.
36. *Road* 54.
37. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980) 21.
38. Nietzsche, *Advantage* 22.
39. *Road* 55-57.
40. de Man, *Blindness* 225.
41. *Road* 52.
42. *Road* 18.
43. *Advantage* 22.
44. *Blindness* 146-47.
45. Paul Ricoeur, "Christianity and the Meaning of History, Progress, Ambiguity, and Hope," *Journal of Religion* 32:4 (October 1952) 250.
46. *Blindness* 147.
47. *ibid.*
48. *Blindness* 129-31.
49. *Road* 78.
50. *Blindness* 151.
51. *Road* 158. I would like to suggest another reading of the collapse of social production — in this case economically rather than spatially. In the underground bunker the father takes account of the provisions and comes across a "double handful of gold krugerrands." After "knead[ing] them in his hand" he simply replaces them on the shelf (142). As Annie McClanahan writes in a recent essay on contemporary capitalism and horror movies, we might read this scene as a negation of eighteenth-century "talking coin narratives" (6). Unlike these stories that reinforce the social benefits of economic exchange, *The Road* offers a negative image of the social by denying the coin's role as both medium of exchange as well as guarantor of "an imagined community of circulation" that underpins economic social bonds (6). Even the gold itself loses its value in such a socially bereft and matter-of-fact world with little left of intrinsic value. Gold and money both are left collecting dust in a world without the social techniques of

circulation and exchange, only consumption. See McClanahan's "Dead Pledges: Debt, Horror, and the Credit Crisis" (<<http://post45.research.yale.edu/archives/2291>>).

52. *Road* 273.
53. *Blindness* 161.
54. *Blindness* 159.
55. Morton W. Bloomfield, "Allegory as Interpretation," *New Literary History* 3:2 (Winter 1972) 301-17.
56. Fredric Jameson, "From Metaphor To Allegory," *Anything* (Cambridge: MIT P, 2001) 24-36.
57. *Road* 286.
58. McCarthy, *Meridian* 258; *Road* 28.
59. *Valences* 612; *Advantage* 22.
60. *Valences* 612.

Figuring Terminal Crisis in Steven Amsterdam's *Things We Didn't See Coming*

Brent Ryan Bellamy

Variations in a conflict that remains constant...can only be glimpsed *at the level of the cycle*: individual episodes tend, if anything, to conceal it and only the abstract pattern reveals the true nature of the historical process.¹

The catastrophe for which we wait is not something of the future, but is merely the continuation of the present along its execrable trend.²

This paper tracks a problem that emerges from within a contemporary post-apocalyptic novel, though is certainly not restricted to it.³ The formal limit to imagining a post-catastrophic future remains a historical one: how can a novel bent on representing an *after*, bent on imagining the movement of history as such, do so "in an age," as Fredric Jameson once put it, "that has forgotten to think historically in the first place."⁴ Could it be that historicity, that sense of the present as subject to historical change, is once more returning in the contemporary moment?⁵ Indeed, Jameson, Perry Anderson, Lauren Berlant, and Franco Moretti have, in their own ways, all returned of late to the historical novel as a fundamental category of realism with continuing import to the present.⁶ For Jameson, realism always entails a negotiation between emergence and dissolution (with George Eliot's *Middlemarch* [1874] as a masterful example of such a dialogue). Anderson, in *The London Review of Books*, identifies the unevenness of cultural forms, locating, for example, a wave of historical novels in Latin America following Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) that catalogue an experience of defeat, while a set of U.S. historical novels written and released during this time had to do with race and empire.⁷ Berlant traces the dimensions of the historical novel's "capacity to sense historical experience," through an affective brush with the present.⁸ Turning his sights to the past, Moretti's *The Bourgeois* (2013) demonstrates the efficacy of his distant reading and dialectically posits that "the more

indispensable realism is, the more unthinkable it becomes.”⁹ In each account, form’s relation to history remains indispensable. Published just after the 2007-2008 financial upheaval, in the midst of these studied returns to realism, Steven Amsterdam’s *Things We Didn’t See Coming* (2010), struggles to represent the present historically and, in doing so, strikes at the very limits of its own formal capacities as a post-apocalyptic novel, but, despite its realist formal innovation it still suffers from a host of ideological setbacks precisely because it is a post-apocalyptic novel.¹⁰ In light of its innovations and limits, here I will test a formal reading of Amsterdam’s novel against descriptions of the historical novel in order to elaborate connections between form, history, and crisis today.

Turning my own sights to the past, the emergence of the post-apocalyptic novel in England followed on the heels of both the science fiction novel and the historical novel. Published just four years after Scott’s *Waverley* (1814) and often credited as the first science fiction novel, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) was also published less than a decade earlier than her sole survivor story *The Last Man* (1826). Nearer the end of the century and also credited as the first science fiction novel, H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895) threatens the Time Traveller’s Victorian present with a bleak and post-apocalyptic future, although the time machine itself, and not the apocalyptic moment, is the conceit of the narrative. Wells’s novel is paralleled, and indeed preceded by, Ignatius Donnelly’s populist, post-apocalyptic novel *Caesar’s Column* (1890), which also dates to the *fin de siècle*. In his novel Donnelly juxtaposes the brutalities of urban industrial capitalism against the rural background of the protagonist, Gabriel Weltstein. The climax of the novel arrives as a working-class revolt overthrows the oligarchic dictatorship of the United States: the infamous, titular column is erected, built out of human bodies surfaced over with concrete. One critic describes the power of this symbol as associative:

A reader contemporary with Donnelly would have thought of Atlanta and Richmond; perhaps of Haymarket Square; certainly of the Paris Commune. An American reader today might think of Coventry or Dresden, of the German death camps; and then thanks to the curious and ghastly coincidence of visual imagery, he would come to the column of white cloud that towered over Hiroshima. But clearly the symbol has a life of its own; it demands the associations.¹¹

Readers of the novel today, too, might think of the billows of smoke from Kuwaiti oil fields lit on fire by retreating Iraqi troops, and certainly of images of the collapse of the World Trade Center Buildings in 2001. *Caesar’s Column* shows that the post-apocalyptic novel has a long history in the United States and can be cross-referenced with both science fictional writing and events in the present, even if it predates the

present by well over a century. Certainly, too, Donnelly's novel makes a space for the post-apocalyptic novel to engage and consider political, social, and economic crises and their aftermath; though, the novel also emphasizes problems with reading post-apocalyptic novels as allegories for any crisis in particular. If the column of Donnelly's novel reveals anything about the genre it is the appearance of absolute exchangeability of its tropes, images, and landscapes for any given crisis, fashionable and horrific, of the present.

In "Future City" Jameson offers a way we might characterize the post-apocalyptic novel after anonymously quoting himself,

Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world. [...] But I think it would be better to characterize all this in terms of History, a History that we cannot imagine except as ending, and whose future seems to be nothing but a monotonous repetition of what is already here.¹²

The future as "nothing by but a monotonous repetition of what is already here" seems to suitably describe the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel, which tend to depict the pre-apocalyptic past as a perpetual and restorable entity. These novels suggest that the same may hold true in the real world and that the shape of the present, and of previous presents, lie ready for just such a reactivation. In so doing, they take part in a larger discursive and ideological struggle over the relationship between period, form, and politics. Post-apocalyptic novels imaginatively work through historical and social contradictions, yet they stage this process within a significantly different framework. They use the conceit of the post-apocalypse as a way of inventing grand narratives after the so-called end of grand narratives, offering beginnings after the so-called end of history, and shoring up U.S. hegemony in the age of its decline.

Peak oil, environmental catastrophe, global epidemics, and massive unemployment index the various fictional worlds described by other post-apocalyptic films and novels. But in Amsterdam's novel we do not see these things head on; we do not witness disaster unfolding from a god's-eye view or through a large cast of characters as is so often the case in recent apocalyptic forms. A good example of the formal impulse to figure catastrophe from the outside is the flashy apocalyptic cinematography in Roland Emmerich's *2012* (2009). The narrative of *2012* seems to be an excuse to screen a series of daring escapes — these sequences happen at least three times in the film — in which a plane takes off from a crumbling runway, the very ground collapsing beneath it as it dodges flying debris, soaring out of the latest danger zone. While the post-apocalyptic novel does tend to limit this type of indulgence, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) offers a sense of the total devastation wreaked by the apocalyptic event:

“The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions.”¹³ Though the formal style of McCarthy’s novel remains sparse, it contributes to a clear depiction of the post-apocalyptic United States — completed by long stretches of highway littered with broken down cars, roaming bands of cannibals, and empty cities with their coffers of food and medicine picked clean. Yet another narrative perspective stands separated from the Emmerich god’s-eye-view and Amsterdam’s close perspective: this mode is what I call the “global cast of characters apocalypse,” where the event is mapped through a number of characters, none much more central to the plot than the others, as in Max Brooks’s *World War Z* (2006) or a film like Steven Soderberg’s *Contagion* (2011). Contrary to 2012 and *World War Z*, Amsterdam’s narrator feels out different aspects of his world from the ground, while he is working to empty houses during the rainy season or acting as a guide for the chronically ill. *Things We Didn’t See Coming* thus remains a post-apocalyptic novel even as it moves beyond the formal imperative to reveal, in massive, all-too-direct detail.

Georg Lukács, in his summary of Sir Walter Scott’s historical novels, uncannily discloses the manner in which I read *Things We Didn’t See Coming*:

[Scott] presents history as a series of great crises. His presentation of historical development...is of an uninterrupted series of such revolutionary crises. Thus if Scott’s main tendency in all of his novels ...is to represent and defend progress, then this progress is for him always a process full of contradictions, the driving force and material basis of which is the living contradictions between conflicting forces, the antagonisms of classes and nations.¹⁴

For Lukács, the Scottian historical novel represents and then resolves or defers these historical antagonisms through two characters: first “the middle way hero” who has an equal stake or personal investment in each of the opposing camps and, because of this standpoint, plausibly mediates the social totality of the novel; and second “the world historical individual” who remains at a remove from the nitty-gritty business of the former, but at a crucial moment acts as the motor of historical change by causing history to happen, thereby resolving said antagonisms. The historical novel, then, formally registers the movement of history through the crises generated by class antagonisms — in the case of Scott’s novels, the crisis was the aftermath of the French Revolution — in a way that philosophical thought had not yet managed to do.¹⁵

While Lukács treated Scott’s novels as a working-through of how historical change took place in the transition from the fall of the aristocracy to rise of the bourgeoisie in France and a response to the economic change of the Industrial Revolution in England, I read Amsterdam’s novel as a response to mounting contemporary crisis: the terminal crisis of U.S. hegemony and capital itself.¹⁶ This crisis appears symptomatically, on a political register, as the withering of concessions to the public from the United States

under sweeping privatization (e.g., healthcare, education, women's reproductive rights, and so on) and, on an economic register, as the fallout of financial solutions to material problems (e.g., capital's inability to combine increasing amounts of surplus capital with similarly bulking populations of surplus laborers), which have both been thoroughly critiqued by Giovanni Arrighi and David Harvey among others.¹⁷ Further, groups like Wertkritik, Théorie Communiste, and Endnotes describe a "secular crisis" that emerges from within the crises of capitalist accumulation, defining it as a "*crisis of the reproduction of the capital-labour relation itself*."¹⁸ If, as Lukács argues, the historical novel creates a narrative place for bourgeois subjectivity after the French Revolution, then I read *Things We Didn't See Coming* as an attempt to reconcile a loss of any such place for the bourgeois subject at the end of the welfare state. Amsterdam's novel further enables this interpretation in the way that it formally registers the category of crisis, which marks not only an inability to imagine an egalitarian future, but also highlights a fundamental question for the left: does capital need to narrate its own future?¹⁹

Things We Didn't See Coming follows an unnamed protagonist through nine vignettes, each with its own setting, plot, tone, and signs of the apocalypse. The novel begins with "What We Know Now" on New Year's Eve 1999, with the narrator and his parents preparing to leave the city to avoid the impending Y2K disaster; this places the novel at a temporal remove from the present and along a timeline roughly corresponding to our own. While it is never explicit about what disaster takes place, as the plot progresses it becomes clear that some form of environmental devastation has occurred — if not as a result of Y2K (a false alarm that still portends problems to come), then from some similar demand of infrastructure and economy that humanity is eventually unable to manage. Throughout each vignette, the narrator remains the only consistent feature of the novel, while other characters, places, and events fade in and out of significance. From an expedition on a horse bred to withstand an exceptionally harsh rainy season in "Dry Land" to a struggle for survival with his sometimes partner Margo in the badlands during a drought in "Cake Walk," the circumstances of the narrator and those around him exist in a state of flux. Organized in this way, the novel registers a tension between the narrator and his disparate and changing surroundings. The narrative context changes so drastically in each vignette, and there is no sustaining system of meaning — no figured city with its dense architectural codes, no global connections knitting the world together, no set of social relations with any consistency *even on the level of character* that could provide the narrator with purpose or motivation other than individual survival.

Each vignette has its own crisis of destruction and redemption, and signifies in its own small way that something has passed away, while what replaces it always remains unclear. The perceived Y2K disaster in the opening vignette finds the family traveling out to the countryside to spend the evening with the mother's parents. However, it ends not with an insistence that this time of crisis requires that the family

pull together, but with the father and son alone in the woods withdrawn from the scene of the unrepresented event.²⁰ We are given some clues as to what happens after Y2K at the start of the next vignette, but these do not depict the apocalypse in any direct or unmediated way. In this way, each vignette marks a shift where one set of expectations passes away and is replaced by another: the novel acknowledges that a complete representation of catastrophe remains at a remove, mediated through the experience of the narrator.

This emphasis on the narrator reveals that his is an individual and a social crisis, that is, it is a crisis of the contradictory bourgeois subject negotiating the future of the individual at the cost of the future of the collective. Here, the lack of consistent social relations, in the form of the missing city or lack of consistent nameable secondary or minor characters, indexes another foreclosure of the possibility for historical change à la Lukács: the world historical figure could not emerge even if it was structurally possible to know what comes next, because there is no way to aesthetically or epistemologically ascertain the system, code, or law that could ground the subject's experience. Despite this limit, the novel struggles to mediate the complex, indirect relation between individual and social totality. *Things We Didn't See Coming* maintains a narrative apparatus related yet distinct from the historical novel: the social totality is mediated by a focalizing character, which makes noticeable the absence of the world-historical individual. What was a structural possibility for Scott precisely because he knew what historically came next becomes impossible for Amsterdam, or for fiction that attempts to think the contemporary in the form of a historical novel, because one cannot possibly know what is to come. What *Things We Didn't See Coming* accomplishes is a realistic narrative exploration of the world in which the absolutely new, unrepresented event is a smoke-and-mirrors show, a displacement of the current historical impasse onto a post-apocalyptic landscape that, crucially, cannot then be resolved by the daring play of any individual, world-historical or not. This accomplishment of the novel places it in line with what Jameson calls "characteristic SF," which "does not seriously attempt to imagine the 'real' future of our social system"; instead, "its multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come."²¹ My continued engagement will focus on whether or not *Things We Didn't See Coming* offers an apprehension of the present as history.

The coincident absence of the world historical individual and the nameable apocalyptic event is only registered across the shifting landscape of the vignettes through so many small signs of the end; even parsing together the end of oil, massive environmental changes, and the stark division between city and country does not fully map out the source of destruction in the changing world. In each case, the absent process itself — the apocalypse — pushes the plot not towards the next step in a narrative sequence, but replaces one crisis — intense rains and flooding — with another — groups of displaced refugees. In each instance the narrator comes to terms

with the new situation, only to be cast out once more into a new crisis. For instance, in “Predisposed,” his medical history is included, with one standout, cryptic detail: “Male Caucasian 36 years, Exposure within North America: Duration 36 years (?other exposures unknown).”²² One could think of *Things We Didn’t See Coming* as a sort of narrative reflection on Walter Benjamin’s musings about Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus* — the narrator sees the debris and detritus of modernity but cannot locate its source or begin to untangle the relationships between the varied objects in the heap. Without the world-historical individual waiting in the wings to resolve the contradictions of the overdetermined crises of the present, all the middle-way hero can do is bear witness.

In a patently formalistic, mediated way, Amsterdam’s novel preserves a desire to reveal the totality. During their escape from the city on New Year’s Eve, the young narrator’s father attempts to explain what is happening: “The world is large and complicated, with too many parts relying on other parts and they all octopus out.”²³ This cephalopodan image, interestingly, prompts the narrator to imagine things from the Emmerich perspective,

I wish I was on a plane over everything. We’d be flying west, going through all the New Year’s Eves, looking down just as they happen. I’d have to stay awake for twenty-four hours of night-time, but I’d be looking out the little window and watching ripples of fireworks below, each wave going off under us as we fly over it.²⁴

The boy’s romantic relation to celebrations around the whole world is trumped later in the vignette, as his father fills in the grim details of his totalizing metaphor: “In your time there’ll be breakdowns that can’t be fixed. There will be more diseases that can’t be fixed. Water will be as valuable as oil. And you’ll be stuck taking care of a fat generation of useless parents”; he continues:

[T]he future is a hospital, packed with sick people, packed with hurt people, people on stretchers in the halls, and suddenly the lights go out, the water shuts off, and you know in your heart that they’re never coming back on. That’s the future, my friend.²⁵

This moment in the first vignette takes the widest view of the end: what passes away here is the future itself. The present is figured in terms not dissimilar to Eric Cazdyn’s description of a new chronic temporality, visible in palliative care, future markets investment, oil-bound cultural habits, and so on, where the future as change or difference is cut off in allegiance to the present.²⁶ The rest of the novel is spent catching up with this fact.

Indeed, by the final vignette, “Best Medicine,” a fully privatized health system

appears as the narrator becomes a sightseeing guide for the terminally ill. He calls them the “last-hurrah set, folks with at least two primary cancers” and says that “the money [he’s] taking home is criminal.”²⁷ The masses of refugees pictured earlier in the novel conspicuously vanish in a return of the personal situation from the first vignette. The narrator is convinced by his tour group to change their plans and leads a visit to see his father who is now an alternative healer living off the land in some backwater region. This return indexes the significance of the father-son relation to the novel, which now seems to function as a compass or a map for the narrator’s relation to the social. Despite the novel’s insistence that it has some purchase or insight available to it, the only thing it seems to offer is a false promise of futurity and care that eclipses both the maternal relation of care and social reproduction within the family and the chance of creating a new social form capable of collectively shaping a viable, equal future outside of the family.

In a section of *Cruel Optimism* titled “Aesthetic Histories of the Present,” Berlant describes the movement of figures “across spaces, quickly and lingeringly, reflectively and in the flesh, projecting and sensing atmospheres and impacts to which they have to catch up and respond” and, in some sense, she is also describing the doubled movement of Amsterdam’s narrator and reader.²⁸ Berlant’s descriptions of affective attachment are mirrored by Amsterdam’s narrator when, in “Uses for Vinegar,” while working for a government relocation agency, he muses that these people cannot think beyond the immediate crisis, “they’re laughing about their dumb luck for surviving. But they have this newborn worry in their faces. They may not know it yet: It’s permanent.”²⁹ Here, some survivors act on the naive belief that the current crisis is the only crisis, whether it’s a fire, a flood, or a drought; the thinking seems to go, once one crisis is resolved those facing it will be able to start over with daily life fully intact. The narrator explains this as he talks about government Grief programs that sprang up to help refugees: “The thought is nice: You’ll have a clean slate, a world of opportunity, you’ll never look back.”³⁰ But he sees through this short-sighted version of survival to a time when survival becomes, in his words, “permanent.” He continues, “nothing really heals because, if you lose everything once, running becomes part of you.”³¹ Berlant transcodes these behaviors: for those “occupying the long middle of a crisis, their ambitious pursuit of an understanding of the presenting situation produces a *personal, political, and aesthetic ambit that pushes the ongoing event into something that has not found its genre*.”³² The narrator reveals a nuanced understanding of crisis as an event that seems to be consistently replaced by newer crises, which, in turn, inform a future that is punctuated only by ruin: a state of disaster becoming permanent.

“Uses for Vinegar” critically splits and fractures perceivable futures into three acts of crisis that sequentially upstage one another. First, the refugees have their focus on an *immediate* crisis; second, the narrator emphasizes survival through a *long wave* of crises, like Scott’s fiction; and finally there is *the future “real,”* a crisis

the novel cannot represent. This third crisis can only be detected through its very unrepresentability. In words hauntingly similar to Amsterdam's "permanent crisis" and Berlant's "understanding of the presenting situation," Benanav describes the "permanent crisis of working life":

For Marx, the fundamental crisis tendency of the capitalist mode of production was not limited in its scope to periodic downturns in economic activity. It revealed itself most forcefully in a permanent crisis of working life. The *differentia specifica* of capitalist "economic" crises — that people starve in spite of good harvests, and means of production lie idle in spite of a need for their products — is merely one moment of this larger crisis — the constant reproduction of a scarcity of jobs in the midst of an abundance of goods.³³

In light of this description, the novel's story, in a narratological sense, generated within and structured by the vignettes, begins to come together, rather than octopus out. Recall Moretti's comment from the epigraph: "Variations in a conflict that remains constant...can only be glimpsed *at the level of the cycle*: individual episodes tend, if anything, to conceal it, and only the abstract pattern reveals the true nature of the historical process."³⁴ The novel's cycle of vignettes form the basis for a greater understanding of the diegetic story world and of crisis more generally. Though the novel formally depicts it, permanent crisis is the limit the narrator cannot see beyond.

The novel recognizes this impasse on the level of content. During a car ride to the country in "The Forest for the Trees," the narrator watches *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987) with his sometimes-partner Margo. He muses,

the sappy story between the cops is decent, but the futuristic stuff is interesting because they get it all so wrong. Robotics were promising and crime was grim so they made a movie about it. But then the violent crime resolved (or was absorbed into the food distribution problem), and robotics fizzled. Next? You think you're worried about the right thing and then you're sideswiped. The seasons change, as Margo likes to say, with a tone of darkness added on.³⁵

In this passage the narrator places *Robocop* in the context of an impasse — crime — and a promise — robotics, significantly acknowledging that the crime problem was deferred rather than resolved. In fact, *Robocop* allegorizes an impasse between the state and the corporation emphasizing that a privatized police force (like a privatized military) requires and incentivizes, rather than prevents or brings to justice, violent crime, which relates to the problem of privatized healthcare and terminal illness — why cure something when you can treat it indefinitely?³⁶ Even in this later vignette,

the narrator cannot seem to see beyond the second stage of crisis, crisis becoming permanent.

Despite the narrator, the novel ties the crises of each vignette together on the level of form, without making their connection clear on the level of content — these are not so many unrelated symptoms, so many fragmentary effects, but are instead part and parcel of a near-unrepresentable system. With this realization the separate vignettes rearrange themselves before our eyes, falling under the rubric of permanent crisis, a dialectical move from separate fragments to formal totality, all mediated by the Lukácsian “middle hero” and his experience of the cycle of historical crises. But this is the place where the novel, on the formal level of the vignette, pushes up against its own representational limit: it only depicts crises as a series or a cycle, which remains the novel’s central, one might even say structuring, crisis. The uncertainty of progress marks another major divergence from Scott’s novels, which could figure crisis as a long wave surging towards a brighter future. For Amsterdam, however, there is no guaranteeing this future. *Things We Didn’t See Coming* struggles to work through this problematic, but in the very momentum of its vignettes and its generic resonance with Scott’s historical novels it encounters its own crisis: the figure that this novel cannot represent beyond the mere shadow of its possibility is the apocalyptic event itself, a terminal crisis.

Despite the apparent interchangeability of the vignettes and the absence of a nameable or figurable apocalyptic event, the novel’s emplotment still proceeds in chronological order. Rather than starting at the end of the story *and at the end of the world* it begins with what one must assume is the apocalyptic event that then proceeds to structure the narrative. This emplotment seems to insist on the movement of history and at the same time puzzles over the ability of the individual to find his or her place in historical change. One way to render the work of the novel on a different narrative register is to try and place the absences from its story: on the level of the family, the absent mother, and on the level of form, the event, or, if we are still reading it against the historical novel, the world-historical figure. Today both figures have been socialized, collectivized, and not in the progressive sense of wages for housework or the social safety net: the social totality today, made up as it is by an increasing number of unemployed laborers and agents of social reproduction, daily remake the structures of domination and exploitation that keep capital accumulating and seem to foreclose the movement of history.

The decline of the U.S. hegemony and the novel’s own formal limits entail these two, deeply related, absent processes — the general law of capitalist accumulation and the social reproduction of the capital-labor relation. A formal contradiction surfaces in the novel where it appears as though capitalist life continues as normal but without the attendant masses of the destitute, refugees, or the unemployed, which is not to say that a “good” novel would include surplus populations in its representational scheme. Rather, this absence becomes notable because *Things We Didn’t See Coming*

so indulgently imagines individual survival. The fantasy here is that this carrying on does not require the labor of others, either as the labor of the production and circulation of commodities or as the invisible care of social reproduction.³⁷ These two problematics are generated within the capital-labor relation and figure the two steadily increasing groups that remain unfigured in Amsterdam's novel: first, those absolutely superfluous to the capitalist mode of production; and, second, a vast population of mostly women who once had to carry out the task of reproducing living labor, but now shoulder the weight of maintaining this population that appears to be "outside" of capital altogether.³⁸

The absence of any figuration of social reproduction in the novel betrays the narrator's fantasy that he can survive by scavenging, slowly working his way back into a position of stability. What the novel highlights, precisely by not emphasizing it, is that the group to bear the brunt of the neoliberal attack on hospitals, schools, and social programs is the women who now find the work of social reproduction intensified. Maya Andrea Gonzalez argues that the actions that serve to replenish both the constitution and the members of the laboring class — from clothing, cleaning, and nourishing to bearing children — are all bound up in the production of capital. Gonzalez further explains:

In capitalism, the lives of the surplus producers are *constitutively split* between the public production of a surplus and the private reproduction of the producers themselves. The workers...continue to exist only if they take care of their own upkeep. If wages are too low, or if their services are no longer needed, workers are "free" to survive by other means (as long as those means are legal). [...] Here is the essence of the capital-labor relation. What the workers earn for socially performed production in the public realm, they must spend in order to reproduce themselves domestically in their own private sphere.³⁹

As Gonzalez points out above, and as Silvia Federici does elsewhere, there are few legal fallbacks for women in this position. Attention to social reproduction reveals that cooperation may be labor's free gift to capital, but this cooperation is daily reinvigorated, at no cost to capital, by the caregivers in the home — a position without the standard temporal limits of the working day ("there is always more dust"). Though its title acts as a symptom of its form, *Things We Didn't See Coming* can only depict the impasses of its own structuring crisis, apocalyptic or terminal, through their effects.

Weaving together the shedding of labor, growth of the unemployed, and the absence of maternal care and reproduction reveals a third absence in Amsterdam's novel: the novel repeatedly attempts to figure terminal crisis, but, after the nine vignettes, the novel brings nothing to term. That is, the cycle of crisis in the vignette form, not unlike the cycle Lukács described in Scott's historical fiction, formally

circles the near impossible formal project of representing an absolute break, a total rupture, a terminal crisis. Counter to the synchronic sense of disaster becoming permanent that the novel imagines, this terminal crisis could only be a diachronic, temporal break. In other words, it could only be that longed-for actual apocalyptic event that so rarely arrives in novels of this kind. So, what we are left with at the end of the novel is, perhaps, what Nicholas Brown describes as the end of literature, where the contradiction inherent in literature is rendered graspable precisely because it cannot be grasped; put another way, the impasse that enables Amsterdam's novel is at one and the same time its own ending.⁴⁰

But here I must ask, the end of *which* literature and *which* literary project? Surely the inability of this particular U.S. novel to figure its object, as I am suggesting above, should not be read as a universal claim about literature or the novel form as such. So, then, in this new national context, what *Things We Didn't See Coming* captures is a crisis of the center struggling yet unable to represent its own decline: that is, a crisis at the center, not in spite of but because of itself, makes this crisis unrepresentable.⁴¹ Thus, we could think of the world depicted by Amsterdam in Jameson's terms as the future by disruption: "The Utopian form itself is the answer to the universal ideological conviction that no alternative is possible, that there is no alternative to the system. But it asserts this by forcing us to think the break itself, and not by offering a more traditional picture of what things will be like after the break."⁴² This does seem to help form an understanding of the novel as a sort of success by failure, in the Jamesonian sense of offering a utopian glimpse that the future could be different, precisely by tracing the limits of its imaginative capacities. Thus, material and social crisis become represented and formalized in the vignette cycle in *Things We Didn't See Coming*. Rather than offer a narrative solution, "what things will be like after the break," Amsterdam's work traces the limits of its narrator's ontological position: what would once simply be known as the bourgeois subject, can now be identified as the normative, masculine subject still clinging to a dying middle class. The outline of these limits maps the problematic of terminal crisis in such a way that confirms the near impossibility, and deep necessity, of collectively imagining and striving to reach beyond the present to the future, which remains a precedent set by the historical novel, even if its rebirth today is one rife with problems and short on solutions.

Notes

1. Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (Verso: New York, 2005) 29.
2. Aaron Benanav, "Misery and Debt: On the Logic and History of Surplus Populations and Surplus Capital," *Endnotes 2* (27 June 2012).
3. Many thanks to those who have given me feedback and advice on this piece: I maintain that thought and writing are intensely collective processes and as such I like to take what moments I can to recognize those who have impacted, challenged, and, thus, enriched my work. Thanks go to Maria Elisa Cevasco, above all, for arranging the dossier and for insisting "do not over polish – life is too short!"; to my colleagues appearing in the dossier, Jeff Diamanti, Marija Cetinic, Vincent Adiutori; to Alexandra Carruthers, Adam Carlson, and Imre Szeman, who gave me wonderful editorial feedback; to the MLG-ICS 2012, especially Ryan Culpepper, Kevin Floyd, Barbara Foley, Mathias Nilges, and Alberto Toscano; to Jen Phillis, the two blind readers, and the *Mediations* editorial team.
4. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) ix.
5. I use the word *contemporary* here as a periodizing term, following Mathias Nilges who made this connection at the Marxist Literary Group's Institutes on Cultural Studies in Vancouver in 2012 during the discussion period for the panel we both sat on — *Aesthetic Histories of the Present II* organized by Kevin Floyd.
6. Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (Verso: New York, 2013); Perry Anderson, "From Progress to Catastrophe: Perry Anderson on the Historical Novel," *London Review of Books* 33.15 (28 July 2011) 24-28; Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011) 66; Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (Verso: New York, 2013).
7. According to Perry Anderson, "In the United States, by contrast, if we consider the span of historical novels of one sort or another produced in the same period, the core experiences triggering the American branch of the phenomenon would appear to be race (Styron, Morrison, Doctorow, Walker) and empire (Vidal, Pynchon, DeLillo, Mailer, Sontag)" (28).
8. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 66.
9. Moretti, *Bourgeois* 186.
10. *Things We Didn't See Coming* was first released in Australia in 2009 (Melbourne: Sleepers). Amsterdam's second book, *What the Family Needed*, was released in 2012 (New York: Riverhead).
11. Alexander Saxton, "'Caesar's Column': The Dialogue of Utopia and Catastrophe," *American Quarterly* 19.2 (Summer 1967) 224.
12. Fredric Jameson, "Future City," *NLR* 21 (May/June 2003) 76.
13. Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Vintage, 2006) 52.
14. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (London: Pelican, 1981) 57.
15. *Waverley's* first draft appeared in 1805, though was abandoned until its release some ten years later. Moretti, *Graphs* 17.
16. Due to the Industrial Revolution, England was already a politically "post-revolutionary" country opposed to France. Lukács, *The Historical Novel* 17.
17. See Giovanni Arrighi, "Hegemony Unravelling — I" and "Hegemony Unravelling — II," *New Left Review* 32-33 (March 2005; May/June 2005) 23-80, and 83-116; David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003); Peter Hitchcock, "Oil in the American Imaginary," *New Formations* 69 (2010) 81-97; Imre

Szeman, "System Failure: Oil, Futurity, and the Anticipation of Disaster," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106:4 (Fall 2007) 805-23; and Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Eagle Has Crash Landed," *Foreign Policy* (July/August 2002): 60-68.

18. Benanav, "Misery." And here is Roland Simon, of *Théorie Communiste*, on crisis, "The current crisis is a crisis of the wage relation, both as the capacity of capital to valorise itself and as the capacity of the reproduction of the working class as such." Roland Simon, "Crisis Theory/Theories" *SIC* (17 July 2011) <<http://sic.communisation.net/en/crisis-theories?DokuWiki=c524e974fa68f1309ab46b88f00ae70b>>. Or, here is Robert Kurz of the Krisis group on the same idea in 1986: "The new crisis is thus no temporary crisis of overaccumulation or overproduction, but rather a crisis of the creation of value itself, from which there can no longer be a way out for capital." Robert Kurz, "The Crisis of Exchange-Value: Science as Productivity; Productive Labour; and Capitalist Reproduction," trans. Josh Robinson, *Mediations* 27:1-2 (Fall-Spring 2013-14) 54 <<http://www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/crisis-of-exchange-value>>.
19. This question emerges from the work of Jasper Bernes: "If it is impossible to project a communist future from present bases, it is also likewise impossible to project a capitalist one. This is because, returning to the point where we began, capital is a self-undermining social dynamic — *the limit to capital is capital itself* — one that establishes by its very own progress forward an increasingly intractable barrier to that progress: by compressing necessary labor (and gaining more surplus labor) it also compresses the pool of workers it can exploit." Jasper Bernes, "The Double Barricade and the Glass Floor," *Communization and Its Discontents*, ed. Benjamin Noys (New York: Minor Compositions, 2011) 157-72.
20. This distance indexes the waning significance of a patriarchal relation, which now seems unable to function as a compass or a map for the social: despite the insistence that the father-son relation has some purchase or insight available to it, the only thing it offers is a false promise that eclipses both the maternal relation of care and social reproduction within the family and the chance of creating a new social form capable of collectively shaping a viable, equal future outside of the family.
21. Fredric Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia, or, Can We Imagine the Future?" *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005) 288.
22. Steven Amsterdam, *Things We Didn't See Coming* (New York: Pantheon, 2010) 145.
23. Amsterdam, *Things* 7.
24. *ibid.*
25. *Things* 23.
26. Eric Cazdyn names and identifies, in medical, cultural, global, and economic fields, a new chronic temporality of the contemporary impasse — a key component of which is the shift from treatment and cure to triage and placation. See Eric Cazdyn, *The Already Dead* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012).
27. *Things* 184.
28. *Cruel Optimism* 63.
29. *Things* 101.
30. *ibid.*
31. *ibid.*
32. *Cruel Optimism* 63-64. Emphasis mine.
33. Benanav, "Misery and Debt."
34. *Graphs* 29.

35. *Things* 122.
36. Thanks to Alexandra Carruthers and Adam Carlson for talking over this point.
37. Maria Mies has referred to this as “superexploitation.” See Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed, 1999) 48. According to Silvia Federici, as such, the structure of class exploitation itself remains generic in nature. See Silvia Federici, “Preface,” *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2009) 7-10.
38. In Fredric Jameson’s commentary on the unemployed at the climax of *Representing Capital*, he develops the category of the absolutely superfluous, as does Marx in Chapter 25, as a constitutive element of the capitalist mode of production, and as a group beyond the reserve army of the proletariat. It should be noted that this remains a structural position, not an ontological one. So that as Jameson urges us, earlier in his book and against Giorgio Agamben, “the destitution of unemployment is the more fundamental and concrete form, from which such later conceptualizations [such as, bare life] derive: what is concrete is the social, the mode of production, the humanly produced and historical; metaphysical conceptions such as those involving nature or death are ideological derivations of that more basic reality.” Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital* (London: Verso, 2011) 125.
39. Maya Andrea Gonzalez, “Communization and the Abolition of Gender,” *Communization and Its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles*, ed. Benjamin Noys (New York: Minor Compositions, 2011) 227.
40. Nicholas Brown, “One, Two, Many Ends of Literature,” *Mediations* 24.2 (Spring 2009) 90-101.
41. Here it needs to be made clear that the specific economic context of my consideration is the center of this phase of capitalist accumulation, in Giovanni Arrighi’s sense, that is, the United States of America thought of in the context of the global system of capital. A counterexample would be that China has refused to invest heavily in fixed capital, so that it can maintain a larger working body of the population. This example is necessarily complicated by recent reports of an economic downturn in China: “Analysts and government planners are now resigned to the fact that the growth rate in 2012 will slip under the once-magic (and numerologically auspicious) figure of 8 percent.” Mark McDonald, “China’s Economy: Apocalypse Soon?” *International Herald Tribune* (9 July 2012) <http://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/09/watching-the-china-stress-index-its-rising/?_r=0>.
42. Fredric Jameson, “The Future as Disruption,” *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2005) 232.

House and Field: The Aesthetics of Saturation

Marija Cetinic

This essay is situated seasonally within the context of autumn, with its own seasonal discontents. Autumn here indexes not a respite from the anticipated relentlessness of winter, but rather a decay or a waning. These "signs of autumn," rather than the free play of signs, articulate something about a major form of contemporary experience and its recent history: not an experience of slippage, disjunction, or difference, but of suffusion and density — of saturation and stasis — that unfold as decline. Autumn marks what feels like a terminal sense of crisis and contradiction that permeates contemporary life in the age of late capitalism.

The term "Signs of Autumn" is drawn from the French historian Fernand Braudel's claim that an economic stage of financial expansion — the transfer of investment from production to speculative finance — is a "sign of autumn." That is, that the growth of speculative capital or financialization is not a sign of the increasing strength of the economic order, but is rather symptomatic of a development precursive to the onset of terminal decline. The growth of speculative capital is correlated to *saturated* conditions of the real economy: conditions of overproduction and over-accumulation from which "fictitious capital" provides an escape valve by offering an expanded field of investment. In other words, the redirection of capital to financial markets indicates a saturated field of productive processes. Such a relation is characteristic of what Robert Brenner calls "the long downturn" from 1973 to 1993, during which the declining rate of profit in the industrial sector was offset by the growth of financial markets. Arguably, it is the relation of this financial expansion to the real economy that ultimately resulted in the bursting of speculative technology and housing "bubbles" in 2002 and 2008. As Giovanni Arrighi has argued, the economic hegemony of the United States may have now reached a terminus at which the speculative market upon which it relied is reined in by persistent contradictions of the real economy that unfold as crises. In other words, the financial expansion of the economy — which compensated for over-production and over-accumulation in the first instance — is itself saturated.

Autumn, then, means something different now; it functions a-seasonally. It does not

foreshadow the brutal discontent of winter nor anticipate the emergence of the cruel optimism of spring. While we might, as Jameson notes, have become accustomed to the rhythms of boom and bust, “to a recurrence from which the system always recovers in a new way, stronger and more unforeseeably prosperous than ever before,” what Marx is describing when he describes the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation, as Aaron Benanav and *Endnotes* argue,

is not a “crisis” in the sense usually indicated by Marxist theory, i.e., a periodic crisis of production, consumption, or even accumulation. [Rather] in and through these cyclical crises, a secular crisis emerges, a *crisis of the reproduction of the capital-labour relation itself*.¹

For the latter, for labor, this means that more and more unemployed workers will be unable to reinsert themselves into the reproduction process becoming absolutely redundant to the needs of capital. For capital, this crisis registers not just as overaccumulation but as an overconcentration of capital in circulatory technologies, rather than as an expansion or restructuring of production as such. Indeed, as Jasper Bernes notes in the recent collection on *Communization and its Discontents*, “circulation no longer shrouds production in the mystifying forms of false equivalence, but penetrates it, disperses it laterally, and submits it to complex mediations” via finance, education, health care, and information technologies.² The double-bind of an autumnized capitalist totality, in other words, presents itself topologically not just as unevenness but as a limit at which the reproduction of labor-power figures secondarily to the more immediate imperative to circulate. In other words, the very form through which capital and labor relate — i.e., production and reproduction — reaches terminal saturation. And what turns out to have reached terminus for Bernes is not just the figurability of a radically different future, but even continuity as such.

But what Bernes and *Endnotes* identify as a fairly recent economic phenomenon has for quite some time posed for Jameson a problem for art, or more specifically the “end of art,” a problem at least logically if not temporally linked to a claim about the “end of history.” If, as Jameson wrote in his 1994 essay “‘End of Art’ or ‘End of History’?”, the suffusion of the world by the market figures as a fabric sewn shut (“the entire world... suddenly sewn up into a total system from which no one can secede”), then to think a rupture of that immobilization of our imaginative capacity insists upon a material intervention, an attention to the thread of the fabric and its forms of binding.³

We can turn here to an instance of a formal engagement within the spatial dilemma identified by Jameson. Operating within a context entirely subsumed by an economic logic that violently discards anything or anyone that does not contribute to the profitable deployment of surplus, a context referred to as the housing crisis, or here perhaps, the *crisis of the house*, Rachel Whiteread builds a cube.

House

House, installed in 1993, is the cement casting of the interior of a condemned three-story Victorian house located on 193 Grove Road in East London.⁴ Rachel Whiteread constructed the work by spraying liquid concrete into the structure's empty shell before its walls were removed. It remained the final house on the street; the other properties on Grove Road had already been demolished to make way for redevelopment. The street was due for demolition when Whiteread, in conjunction with the commissioning body Artangel, and with the permission of the local council, took over the last remaining empty house and turned it into a mold for a sculpture. She won the annual Turner Prize for best young British artist in 1993 — the first woman to win the prize.

House engages in a logic of spatial occupation — the construction of a momentary material intervention in capitalist time and space — through the construction of a total barricade, a cement shell structure defending an interior void space against an outside that brings an imminent dematerialization as devaluation. It arrests the loss that the house already-is through a construction of the *form* of its disappearance: spraying cement into an inside to preemptively trace the subsequent peeling away of its exterior materials. But even this tenuous distinction between inside and outside fails to hold. The hollowness of Whiteread's cast suggests the insufficiency of its own defensive covering; merely a shell, a surface, it remains vulnerable to both the useless vacancy of its domestic interior and to the awaiting bulldozer equipped to flatten this unprofitable site that momentarily paralyzes future accumulation.

House does delay the bulldozer. Unambiguous in its insufficiency, however, *House's* intervention is *not merely* the exposure of the contradictions of exploitation, though the abstract grey cube does formally engage us with the contradictions of urban development through capital projects, of the residual materials of gentrification, and of the real consequences of economic crises that jeopardize the growth of capital. *House's* intervention is also *not* an intervention; that is, it does not represent an attempt to move outside the realm of art into some supposed "real world" in which it challenges the proposed demolition of 193 Grove Road. Rather, as Jacques Rancière cautions in *Dissensus*: "Displacing art's borders does not mean leaving art, that is making the leap from 'fiction' (or 'representation') to reality" because "practices of art do not provide forms of awareness or rebellious impulses *for* politics," nor, Rancière continues, "do they take leave of themselves to become forms of collective political action."⁵ For Rancière, in other words, art's interventionist capacity is immanent to the spatial fabric of "art's borders" as such. *House* figures its attention to the pressing issues raised by the house through a close aesthetic or formal consideration of them. And thus its form is figured as the house's persistence, the persistence to and exacerbation of the crisis to economic growth that it represents: an aesthetic persistence that affects the landscape of the visual by materializing the residue of a house that is both *really* absent, and that *really* remains in our field of view.

The formal persistence of the house, the cement materialization of its

dematerialization, is marked, significantly, by the heaviness and stillness of its posture. It indexes its own uselessness, its immobility, attempting to occupy a temporality inconsistent with the accumulative logic of the flow of capital. 193 Grove Road presents a material barrier to such accumulation that, while it stands, blocks reinvestment and redevelopment on its site. Growth necessitates its devaluation or destruction because it has been deemed dead capital; because it no longer functions in the housing market as profitable; because it presents a barrier to growth; because it indexes excess. As Marx states in Part 2 of *Theories of Surplus Value*,

[M]achinery which is not used is not capital. Labor which is not exploited is equivalent to lost production. Raw material which lies unused is not capital. Buildings which are either unused or remain unfinished, commodities which rot in warehouses — all this is destruction of capital.⁶

So 193 Grove Road is this kind of rotting outside of the profitability of property. And Whiteread's cast of the space formally registers this stasis, the momentary loss to capital. Her literal concretization of the house makes visible art's relation to a logic of circulation.

The density of Whiteread's material indexes a resistance to growth. There is an explicit structural closure here which does *not*, however, indicate that "there is no alternative" to an economic logic which dictates that these houses in East London on this particular street need to be destroyed to make way for capital redevelopment. It is a closure that does *not* indicate that we are closed to the imagining of any other possible alternative to such logic, but precisely that *closure is itself an alternative*. That closure, formalized here as density, blockage, immobility — *as cement* — indexes a kind of sabotage, a threat posed by the halting of movement, a refusal to get out of the way for the inexorable logic of capitalism. In rendering solid the residue of 193 Grove Road, Whiteread's *House* as a house registers a withdrawal from value. For Marx, devaluation is value that is at rest in any particular state for more than a moment; this momentary stoppage to circulation, here due to the superfluity of a property which no longer yields profit and which stands in the way of a redevelopment project, is countered by its necessary destruction. Then, growth can resume, equilibrium can be re-achieved, accumulation can begin again on the very site of what has been destroyed. To withdraw then from this particular unfolding logic of overaccumulation-devaluation is either 1) to exacerbate overaccumulation by multiplying the presence of those unused, rotting material residues, that which is no longer capital, or 2) to arrest or suspend that motion or metamorphosis through which capital circulates and which always includes necessary devaluations to counter the tendency towards overaccumulation.

We might argue, of course, that *House* merely constructs another object of value, an art object, inside of, or as a replacement to, what has been devalued, and thereby

immediately re-enters the unfolding economic logic at work.⁷ *House*, that is, withdraws from the housing market to enter the art market with its own logics of circulation, its own investments in gentrification and speculation, its own intimate embeddedness in financial and cultural capital. But there is an insistence here that presses upon us to think *House* as *a house* in its unrelenting and absolute proximity to the domestic residence whose site it occupies. And we might say then that it was the resoluteness of this proximity, cemented there, its realism, that demanded the ultimate destruction of Whiteread's work. That insofar as *House* was still that house on 193 Grove Road, it too interrupted the flow of redevelopment, it too represented an overaccumulation that was blocking a certain economic progress, and it too necessitated demolition. In Whiteread's formal reconfiguration of the house into, simply, "raw material which lies unused," she has not explicitly altered the scale or the form of this already uninhabitable architecture, but has rendered material the impossibility of the structure's existence outside of the logic of value-form.

On January 11, 1994, Tower Hamlets London Borough Council voted to tear down the structure. *House* was demolished by a mechanical digger in two hours.

Field

By way of conclusion, we turn briefly to *Sunflower Seeds*, a field of one hundred million porcelain "seeds," each individually hand painted by 1,600 Chinese workers, and strewn across the vast floor space of the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. The piece was conceptualized by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, commissioned by the Tate Modern, and opened in October 2010.⁸

Ai Weiwei's instructions for engaging with the piece insisted on the visitors' full immersion in the landscape. The field of seeds could be touched, run through, laid in, held, stolen. This relational approach is typical of the art commissioned for the space which often involves the viewer's full sensory interaction, and is further characteristic of the turn in contemporary art toward what Nicolas Bourriaud calls *relational aesthetics* (1998). In his central text that defines relational practice in art, Bourriaud describes the possibility of a *relational* art as one that takes as its "theoretical horizons the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space."⁹ Insisting on art's intervention in and effect on human intersubjectivity, Bourriaud argues that "art is the place that produces a specific sociability" because it "tightens the space of relations."¹⁰ What is implicit is a belief that collaboration and participation *as such* are political practices that can directly alter the field of social relations.

Within forty-eight hours of the opening of *Sunflower Seeds*, the installation was restricted by a roped perimeter delimiting the proximity to the piece. The Tate offered a statement:

It is no longer possible to walk on the surface of the work, but visitors can

walk close to the edges of the sunflower seed landscape on the west and north sides. Although porcelain is very robust, we have been advised that the interaction of visitors with the sculpture can cause dust which could be damaging to health following repeated inhalation over a long period of time. In consequence, Tate, in consultation with the artist, has decided not to allow members of the public to walk across the sculpture.¹¹

The seeds are deemed hostile to the subject. The shards of porcelain dust can become lodged in your lungs if you breathe them in, and eventually kill you. The institutional imperative here, under the auspices of protecting the subject's health and well-being, is an enforced disengagement from any direct relation with the materiality of the art. The irony is that the Tate refuses to recognize that the fatal force immanent to the porcelain seeds, even if unanticipated, cannot simply be withdrawn from the installation; their toxicity is at once a radical critique of the unquestioned positive effect of relational aesthetics, and, a formal materialization, in the reproducible homogeneity of the seeds, of the specter of abstract labor with a total indifference to the concrete usage of the objects produced. The Tate protects its viewers against this unforeseen rupture.

In its direct intervention on the viewer's corporeal conditions of viewing, the museum is exposed as not merely a symbolic ligament to the regime of the sensible but rather as a force regulating both what and how people see and, more to the point, what they can and cannot do with their bodies. On one hand, then, it's impossible not to recognize the Tate Modern and its counterparts as in a strong sense biopolitical — if you breathe the dust you'll die, so don't breathe the dust. On the other hand, though, the realization of this force is first and foremost spatial — like a painting, you can only look at the seeds from a distance. In the injunction to stay back, then, what the Tate insists upon is an abstracted whole of what the Chinese workers serialized into bits.

Abstraction here, as enforced by the Tate's defensive regulation on the viewer's posture, protects the museum not only from potential liability as well as the highly likely theft of the porcelain seeds (a mountain of 100,000 seeds sold at Sotheby's in London for over half a million dollars), but also registers a latent commitment to abstraction as an aesthetic and regulatory practice grounded in consensus. Juliet Bingham, the curator of the show, articulates with sweeping neutrality and the annulment of dissensus how abstraction functions as little more than a safety valve:

Ai Weiwei's...commission, *Sunflower Seeds*, is a beautiful, poignant and thought-provoking sculpture. The thinking behind the work lies in far more than just the idea of walking on it. The precious nature of the material, the effort of production and the narrative and personal content create a powerful commentary on the human condition.¹²

But in its real abstraction as an uninhabitable field of grey, Ai Weiwei's piece returns us to the abstraction of the grey liquid cement of Whiteread's *House*. In *Sunflower Seeds*, however, there are at least three registers of abstraction: 1) The flat horizontality of greyness saturating the floor of the Turbine Hall figures abstraction as saturation; that is, the totalizing homogeneity of the structure, its generalizable greyness, when viewed from the permitted distance, formalizes a conception of suffusion or exhaustion; 2) The abstraction of the multiplicity and reproducibility of the endless porcelain seeds indexes the abstraction of labor, or, in other words, the appropriation of human activity into empty performances of abstract time wherein all forms of labor are reduced to the same kind of labor until all they have in common is that of being the expenditure of human labor power in the abstract; 3) Abstraction as form. The prescribed uninhabitability of the field of seeds reconfigures its surface as an abstract plane. Insofar as it can now only function as a deserted, vacant landscape, rather than a series of individualized encounters, the piece withdraws from instrumentality while marking the limits of aesthetic practice.

And it is precisely at the conjuncture of these three abstractions that a certain utopian impulse can manifest itself as a refiguration of space through a thinking of unemployment as exploitation and a pressing upon the closed logic of profit that saturates all possibility. On December 9, 2010, in central London, thousands of students and others gather to protest as Britain's Parliament narrowly passes a proposal to raise university tuition fees significantly — nearly tripling them — as part of a set of austerity programs that target education. That same day a group of the student protestors march into the Tate Modern and, without asking, walk onto the uninhabited grey abstract field of Ai Weiwei's *Sunflower Seeds*. This is not a self-presentation as a space of democracy, participation, and openness. Nor is it a direct engagement with the regulating policies of the Tate Modern; that is, it is not a negation of the prohibition against immersion in the art space. The unanticipated occupation of the space by the students, in its unambiguous traversal of the site, is also a traversal of the very questions of participation or immersion as *such* when prescribed from within the borders of art and posed as singularly relevant to aesthetic practice.

The demands of the students are not directed toward the existing powers at work here, but rather constitute a marking of the symbolic limits of the struggle. This is not a performative gesture of subversion. The cut in the smooth abstraction of *Sunflower Seeds* on the order of students as labor — students whose future labor has already been sold in the form of debt, students whose future employment has already vanished, students who are unemployed before ever having been employed — that cut reconfigures the flat field of Turbine Hall through a practice of polemics that does not unfold as dialogue or negotiation, but that is itself already what is to be said, and how it is to be done. Occupying the space of Turbine Hall is a generalization of the students' occupation of the streets of London; the urban geography of the city is re-mapped such that, whatever area the students find themselves in becomes a potential political site,

a space to be seized. It is a spatial escalation wherein property is rendered that which belongs to everyone. The circle cutting across and constituting a re-formation of the given field is a subtraction from the logic of circulation that governs the space. The unanticipated effect of this subtraction, like the subtraction from devaluation that Whiteread's *House* figures, makes clear the contradictions between content and form by traversing the legibility of demands that remain entrenched in a symbolic logic. Their non-demand is more than an accident: it is the expression of their commitment to non-identity, to understanding struggle as an opportunity not to affirm the identity "student" or "indebted" but to negate its premise in property. Thus without content, their practice politicizes the very forms of urban distribution: the city becomes a field for struggle, rather than a map of what delimits it. The students' formal intervention is contingent on their collectivization of aesthetics, as is their self-negation.

Notes

1. Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One* (London: Verso, 2011) 147-48, and *Endnotes* and Aaron Benanav, "Misery and Debt: On the Logic and History of Surplus Populations and Surplus Capital," *Endnotes 2* (April 2010).
2. Jasper Bernes, "The Double Barricade and the Glass Floor," *Communization and Its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2011) 161.
3. Fredric Jameson, "'End of Art' or 'End of History'?" *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998) 91.
4. See <<http://www.luhringaugustine.com/artists/rachel-whiteread#/images/48/>>
5. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2010) 149.
6. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value: Volume 2* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969) 495.
7. For elaboration on some of the recent debates around the financialization of art, see Andrea Fraser, "There's No Place Like Home / L'1% C'est Moi" (*Continent 2* [3] [2012]: 186-201), and Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011). Fraser elaborates an argument for an art discourse situated within a deeply conflictual social field wherein "the apparent contradictions between the critical and political claims of art and its economic conditions are not contradictions at all but rather attest to the vitality of the art world as a site of critique and contestation, as these practices develop in scope and complexity to confront the challenges of globalization, neoliberalism, post-Fordism, new regimes of spectacle, the debt crisis, right-wing populism, and now historic levels of inequality" (29).
8. See <<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/unilever-series-ai-weiwei-sunflower-seeds>>. See also Christian Sorace's "China's Last Communist: Ai WeiWei" (*Critical Inquiry* 40:2 [Winter 2014] 396-419) in which he discusses Ai Weiwei's celebrity status in the Western art world and the ways in which the reception of his work has simplified the contradictions of his project. "Ai's branding as an icon of liberalism and multiparty democracy," Sorace writes, "reveals more about the fantasies the West harbors toward China than it does about Ai's own political-aesthetic interventions" (396).
9. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 2002) 14.
10. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* 15-16.
11. Juliet Bingham, "About the Exhibition (Update: Friday 22 October 2010)." <<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/unilever-series-ai-weiwei-sunflower-seeds>>
12. Juliet Bingham, "The Unilever Series: Ai Weiwei" <<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/unilever-series-ai-weiwei-sunflower-seeds>>.

The Cultural Work of Architecture: Fixed and Social Capital at Fiat

Jeff Diamanti

This truth is, that just as there cannot exist a class political economy, so too there cannot be founded a class aesthetic, art, or architecture, but only class criticism of the aesthetic, of art, of architecture, of the city itself.¹

Just under a decade after the two oil shocks of the 1970s, what was until then the single largest automobile manufacturing plant in Europe closed its doors. Only a few years later, the former Fiat factory in Lingotto, Turin reopened not as a manufacturer of commodities but as a cultural complex. Of course Fiat's decision to reinvest a significant portion of its capital into an ostensibly unproductive capital asset — a building that on the face of things produced nothing, and instead housed cultural objects, leisure activities, education facilities, and entrepreneurial startup space — was anything but a free gift back to the Piedmontese economy, of which they were fondly considered "La Mamma." Chairman Giovanni Agnelli reportedly owned nearly a quarter of the companies on the Milan stock exchange in the 1970s and with Fiat alone controlled 16.5 percent of Italy's industrial investment in research.² The board's response to overaccumulation during the recession was a combination of outsourcing, property development, and what Josh Whitford calls "guided growth."³ Understood as a historically specific economic strategy, Fiat's investment in culture alongside the then-new research and development facility elsewhere in the city and manufacturing expansion into the Italian South, Brazil, and India was a specific wager on how to extract future surplus value from a population that its own factories had until then organized as worker and non-worker. Its post-retrofit renominization, known now simply as Fiat Works, is perhaps no accident, but instead an insistence on its postindustrial dynamism: Fiat Works.

Politically this essay's concern with Fiat's flagship factory will surely not strike most readers as fortuitous given Fiat's role as both an antagonist in and a setting for what in

the English-speaking world has come to be known as the birth of Italian Autonomous (and later Post-) Marxism. In fact what strikes me as necessary still, some forty years on, is precisely the relationship between the political economy of architecture in places like the Italian North and the emergence of two competing though in a strong sense mirror positions on the nature of the new economy: on one hand, a widespread enthusiasm at the level of macroeconomic policy in the cultural and creative content of what were then new ideas about the coming postindustrial society; and on the other, the political blowback against those same economic transformations which in more recent memory has been dubbed, thanks to Silvia Federici's critique of it, immaterial labor theory.⁴ The latter is but one of the many theoretical positions that would emerge out of the heated years preceding the factory conversion at Lingotto. And while the explanatory and rhetorical power of their theses on affect and rent in what they call Post-Fordism is not in question here, what strikes me as urgent is the need to consider earlier counter-tendencies in proletarian theory from which that more popular and influential one emerged: namely the aesthetically attuned insights into economics made available by the criticism of Marxist architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri on the one hand; and the split, on the other hand, precipitated between Mario Tronti and Antonio Negri with the publication of Tronti's 1966 *Operai e capitale* (*Workers and Capital*, much of which had already appeared in *Quaderni rossi* a few years earlier), in no small part because the recent shorthand "Italian theory" occludes the heterogeneity of what was arguably the most rigorous period of Marxist analysis in the postwar period. And the urgency of considering other directions in Italian Marxism in order to understand the kinds of cultural strategies developing at firms like Fiat is also not due to a nostalgia for a more militant period of struggle but is rather born out of a concern for a more politically attentive, and we might say older, materialism (hence the interest in architecture, buildings, urbanism, and the economics of fixed capital during the transition to intangible assets) than the one on offer by immaterial labor theory.

As a work of architecture, Renzo Piano's retrofit beginning in 1982 makes murky the distinction between avant-garde architecture in Italy during the previous two decades — a period characterized by experiments and hypotheses largely concerned with typologies of collective living and megastructural interventions by Superstudio, Archizoom, and the group known now as La Tendenza — and the physical needs of big industry. A discipline imagined in the postwar period as uniquely political in its capacity to make concrete modes of socialist belonging through strikingly modernist forms, architecture, and architectural theory had by the 1970s reached a widely recognized terminus point.

Manfredo Tafuri in *Architecture and Utopia*, perhaps his most famous book in the English-speaking world, insisted that the professional impasse was written in the stars because "the fate of capitalist society is not at all extraneous to architectural design."⁵ What it meant for the two to share a fate on Tafuri's account was that architects had

a defeated and yet critical “task” ahead of them: namely, the political function of architecture consisted in its capacity to put “the working class, as organized in its parties and unions, face to face with the highest levels achieved by the dynamics of capitalist development, and relating particular moments to general designs.”⁶ The “particular moments” of both the “working class” and “capitalist development,” here, are imagined at a much larger scale than their proximity in the factory, and so the modernist commitment to functional or figurative architectural forms of socialism such as collective housing or even the *casa del popolo* (house of the people) is made, at least from a political perspective, obsolete. Though it was inconceivable for architecture to distribute or make space for socialism, Tafuri nonetheless saw in its specific material qualities the capacity to make available a version of totality, or “general designs,” to a “working class” undergoing rapid transformation. Tafuri thus reestablishes the same critique of radical Viennese urbanism he had been developing in the radical journal *Contrapiano*, except that in the case of the Italian postwar North, class composition and urban forms of economic planning make architectural *interventions* virtually impossible. For the same reason, however, Tafuri recognized the indispensability of architecture to a working-class standpoint because of its capacity to distribute both an aesthetic and economic materialism. The “search for architectural alternatives” to capitalism, his final provocation insists, “is a contradiction in terms” not because architecture was no match for capitalism, but because architecture at that moment had become a constitutive moment in the urban plan “of the technician, of the organizer of building activity, and of the planner, within the compass of the new forms of capitalist development.”⁷

Though Tafuri’s critique of what he calls an architectural ideology and its corresponding operative criticism is often understood as a dismissal of neo-rationalism or apolitical formalism in architecture, his argument through the 1960s and 1970s had far more to do with what I will here explain is the architectural logic of capitalism than with a capitalist logic of architecture. The former had always been at work through what Tafuri called “the utopia of form” and architecture’s capacity to distribute both perspectives and people, but with the rise of Decision theory and the cybernetic revolution in economics, he imagined it had become a far more immediate impasse to something like a “radical antidesign.”⁸ In the cybernetic paradigm of economic development, Tafuri, wedding his criticism to leading design and planning theorist Horst Rittel’s, insisted that the old opposition between plan and value had fallen away, and in its wake was a model in which “the very structure of the plan...generates its systems of evaluation.”⁹ The idea advanced by Rittel and taken seriously here by Tafuri was that growth in the new economy would consist of a version of surplus value planned in advance by state and private enterprise, and that the consequences for working-class composition (and the architecture that would distribute it) would be transformative in unpredictable ways. The integration of architecture into building cycles, economic zoning, and long-term regional plans

signaled to Tafuri that the state and the private sector had signed a new accord putting architectural development at the core of its plans. Thus in Tafuri's account, the postindustrial phase of capitalist development required architecture's capacity to rationalize the distribution of different kinds of value (geometric, social, functional, and property values to name the most important).

Without question the most material of all the classically aesthetic orders — which is to say the most voluminous, heavy, and static form of art according to both Kant and Hegel — architecture will turn out not accidentally to accelerate a new phase of value-time necessary for postindustrialization. In Turin especially, Tafuri's particular attention to the overlap between urban planning and capitalist development takes the Fiat car company's economic and architectural activities as one and the same. Our purpose here is thus to reconsider Tafuri's claim that architecture sits at the core of postindustrial growth in relation to the other "Italian" position associated with immaterial labor theory, and to forward a modest hypothesis about what the capitalist world must look like for us to agree that there is something of an architectural logic to growth during the simultaneous dematerialization of the economy.

Fordism and Futurism; "Architecture or Revolution"

Fiat's wager on future economic development was an immediate response to an historic impasse in the Fordist paradigm of value creation. The board's decision to refunction its factory in Lingotto says as much about its own historical position within a politically hostile labor market — Fiat's other factories in Turin were of course key sites for labor struggles through the 1960s and 1970s and the historic center of Italian workerism called *operaismo* — as it does about what policy makers and industrial leaders imagined drove economic growth. Two such assumptions worth noting up front are first that intensifications of both the working day and the productive capacity of workers (relative surplus-value by another name) are not the only means in which to valorize capital, and second that a capital asset geared for cultural production and circulation is a sound resolution to a liquidity trap. Neither assumption was entirely new in the 1970s. What was particular, however, was the emergence of a set of macroeconomic commitments within technical discourses on value that sought to generalize the kinds of bets unfolding at Fiat (more on this below).

Italian manufacturers' relationship to the question of technology and progress, when Fiat-Lingotto initially gained notoriety earlier in the century, was framed by at least two factors. On one side, an increasingly attractive Fordist mode of production appeared capable of transitioning continental Europe's agrarian economy, then still only sparsely punctuated by city states, to a national labor market needed for mass production; and Futurism on the other side as an avant-garde ideology adequate to aestheticizing and universalizing Fordism. Taken as combatable modes of wedding material and labor together as an industrial force, Fordism and Futurism characterized the early stages of Fiat's dominance in the North and in the architectural imaginary

of twentieth-century modernism.

F.T. Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto" in 1909 was not a little certain about the source of their modernity, or what they modestly understood as "the very first sunrise on earth."¹⁰ Fueled on "machine gun fire," the "new beauty" of speed put the automobile at the core of their engineered future. Museums, libraries, and cemeteries marked and maintained the slowness of the past. Only with "factories suspended from the clouds by the thread of their smoke" would the "great crowds agitated by work," on Marinetti's account, bring modernity to a pace acceptable to its aesthetic, liberating them not from but to work.¹¹ The romanticization of war and its aesthetic which we tend to associate with Futurism today only served half their project: the other took what would become the Fordist factory as the ground zero of a new society, of which war was only the loudest expression. Thirteen years later they would get Il Duce, the same year Giacomo Mattè Trucco finalized Fiat's plans for its flagship factory of the future. Within the decade, Mussolini would use Fiat's heavenly fortress to stage Italy's own take on the fascist factory rally, filmed and distributed for all Europe's modernists to eat up.

Upon returning from a tour of Detroit and Chicago at the cusp of World War I, Fiat owner and founder, V.G. Agnelli, commissioned company engineer, Mattè Trucco, to design the largest and most efficient industrial complex in Europe. Indeed for automobile manufacturing, Fiat-Lingotto came second only to Ford's River Rouge Complex in Michigan. The latter, finished in 1917 by Albert Kahn, translated Frederick Winslow Taylor's techniques for scientifically managing the division of manual labor into the assembly line for Ford's burgeoning empire. Each of the Lingotto's five floors was designated for a distinct phase of automobile manufacturing with raw materials entering at ground level; assembly, motor calibration, upholstery, and finishing from floors one through five, all tied together by the first helicoidal ramp in the world made from reinforced concrete; and a full kilometer long oval open-air test track on the roof. The Taylorist logic informing its layout was a direct response to a factory occupation of Fiat's older and more open plant in Turin by workers looking for syndicalist control of production in 1921. Sparked in no small part by Amadeo Bordiga and Antonio Gramsci's newly founded Italian Communist Party (PCI) in January of 1921, workers at the beginning of the decade, especially in the North, were encouraged as much from the left as from Mussolini's *Il Popolo d'Italia*. Mussolini's newly minted fascists called for social and economic reform and a nationalization program nearly indistinguishable from the platform developed by the PCI in Livorno, though as two theoretical positions on value and distribution, the two couldn't have had less in common.

Internally, Fiat workers then as in the 1960s and 1970s made no mistake about which flag to fly. Theirs was red throughout, unduly flanked outside by the black shirts of Italy's other radical wing. Agnelli's appointment to Mussolini's senate in 1923 effectively sealed the company's political future, however, and with it the interim

success of its ambitions for a monopoly in the region. Fiat's new factory, in other words, installed an organizational logic as much imported from Detroit as from the National Fascist Party's (PNF) Roman headquarters. Designed for an ideal division of optimized labor — a combination of cooperation for increased output and division for specialized assembly — Lingotto announced a future relation between labor and capital emblematic of advanced industrial production across the globe. And though the factory would outlive the PNF later in the century, one was unthinkable without the other in the 1920s.

That the Lingotto factory came to emblemize modernist architecture for both Reynier Banham and Le Corbusier, and a future coterminous with fascism for the Futurists at Capri and Mussolini himself, is because what makes it modern in both positions is a formalization of an economic promise in cultural terms. What for Banham is "the most nearly Futurist building ever built" arrives on the scene in the art world through Werner Graff's visualization of *de Stijl* reloaded in a 1922 issue of *G* where the Turin factory brackets a more militant declaration of Bauhaus outlook: "Uninfluenced by the methods of mechanical technology, the new and greater technology begins — the technology of tensions, invisible motions, action-at-a-distance, and speeds unimaginable now in 1922."¹² The promise of a technological future for Graff, as for Marinetti and Mussolini, expressed itself in the new Fiat factory through a building and workforce understood not as complimentary but as singular. Elementarism (a term introduced and canonized in *de Stijl* by the Russian constructivist, El Lissitzky) referred in the early modernist aesthetic as much to the rationalism of an architecture as to the technologization of the variable side of capital, which is to say human labor power itself. With newly available reinforced concrete and a technique of ribbing enabling a seamless spiral ramp to link floors one through five, Fiat-Lingotto materialized workflow not just through management but also in the building itself. The irony is that Mattè Trucco's layout was actually more rigid than flexible as a result of its concrete flow. The larger complex at Mirafiori resolved much of Lingotto's engineering flaws in 1937 (whose guest of honor during the opening ceremony was none other than Mussolini himself) by separating workers into discreet buildings while maintaining flow with assembly belts and subcontracting. Still, the North's largest employer became so by understanding the project of mass production as an architectural one first, and a management one second. The postindustrial promise half a century later would be that technology had finally liberated mankind from heavy lifting; the claim in its Fordist mode is that workers, given the right buildings, have finally become technological.

No one took the singularization of worker and machine more seriously in the 1920s than Le Corbusier. That three aerial shots of Fiat's Lingotto factory line the final page of *Towards a New Architecture*, as the visual equivalent of "architecture or revolution," should come as no surprise given the book's core conviction in a machinic modernity.¹³ If the progress of enlightenment had stalled at some point in the nineteenth century

for Le Corbusier, it wasn't because mechanization had come to organize most of social and political life, but rather that it hadn't organized it enough. Between the advancement of production, and what were for him dead styles of an architectural prehistory, lies the fundamental contradiction between the home and the factory, which his manifesto aimed to fix. His first order of business then was to make the house a "machine for living in."¹⁴ Industrialization meant for Le Corbusier that "everywhere can be seen machines which serve to produce something and produce it admirably, in a clean sort of way."¹⁵

Le Corbusier's admiration for the "clean sort of way" that modern industry produced things found its most advanced expression in Fiat's factory at Lingotto. In Italy, Fiat's Fordism and Futurism looked to Le Corbusier like a prefiguration of the problem of "architecture or revolution" in no small part because its maximization of the fixed part of capital in the production process and its mechanization of the variable part. Which is to say that Fiat's engineering feat at Lingotto supplied modernism, at least in Le Corbusier's parts of the world, with its aesthetic and economic synthesis. One could therefore say that in the 1920s, at least in the idiom of Le Corbusier's famous either/or, that Italy didn't need a revolution: just Fiat.

Fiat Works

If what is made available in narrating Fordism and Futurism together, though, is a sense of the aesthetic (and in this case architectural) imaginary at the heart of the more technical qualities of that historically specific logic of production — which is to say in more simple terms that art history and economic history are best read not separately but rather as two sides of the same historical process — then Fiat's factory conversion would mark much more than a diversification of the company's assets. What I will suggest now, in other words, is that the conversion of what was once the largest car factory in the world into Europe's largest cultural factory, in an architectural idiom associated with craftsmanship and a sympathy for regionalism, is nothing short of a *material* blueprint for the postindustrial commitment to immaterialization, intangibility, and weightlessness.¹⁶ Which is another way of putting Gail Day's recent claim that the architectural criticism Tafuri developed at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia (IUAV) understood avant-garde negation in the postwar years "as wrapped up with capitalism's modern coming-to-being, its artistic innovations ultimately playing a role in social restructuring."¹⁷ Day's point, which is one she shares with Fredric Jameson in his earlier assessment of Tafuri's contribution to the history of dialectical criticism, is that Tafuri's patience in tracking the force of aesthetic negation in twentieth-century art tells us as much, if not more, about economic development and contradiction than economics itself. As I began to suggest above, this is due in no small part to Tafuri's intuition of a uniquely *architectural* logic of capitalist development; a distributive logic in which material and immaterial elements are brought to bear on the periodicity of space.

Piano's conversion of Fiat's Fordist factory is thus best understood up front as a conversion of its periodicity; a material reconfiguration of the aesthetics of Futurism in order to make space for an after to Fordism. In fact, Piano's earlier and still more famous Centre Pompidou in Paris with Richard Rogers paved the way for an expansion of the cultural sector into heavy industry (indeed, the façade of Pompidou prefigures this expansion), a project whose mandate, Piano explains, "was to find a different tool for making culture and information."¹⁸ Pompidou thus gave an early indication of how architecture would give physical shape to a process of extraction invested in the immateriality of culture and information. The idea there would be to externalize the infrastructure of the building: "utilities are positioned along the west façade and have been color-coded (blue for air, green for water, yellow for electricity, and red for the vertical air circulation systems)" and the "elevators and escalators have been placed upon the support structure, along the façade" in order to make the building's machinic qualities transparent.¹⁹ Pompidou — and in a qualitatively new fashion at Fiat Works a few years later — began working out the aesthetic of a cultural economy in which architecture appeared to do a kind of work while the people inside engaged in activities until then thought of as outside the realm of economic growth.

Pompidou's program to make the infrastructure of the building architectural, which effectively made the working elements of the structure transparent in order to thematize transparency more generally, was in fact the last (and not the first) in a sequence of Piano's work that began with his first three major projects in 1966-70. The first was his earlier firm's initial results in experiments with polyester, plastics, and transportable structures. His Mobile Structure for Sulphur Extraction in 1966 consisted of a steel tension structure that could be erected in a variety of configurations *in situ*, reinforced by a polyester wrap that protected the sulphur mine and machinery from the environment.²⁰ Studio Piano's 1967 Shell Structural System for the Fourteenth Milan Triennale used a similar steel infrastructure to support a transportable and multi-use glass fiber container that could house unlimited activities. And the third, the Italian Industry Pavilion at Expo 1970 in Osaka, Japan used the principles invented in the first two projects and rendered the steel and polyester structural elements into a mobile square where Italy's newest industrial products could be framed by the most forward looking product of them all: postindustrial architecture.

Pompidou is the fourth in a sequence of projects interested in making interior space light and flexible (the two terms most immediately associated with Piano's career more generally) eliminating the gap between façade and structure. The Fiat conversion is thus part of a new sequence, and is more accurately the sequel to what had then become the Building Workshop's first major retrofit at the Schlumberger factory in Paris, 1981-84. Schlumberger's specialization in electronic equipment was at the cutting edge of oil detection and extraction and had launched the company, by the end of the 1970s oil crisis, into what was quickly becoming the center of the economic universe: the energy sector. Schlumberger had, much like Fiat in Turin,

rid itself of a significant portion of its workforce — indeed, on a macroeconomic scale, it was precisely the substitution of oil for coal that had dramatically increased productivity and thus decreased the relative size of the workforce to the rate of output in the manufacturing sector — and so its eight-hectare lot that once housed both workers, industrial manufacturing, and management facilities needed to be reconfigured to accommodate the company's more capital-intensive future. This meant replacing the factory that sat in the center with a garden, and communal spaces for eating and meeting directly beneath and above it housed in a Teflon awning. All the remaining structural elements were left intact, such as trusses and purlins, and the new infrastructural elements were again color-coded based on concrete, fenestration, circulation, and air conditioning. And while outside the building is a landscape architecture that anticipates much of the corporate campus architecture of the next fifty years, the idea at Schlumberger is to “invade” the factory's interior space with the natural elements that form the communal exterior through the planned continuity in color schemes based on botanical seasons. Work time inside the factory, which more concretely is based on the geopolitical and global economic thirst for, and the capital deepening implied by oil, is framed architecturally as the time of natural seasons.

Still owned by Fiat, but financed jointly by Fiat's development company, SITECO, and the city of Turin, Piano's next factory conversion came in four stages starting in 1984, coming in at just over one billion U.S. dollars by the final stage in 2002. The division of labor at the new Fiat is no longer organized around the assembly of a material commodity but rather what is imagined to constitute the multifaceted activities of culture: an exhibition center, cinema, private gallery (funded and supplied by Agnelli's grandson), polytechnic university, concert halls, and a shopping center, all of which, according then to the *Architectural Review*, “constitute such a rich mix of enterprises for whom creativity is crucial that they should spark between them a lively and fertile entrepreneurial ecology.”²¹ Of course the fantasy here is that having space designated for social and cultural activities serve as a stimulus for innovation, and that innovation is a constitutive dimension of future economic development. That the husk of a Fordist factory can ground a value-creating set of activities, though not function as a site of production, however, is a wager on the logical relation between architecture as fixed capital and the accumulation of surplus value in whatever comes after Fordism.

At Fiat, in other words, it wouldn't be nature that drove the architectural imaginary of economic growth, but rather its cultural rhythms. And yet the distinction between the two, between an idea of economic time linked to nature and one linked to culture, would appear in Piano's architectural philosophy not as a contradiction at all, but rather as two sides of the same feature of architecture's unique facility with the “organic.”²² So while the heavy-handed landscaping seen at Schlumberger is more restrained at Lingotto, but nonetheless central to masking the new auxiliary spaces a multi-use

cultural center requires, what instead gets naturalized is what architectural and environmental critic Peter Buchanan calls the building's "primitive consciousness": for the first time, Piano wired the entire structure with smart systems monitoring human movement, external climate, and supplies, all of which is communicated to a "central nervous system."²³ Only this way can the various exhibitions and open spaces on the first and second floors energize the entrepreneurial spirit of its other "incubator units" housing new and small businesses in need of Fiat's bump. As each venture grows, plenty of premium space is available for lease on floors two and three. Higher up is a four-star hotel and departments of the Faculty of Science at the University of Turin. In the middle of Fiat's famous rooftop racetrack sits the helipad and globular conference space, and the sixth floor of the private Agnelli art collection housed in the Pinacoteca Giovanni and Marella Agnelli Gallery emerges to tie the economic limbs of the building down to its cultural spine. Twenty-five pieces ranging from Manet, Renoir, and Matisse to Picasso and, with appropriate historical irony, Italian Futurists Giacomo Balla and Gino Severini, sit in the "Scrigno" (or treasure chest). The collection itself is part of the Agnelli family's estimated fortune of over \$5 billion (USD).

Thus what began on the concourse level as a "fertile entrepreneurial ecology" where startups rubbed shoulders with the creative class — which is to say where the intense capital deepening embodied in the building's conversion has provided the costly means for *cultural* and *creative* production — has upon ascending through to the sixth floor become the opposite: the means of more speculative, managerial, and intangible forms of production in the larger and more expensive spaces approaching roof level are the very cultural objects for which the new factory has been designed to showcase. The fixed cultural assets emerge at the top of the factory where cars used to in order to shore up the admittedly less-valuable capital asset (the building itself) choreographing the Lingotto's workflow. The elasticity between the two forms of capital deepening — architectural on one end and art historical on the other — provides, to use the director's language, the organic composition of postindustrial production. What used to be the geographic center of class struggle in Italy had become by the mid-1980s the "nervous center" of Fiat's international division of labor.

It's also at about this time that Fiat began to diversify its investments and regional stronghold by becoming what we now know as the multi-sector behemoth Fiat Group. So far as workers in Turin were concerned, Fiat's expansion into property development and insurance meant the full-blown urban transformation of, and relation between, capital and labor. The closure of Lingotto, effectively Fiat's international headquarters for over half a century, came at the tail end, rather than at the beginning, of a twofold restructuring scheme. The first phase included breaking up the company effectively into a financial and property developer called Fiat Engineering and SITECO respectively, in addition to its more traditional role as automobile manufacturer. The second phase saw an internal reorganization of the production process itself: the

new Melfi plant in the southern province of Potenza finished in 1993, surrounded by twenty-two subcontractor plants, is emblematic of the new just-in-time strategy we've come to associate with post-Fordist production and is one of many Fiat plants opened globally after the crisis of the 1970s. Phase two was a strategy as much about flexibility as it was about the maximization of fixed capital in the form of robotics in the place of variable capital, i.e., workers.

Layoffs reached 23,000 in 1980 in Turin with productive capacity slowing to 60 percent.²⁴ Meanwhile, Fiat Engineering opened Central Research Fiat (CRF), one of the most ambitious R&D centers in Italy since Olivetti's experiments in the 1950s and 1960s. Where the latter sought to formalize and facilitate an "anti-industrial" "republic of the intellect," Fiat instead committed itself to organizing both immaterial and material forms of production across the space of the city.²⁵ Of course the argument here is not that Fiat is exceptional in its deployment of a new logic of accumulation. Certainly even in Italy its mobilization of capital away from the factory floor proper was facilitated and necessitated by the state through new taxation and financial laws, and the unfolding of a similar logic was visible elsewhere much earlier in the century.²⁶

The introduction of a financial regulator, CONSOB, in the early 1970s is one such example, but perhaps more relevant to the transformation of Fiat-Lingotto is the aftermath of what came to be known as Progetto 80 in 1969-70. Championed by Giorgio Ruffalo at the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Progetto 80 consisted of urban planners, economists, civil servants, and business leaders planning a three-tiered program for future economic and urban development in Italy. Aiming to grow the northern economy by 1980, the program cohered first in the construction of a system of accounting policy changes; second, program budgeting and integrated planning; and third, the regionalization of integrated planning. Unsurprisingly, its "long term perspective" was one grounded not on an intensification of manufacturing exclusively, but instead a model of value creation choreographed by transformed urban relations.²⁷

Perhaps most relevant for the discussion here, Progetto 80 laid the policy necessary to change valuation protocols in the Civil Code for property holdings in 1974. Instead of the "historical cost principle" determining the value of capital assets in which a building's initial cost and value trend attached to its land use determined its long-term value depreciation (and thus to what value it would contribute to the production process), new provisions were put in place to address events that change the asset's economic nature, such as the conversion of a prototypical Fordist factory into a hub for culture. Debates about which method best represented the value of an asset had been raging for decades in the U.S. and U.K. in what is now known as the Cambridge Capital Controversy, or what Ian Steedman, Paul Sweezy, and others on the left called the value controversy — debates that if anything were about how fixed capital could be understood as value-producing in the newly developed science of econometrics

once it was understood as a commodity just like labor. By the 1970s, however, the International Accounting Standards Committee (IASC) sought to globally abandon the historical cost principle on company ledgers and auditing reports. Market value came to replace the law of devaluation, and buildings that would have otherwise been depleted of their congealed value got a new lease on life. With new property law comes a new narrative of property; and instead of a graveyard of dead capital, Fiat was able to expand the capacity of its capital assets to assume the uncanny appearance of workers themselves.

Social Capital and Its Organic Composition

A good part of the Italian left had already anticipated the kinds of transformations unfolding at Fiat at least a decade before the decision to close Lingotto. From the perspective of a Marxist analysis of the basic categories by which capitalism grows — namely the organic composition of capital in which the increase of constant capital (c) which is the capital invested in fixed assets like machinery and buildings, over variable capital (v) spent on labor power, or capital deepening in order to increase labor productivity, defines the general tendency of economic growth — the limit is a natural one, which is to say that it will develop internal to capitalist development, rather than external to it. At a certain point so little labor time is required to produce the same output that the class antagonism between proletariat and bourgeoisie becomes instead an antagonism between those with and those without employment. The organic composition of capital, in other words, has as much to do with economic growth as it does with the sustainability of social relations over economic time. The question then is not whether or not the logical limit to the Fordist value form had been reached by the 1970s (it had) but rather how best to characterize the strategic reactions that were swiftly remaking the shape of economic relations.

Clear already in 1963 to Mario Tronti was that while the traditional site of production in its factory form remained the dominant expression of working-class struggle, surplus value as the *sine qua non* of capitalist accumulation could not be explained or critiqued from the factory floor exclusively. That all of society had become a factory was actually, at least in Tronti's early analysis, a claim not just about the privatization of the city but about the socialization of capital and labor at a definite point of development in the organic composition of capital. On the question of whether or not the composition of capital over time takes more or less variable versus fixed capital (or value from labor as opposed to machines), Tronti adds that an increase in the fixed component always means a simultaneous increase in the "non-paid part of the social working day."²⁸ Tronti doesn't mean simply that unemployment rises as machines do more work but rather that the work done outside of the factory — namely, cultural, intellectual, and creative work, or social reproduction more broadly, including what by the end of the decade would be the most important oversight of all: gendered work — come to constitute more and more of the variable side of capital

once those lucky few with jobs show up to work.

Instead of an intensification of the paid part of the working day, which in Marx's terms would constitute an increase in relative surplus-value, or what we can call the Direct Sphere of Variable Capital (DSVC), Tronti's thesis about the social factory is premised on a claim about the intensification of human labor before it arrives on the labor market, or what we could call here the Indirect Sphere of Variable Capital (ISVC). Tronti's hypothesis that more and more surplus value comes from the reorganization of the ISVC, or "the social factory," is another way of highlighting the social history contained in the organic composition of capital, which is to say that both "v" and "c" and the ratio between the two are results of socially mediated conditions external to the factory at any given moment.

But the intensification of the ISVC brings with it immediate consequences too for the process by which the value embedded in fixed capital is produced, consumed, and valorized over the course of the total workday, in addition to the variable side of capital: "within this process of production," Tronti maintains, social capital "produces, reproduces, and accumulates new capital; it produces-reproduces and accumulates new labor-power" because "at this level the division between necessary labor and surplus-labor does not disappear at all: it is simply generalized, i.e., socialized in the total process of capitalist production."²⁹ So while one side of the organic composition of capital is intensified, the other follows suit by virtue of the social organization *outside* the factory required and implied by a high degree of capital deepening *inside* it. And the final twist to what appears first as a tautology is that the increased value produced in the ISVC is itself the result of form of capital deepening outside the factory in which large-scale capitalists begin investing in the urban means of social reproduction, about which Fiat knew plenty by the time they hired Piano to update their flagship factory.

Thus the transformations that would become both architecturally and politically explicit at Fiat in the following decade, and more generally associated with Post-Fordism during the 1970s through the 1990s — that is, postindustrialization and with it immaterial forms of production — had in Tronti's early estimation little to do with a return to rent or a fundamental breach in the capitalist value form. Rather, the economic and social transformations increasingly becoming paradigmatic during the most intense years of Italian ultra-leftist struggle were logical extensions of tendencies embedded in the most fundamental laws of capitalist accumulation, however misleading their initial appearances were for the traditional left. "Capitalists," Tronti continues, "know this well: the real generalization of the workers' conditions can introduce the appearance of its formal extinction."³⁰ Its formal extinction, however, only appears as a negative image in its organizational forms, which by 1966 across Europe was already breaking apart at the seams. Trade unions, parliamentary parties, and the like continued to take the identity of the working class as the beginning and end of socialism, but its function in the production and valorization of capital had

shifted from beneath its feet. “Because of this,” Tronti concludes, “when the working class politically refuses to become people, it does not close, but opens the most direct way to the socialist revolution,” in no small part due to the emergence of a new phase of value where the ISVC began making up for the shortfall in the DSV. ³¹ As we have already seen, however, the capitalist concern with the working class as such was both the cause and result of capital deepening inside the factory and urban planning outside.

Which is another way of saying that what Piano’s factory conversion made material was the particular architectural relay that would mediate direct and indirect spheres of variable capital in relation to a postindustrial materialism deeply concerned about the nature of value. The idea here, though, has been to read the architectural and aesthetic history of Fiat’s economic transformations in order to distinguish between the types of radical materialisms that would take shape around its factories. Piano’s cultural conversion didn’t merely figure a future growth model as a set of immaterial forms of labor, but instead materialized the architectural side of postindustrial work as the setting in which increasingly indistinguishable spheres of variable capital would get mediated into value. The so-called shift into cognitive, creative, affective, or broadly named immaterial forms of labor, in other words, seems to address only half the picture of postwar political economy. As capital assets, the architecture of Fiat not only coordinates and leverages, but also assumes an active role in the transformation of cultural activities into value, just like its shored-up value in urban fixed capital has as its aim the coordination of the unpaid part of the workday. Thus to the extent that any viable movement of proletariat force is finally able to abolish “the present state of things,” the *state of things* in the age of immaterial assets will remain a very material concern, which is to say that the so-called immaterial, financial, or creative economy never eliminated, but rather intensified, the capacity of architecture to work and for work to congeal in architecture. ³² Piano’s most recent commission for the Stavros Niarchos Cultural Center touted as the “rebirth of Athens” — i.e., the ground zero of late capitalist austerity and ultra-leftist confrontation — should therefore surprise no one when it imagines culture as the bailout package for which we have all been waiting.

Notes

1. Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1976).
2. See John Tagliabue, "Giovanni Tagliabue, Fiat Patriarch and a Force in Italy, Dies at 81," *New York Times* (25 January 2003) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/25/business/giovanni-agnelli-fiat-patriarch-and-a-force-in-italy-dies-at-81.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>>, and Luca Ciferri, "Agnelli — The Uncrowned Monarch of the Italian Motor Industry," *Automotive New Europe* <<http://www.autonews.com/files/euroauto/inductees/agnelli.htm>>.
3. Josh Whitford and Aldo Enrietti, "Surviving the Fall of a King: The Regional Institutional Implications of Crisis at Fiat Auto," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29.4 (December 2005) 771-95.
4. Maurizio Lazzarato's influential essay on "Immaterial Labor" from 1996 usually stands in as the most developed expression of the theory, but I have in mind the even more recent collection on *Crisis in the Global Economy* put out by the UniNomade network on *Semiotext(e)* in which "financialization," "biopower," "cognitive capitalism," "the becoming-rent of profit," and the "new affective enclosures" are all deployed diagnostically to describe, in no uncertain terms, what in Carlo Vercellone's contribution is called "the crisis of the law of labor time-value." The position I am favoring in this paper is not one that understands Post-Fordist capitalism as a break in the long view of capitalism's internal laws, as in the case of the UniNomade position, which is not to say that their work (and Vercellone's in particular) is not endlessly insightful and indispensable to political organizing after 2008.
5. Tafuri, *Utopia*, 179.
6. *Utopia* 172.
7. *Utopia* 182.
8. *Utopia* 179.
9. *Utopia* 175.
10. F.T. Marinetti, "The Futurist Manifesto" <<http://vserver1.cscs.lsa.umich.edu/~crshalizi/T4PM/futurist-manifesto.html>>.
11. Marinetti, "Futurist."
12. Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (New York: Praeger, 1960) 193.
13. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (BN Publishing, 2008 [1923]) 289.
14. Le Corbusier, *New Architecture* 107.
15. *New Architecture* 277.
16. The two best examples of recent architectural criticism to isolate building craftsmanship and critical regionalism are Hal Foster's chapter on "Light Modernity" in *The Art-Architecture Complex* (London: Verso, 2011) 52-70, and Kenneth Frampton's chapter "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance" in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend: Bay P, 1983) 16-30.
17. Gail Day, *Dialectical Passions* (New York: Columbia UP, 2012) 80.
18. Renzo Piano, *Pezzo per pezzo* (Rome: Casa del libro editrice, 1982) 23.
19. Fondazione Renzo Piano <<http://www.fondazione-renzo-piano.org/project/83/centre-georges-pompidou/genesis/>>.
20. Peter Buchanan, *Renzo Piano Building Workshop Complete Works, Volume One* (London: Phaidon, 1993) 46.
21. "Reviving Lingotto — Mixed Development, Turin, Italy," *Architectural Review* (November 1996).
22. Peter Buchanan, "Further Dimensions of the Organic: The Continuing Evolution of a Natural

- Architecture,” *Renzo Piano Building Workshop Complete Works, Volume Two* (London: Phaidon, 1995) 6.
23. Buchanan, “Further Dimensions” 158
 24. Whitford and Enrietti, “Surviving” 782.
 25. Manfredo Tafuri, *History of Italian Architecture, 1944-1979* (Cambridge: MIT P, 1989) 37.
 26. Pier Vittorio Aureli’s recent analysis in Log 23 (Fall 2011) of Cedric Price’s 1966 plans for the Potteries Thinkbelt in North Staffordshire, England suggests one such predecessor to the architecture of intangible assets.
 27. “Progetto ’80: A Project for the Renewal of the Italian Society,” *Planning Studies Centre* (8 April 2012) <<http://www.planningstudies.org/research/progetto80/index.htm>>.
 28. Mario Tronti, “Social Capital” *Telos* 17 (1973) is a translated reprint from the original chapter in *Operai e capitale*, 1966, which first appeared separately in the Marxist journal *Quaderni Rossi* in 1963. Future reference will be to the online version, “Social Capital” found here: <<http://zerowork.org/TrontiSocialCapital.htm>>.
 29. Tronti, “Social Capital.”
 30. “Social Capital.”
 31. “Social Capital.”
 32. Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*. <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/cho1a.htm>>.

Occupy Nothing: Utopia, History, and the Common Object

Sasha X

And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?...And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.¹

We have come to torment you before the time that your spirit might be saved a little longer. Not the spirit of God, the one that seeks an escape from the dust of our being, for we had been right to kill that imposter long ago. Rather the earthly spirit, the utopian impulse toward the city shining on the hill: our collective desire for the society of equality.

The streets that we will never walk. The society that we will never know.

The torment that follows is an inquiry into 1) the dialectical logic of the contemporary configuration of the capital-labor relation, and 2) the corresponding contradictions through which we are developing a political-aesthetic critique of the logic of contemporary anti-capitalist struggles as they have surfaced over 2011-12 in the West. The activity in the background of the arguments presented here is that of broadly defined "leftist" protest as it has manifested in the United States and Canada in the recent wave of political protest unfolding through Occupy Wall Street and the stirrings of students and workers that continue to bubble in its wake: the specter of Tent-City looming over our politics.

It seemed at first an amusing and novel form of utopianism, this march of the ants out of their anthills out to an empty square, demanding everything from nobody. There was a skirmish or two, and thanks to the combined "powers" of the now redundant (i.e., incredibly boring) sphere of corporate media and the increasingly banal world of the Internet, a *fleeting image of possibility* passed across the screen of consciousness. Once it passed, the situation again became a matter of time, a time that we no longer

possess, but has, in the world's last autumn, returned to possess us once and for all. What we rose to occupy had already occupied us: the thousands of tents reflecting not a poverty of vision, but an unconscious admission: The World Is Ending: Bring Tent.

Our focus here is an argument about how we are to understand the material trajectory of the current economic moment. This argument is an attempt to develop the logic of Fredric Jameson's and Aaron Benanav's theses regarding the becoming historical of the crisis of the capital-labor relation, an argument based in part on a careful and provocative reading of Marx's differentiation between relative and absolute surplus labor in Chapter 25 of *Capital Vol. 1*.² Structuring our thoughts is a conviction that Jameson's and Benanav's theses on labor present a radically Hegelian interpretation of both Marx and the dialectics operative at the present conjuncture.

An integral part of Jameson's theses regarding unemployment in *Representing Capital* is his rearticulation of his conclusions regarding the form and function of the utopian impulse, which he presented in *Mediations* in 2010 in the essay introducing his new work on *Capital*. Reading these two aspects of Jameson's most recent thought together has not proved particularly inviting, it seems, as the "new set of conclusions" set out in *Mediations* have not been reflected in the living body of theory continuing to probe *Archaeologies*. However, we have all known for a long time that thinking dialectically requires a seriousness and a suffering that aren't in the habit of resolving. While many of the political claims of this paper are directed toward Occupy Wall Street, it is the current formation of the relation between economics and political aesthetics to utopian signification that is the primary object of our labor.

In other words, the subject of this paper is both Occupy and not Occupy, and the prescription onto which it opens is Occupy Nothing. What we desire to bring to attention is an understanding of the generalization of the political-aesthetic logic of Occupy Wall Street, its diffusion, in other words, into the very atmospheric fabric in which the stuff of political action is embedded at present, *a process of diffusion from which Occupy itself appeared*.

In his 2005 book *Caamps: A Guide to 21st-Century Space*, Charlie Hailey suggests that we are witnessing "a resurgence of camps" and that "[d]efining the camp is a central problem of our contemporary moment. [...] To understand a camp's paradoxes is to begin to comprehend our current spaces."³ For Hailey, writing on the crest of the last wave of economic utopianism, it's not so much the *proliferation* of the camp that marks our contemporary moment, but the *antagonisms* through which the camp positions itself spatially and discursively.

The space-time of tent-city cuts across aesthetic registers in a way that makes all thought contained to an individual relative sphere — or, in true space-time speak, coordinate system — appear as a splash pond before the resonating ocean of human experience.⁴ Who among us woke up in the cold, damp, and pre-morning dark of Occupy's tent cities and did not see and feel, if only in flashes, the reflection of the refugee camp and the battlefield, the aesthetic of FEMA tarps, hobo camps, and family

vacations gone terribly wrong?

A central contradiction embedded in contemporary manifestations of tent city is that while in its crisis formations it is an index of political and social failure, it is increasingly being taken up as a political-aesthetic strategy. Clear already, in other words, is that the relationship between the abjection of the refugee camp and the activism of the political camp is not just peculiar, but fundamental to the contradictions of camp spaces to which Hailey anchors “our contemporary moment.” Which is to say that, in ways that are becoming increasingly literal, the politics of disaster fills the space in which we live, move, and fear for our being.

In the last chapter of *Representing Capital*, Fredric Jameson, thinking along a similar trajectory as Hailey, articulates the possibility of a political project *within* the generalization of camp spaces. Jameson’s theorization of unemployment implies the raising of the tent-city phenomenon to the level of a political-economic paradigm. Jameson claims that the global expansion of capitalism has given birth to a historically unique and globally extensive network of abjection:

[The] massive populations around the world who have, as it were, “dropped out of history,” who have been deliberately excluded from the modernizing projects of First World capitalism and written off as hopeless or terminal cases, the subjects of so-called “failed states” (a new and self-serving pseudo-concept) or of ecological disaster or of old-fashioned survivals of allegedly immemorial, archaic “ethnic hatreds,” the victims of famine whether man-made or natural — all these populations at best confined in camps of various kinds...surely the vessels of a new kind of global and historical misery...[should be] considered in terms of the category of unemployment.⁵

To subjectivize the Real of globalization via the condition of unemployment in this way is to break with the mystifying narrative-economies of hope that have long coerced our necessary minimum consent, such as the Peter Pan tales of “boom and bust” (which sound almost comforting from this side of history), and to suggest, as Benanav does in his essay “Misery and Debt,” that we are witnessing the emergence of “a crisis of the reproduction of the capital-labor relation itself.” Benanav develops this central claim through Marx’s distinction between “relative” and “absolute” unemployment, a movement of the dialectic crucial to understanding what is at stake in the political aestheticization of abjection today.⁶

The central point that we take away from Benanav’s cogent reflections, and which we express in the form of a Hegelian *result*, is that the new forms of abjection produced out of the full subsumption of the globe under capital must be distinguished into two categories epitomized by their relation to labor: the first, the more common notion of the reserve army of labor and the second, absolutely superfluous populations, the

latter presenting an insurmountable challenge to political organization historically committed to the site of production as its terrain; for, to be absolutely superfluous, is to have no function in the production process — to be unemployed not in the sense of being between employment opportunities or waiting for recovery, but to be subjectivized as permanently unemployable and absolutely unnecessary. It is not, however, to be outside of capital (the absolute couldn't be so lucky). That, in fact, is the real kicker. No work to do, no house to fix, no happy family, nowhere to go — and yet, still inside a capital that provides nothing today and promises nothing tomorrow. “Jobs for All” is no longer even whispered, let alone championed. The new optimism is “Jobs for Some.”

It is on the foundation of the preliminary critique of contemporary political-economy offered by Jameson and Benanav that we must consider the material conditions of absolute surplus, or absolutely surplusd populations, as one of the most significant, if not the primary, economical-aesthetic register of politics today. It is on the basis of this imperative that we put forward *the common abject*, a concept through which to capture the central contradiction of tent city in its paradigmatic sense. This internal contradiction of the common abject is constituted in its being both 1) the 99 percent, or the any-fraction of the impoverished “working” or indebted masses, and 2) the negation of that any-fraction via its simultaneous formation as a massive category of living flesh entirely redundant to capital after globalization. After globalization, we now know (always too late) that there will always be fewer and fewer jobs. This is the central political-aesthetic contradiction at the heart of the tent-city protest camp: *the globe's unemployable majority do not register in Occupy's otherwise universalizing percentile and yet foreground the aesthetic through which the movement reproduces its own figuration*. The claim of the 99 percent is that they are able to represent the interests of everyone (who counts), while at the same time the abject populations of their cities, let alone of the world, are displaced by the spewing wound of outmoded middle-class desires.

Before exploring a few of the more problematic expressions of this contradiction at the heart of tent city, we want to re-inflect this opposition between the unemployed and their negative, the absolutely surplusd, through Jameson's re-presentation of his theorization of the utopian impulse at the sequential end of his *Representing Capital* project in the *Mediations* essay “A New Reading of Capital” from 2010. In this turn to Jameson's work on utopia we aim to do two things: one, to provide a further theoretical context in which to historicize the contradictions of the common abject, and two, to argue for an understanding of Jameson's alternative set of conclusions regarding the utopian impulse as a historicization and reappraisal in the wake of the crises of 2008 (and after). This reappraisal concerns his collected claims regarding utopian politics as formalized in 2005 in *Archaeologies*:

There I posited two kinds of oppositions: the first one was the opposition between Utopian models or projects and the Utopian impulse. I now want to reidentify these two rather different manifestations of Utopia in a new and clearer way: for I have come to realize that the Utopian texts (and also the revolutions) are all essentially political in nature. [...] In that case, I am led to affirm that the Utopian impulse, on the other hand, is profoundly economic, and that everything in it, from the transformation of personal relations to that of production, of possession, of life itself, constitutes the attempt to imagine the life of a different mode of production, that is to say, of a different economic system. [...]

[T]his distinction between politics and economics, between the achievable Utopia of the Utopian planners and the deep unconscious absolute Utopian impulse, is one between the social-democratic moment and the moment of communism. Communism can only be posited as a radical, even unimaginable break[. ...] Communism is that unimaginable fulfillment of a radical alternative that cannot even be dreamt.⁷

Properly historicizing and understanding Jameson's inversion of his key utopian categories of project and impulse requires reading them in light of the crisis of the capital labor-relation as theorized by Jameson and Benanav. In the alternative conclusions in *Mediations*, the utopian impulse shifts from being the political engine of coerced consent to being the "moment of communism," a shift tied to the absolute shedding of labor-power that constitutes one of the key features of the ongoing crisis of the capital-labor relation. The production of absolute surplus, in other words, is accompanied by a material shift in the ground of utopian signification. This shift is the shedding of the utopian impulse from the dialectic of production and reproduction; or, to put this in equivalent Marxist-Hegelian terms, *the negation, which defines the birth of this new economic epoch, is the negation of utopian desire within the reproductive ideology of global capitalism.*

Let us try to concretize what constitutes this negation of utopian desire by reading it through the development of the utopian desires of labor in the sequence from Fordist to post-Fordist production up until the eve of the massive subtraction that has been unfolding since 2008, a period that corresponds to the lifespan of the previous conception of the utopian impulse, from *Archaeologies* back to Bloch (to whom Jameson traces his genealogy of the term). If the heights of Fordist production were achieved through the coerced consent of labor as such, a coercion made possible through the exploitation and direction of the utopian impulse toward the phantom of a universal, home-owning, pension-receiving middle class, post-Fordism culminates in the explicit disavowal of this ruse on the part of capital, which pulls up the curtain on the golden promises of Oz to reveal that the chair is empty.

No doubt, as Marx suggested, dialectics is a "scandal" at heart. But in an age that

has drowned in a sea of spectacle, the pulse of the “real movement” is often no more than a faint vibration at the extremity of the banal. To see the consequences of this great deconcealment, we need look only to the most banal forms of prime-time entertainment. Let us consider, therefore, the butt of all jokes: reality TV and its deconcealment of social tragedy.

Reality TV is, on the surface, a comic genre. Yes, there are the tragic heroes and heroines, the deserving competitors that are struck down before the realization of their goals, even those who willingly fall on their swords in an expression of their unwavering sense of duty to fundamental ethical contradictions: the one that will not eat the bowl of cockroaches in obedience to a sudden rush of decency, the man who leaves the dating show to care for his kids. But in the end, someone always wins the money, finds their true love, gets their house renovated, or becomes a star.

There is, however, another sense in which, in essence, reality TV is fundamentally tragic in structure. This tragedy is not the abominable sentimentality substituted for nuanced emotional experiences and credible intellectual ideas; neither is the source of this tragedy the rendering of love, charity, bravery, discipline, etc., into profit-generating spectacle (as if spectacle could in some way define the difference between “reality” and “regular” TV), nor is it the elevation of the grotesque to the level of the beautiful in any number of other ways. The true tragedy of reality TV is the gap between its version of reality and the Real of capitalist society at present. We are not talking about the superficial sense in which the “reality” of *The Bachelorette* or *Undercover Boss* comes heavily mediated through the usual technological apparatus (the lights/camera/action of it all), nor of the obvious scripting and shaping that this implies. What constitutes the true tragedy of the gap between reality TV and the Real is that what is in fact played out on the screen is the specter of yesteryear’s liberal social-democratic (i.e., middle-class) dreams, convictions, and expectations, which, in the wake of neoliberalism, have shifted decisively from the realm of possibility to impossibility.

The tragedy, in other words, is not the perversity and radicalness of what is presented, but precisely its banality, and the fact that even the banal fantasies of the middle-class — a good job or boss, a loving partner and stable family, a house — are, in a generalized sense, impossibilities so out of reach for the average person in society that we pay to have their “real life” possibility staged for us during prime-time. The sentimental twinge and the thoroughly tedious suspense of it all stand in as the last-defense substitute for our unfulfilled and decaying desires. Take Mike Holmes, the fairy-godmother-jack-of-all-trades who protects us against the immoralities of the housing-market: what does he represent other than the last-ditch fantasy construction of a collective subject that feels completely helpless and worn out in the face of cannibalizing social forces?

It is this generalized death of every banal middle-class dream that constitutes the tragic realism of the past decade, expressing itself through the ever-intensifying

turn to both fatalistic social realism and apocalyptic fantasy. This is not the tragedy of Sophocles or Shakespeare, but the final concretization of the *Death of a Salesman*, the one stabbed in the stomach by Arthur Miller at the midpoint of the last century. Think of the current epidemic of social realism chronicling the relentless decaying of urban dreams; or think of the last men of the post-apocalypse, the father and son of Steven Amsterdam's *Things We Didn't See Coming*, standing on the edge of nowhere in the midst of universal destruction, registering all the symbolic darkness of Father and Son, the men we already know are to blame for everything.

It is in the context of this actualization of abjection in the aforementioned economic and aesthetic relations that we argue we should consider the political abjection that exploded across this continent and indeed the globe in the form of Occupy's tent cities. The generalization of the common abject, which names the dialectical relation of the relatively and absolutely unemployed, both necessitates and produces an understanding of tent-city protest as belonging to the aesthetics of death and characterizes aesthetic production as expressed through the negation of the utopian impulse in popular culture: the death of the spouse, the death of the house, and the death of fulfillment as such.

In closing we offer in juxtaposition two opposing utopian viewpoints, the first from Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman's 2011 book *After Globalization*, and the other — from a recent Occupy Wall Street campaign statement. At issue in this juxtaposition is the most critical issue concerning what used to be known as radical politics: the deconcealment of Nothing, the negation of the form of appearance of what was the spirit of capitalism in post-Fordism.

Nothing can save us. Not the schemes of government planning committees. Not the triumphant spread of liberal democracy to the four corners of the world. Neither sudden scientific breakthroughs, nor technological marvels. Neither quick fixes, nor golden bullets...neither vigilantes, nor vanguards. Not the nation...not common sense. Not capitalism. Not the future. [...]

So, all of these somethings (education, morality, nation, future, history, capitalism, common sense) will not save us. Nothing will save us. [...]

[At the current conjuncture] the relations that exist between things, between nations, between past and present, rich and poor, ally and enemy...are in the process of being deconcealed. What comes after globalization? The deconcealment of the absent relations that make up, and are made by our lives — the deconcealment of nothing.⁸

And now our friends from Occupy:

We want you to occupy something. This can be just about anything. Like a park, a farm, defending a foreclosed home, or holding a sit-in at your town hall or school. You might only need a half dozen or so dedicated people. Issue demands if you like, but don't go home until they're met.⁹

Occupy is a politics of something. In fact, it is clear from the above that Occupy has never met a something it didn't like. But something is not going to save us. Nothing may. Of course, nothing is a kind of something, as Cazdyn and Szeman state clearly elsewhere in the book: "Nothing is the thing without which something would not exist."¹⁰ If this utterance sounds like some kind of philosophical escapism, it is time you caught up on your physics in addition to your Hegel. It is also time that our politics stepped out of yesteryear's limelight and out into the dark. And what are we to do there, you ask? *Wait*. Wait without hope, that is, without hope for fulfillment, for though nothing can save us, it's not going to save us in the way we've always wanted, *deus ex machina*. There is a good chance, it is now time to admit, that we won't be saved at all.

The negation of any generalized ideological expectation for amelioration or fulfillment is in part what delimits the common abject and makes the apparent utopianism of Occupy at worst a cruel and ridiculous joke and at best a tragicomic spectacle. If you take away only one image from this paper, make it the following, from the epigraph above: the spectacle of Occupy's aesthetic contradiction is akin to that of those New Testament pigs, which, having been occupied by the demons cast out of the men of Gergesa, were driven to madness, running like wildfire down to the sea where they drowned.

Notes

1. Matthew 8:29 (King James Version).
2. Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One* (London: Verso, 2011); "A New Reading of *Capital*," *Mediations* 25.1 (Fall 2010) 5-14; Aaron Benanav, "Misery and Debt: On the Logic and History of Surplus Populations and Surplus Capital," *Endnotes* 2 (April 2010) <www.endnotes.org.uk>.
3. Charlie Hailey, *Camps: A Guide to 21st-Century Space* (Cambridge: MIT P, 2009) 1-2.
4. I am working from an understanding of the physicality and relativity of reference frames developed through Einstein's key dialectical text, *Relativity: The Special and General Theory* (1916), in addition to the dialectics of *Capital Vol. 1* and Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Limiting thought and theory to an individual coordinate system would amount to, in this case, trying to theorize the aesthetic characteristics and registers of tent-city by severing Occupy's tent-cities from the specters that so obviously haunt them.
5. Jameson, *Representing* 149.
6. Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. 1* (London: Penguin, 1990) 791.
7. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005) 13.
8. Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman, *After Globalization* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) 5, 57, 58.
9. Occupy Wall Street, "Occupy's Pledge to FIGHT BACK" <www.occupywallst.org>.
10. Cazdyn and Szeman, *Globalization* 57.

On the Power of the Negative

Fredric Jameson

So the power of the negative turns out to be postmodernity after all: it is not, according to these splendid essays, the motor power of history Hegel celebrated. Rather, it is history's breakdown, an ominous perpetual present in which no one knows what's coming (the "thing we didn't see") and indeed no one knows whether anything is coming at all. This is truly the realization of queer theory's master slogan "no future," and it justifies the combination of so many disparate topics, from architecture to finance capital (all in one essay), from dystopia to Occupy, from permanent unemployment to irony. The permanent present means that no one can remember what the catastrophe was, and that therefore there can be no thematic agreement about where we are now, and certainly no plausible forecast about futures, except to the degree that in that sense we don't have one. The only remaining topic is time itself, or rather this peculiar temporality of a present without a past or future, which does not look much like eternity and which, despite Paul de Man and the German Romantics, it does not seem to me has much claim on the term "irony" either.

I have always loved the idea of the Rachel Whiteread house (idea, because I have never seen it and now never will): that it should be demolished is however perfectly logical and as it were built into the very structure of the work itself.¹ Here is a row of derelict houses, all to be demolished and without even squatters for inhabitants any longer: this is already the crisis itself and its nothingness—only the ghostly embodiment (or disembodiment) of structural unemployment, as Aaron Benanav forecast it for present-day capitalism, in essays frequently cited in these pages.² But how to make a ghost or a disembodiment visible, how to make it appear? A problem not dissimilar from that of making a present visible in the absence of its past and future. You make a cement cast of its vacancy: some first Hegelian negation, in which absence is negated by materialization, in which absence, reified, is made to be present, to appear. And then, in a second, not even Hegelian negation, you destroy it. Does a memory remain? If so, it is certainly not in the fashion of all those vacuous monuments and memorials which sprang up in obedience to the equally

vacuous slogan of “*lieux de memoires*.” But it is not either the tangible, magnificent gesture of Gordon Matta-Clark’s slashing onslaughts on buildings, hacking a single-family dwelling in half, making holes through old warehouses. That was still the old modernist stroke of genius; this is something else, for which I don’t much like the current notion of melancholy either (although I recognize its relevance), in which affect replaces emotion: this is not a mimesis of the demolition to come; it is its silent presence.

I assume, perhaps wrongly, that Grove Street was then to become the site of a cultural center on the order of Renzo Piano’s rebuilding of the Fiat factory in Turin: immaterial culture as the aftermath of unemployment, demolition, nothingness, some third negation, indeed, in which the “spiritual” negates the material, and reification takes the form, no longer of concrete, but rather of “creativity” and tourism (yet another postmodern simulacrum oddly missing exhibition).³ To connect this “cultural” refuncting with the emergence of the concept of immaterial labor (which it of course at once historicizes) is surely an impressive methodological gesture, which turns theory into yet another cultural symptom as indeed it indubitably is. This does not mean that theory, as a historical reflexion of a given historical situation, is thereby necessarily untrue: but only that we need to change the way we think about truth. That Occupy itself is a symptom rather than a political program may well mean that the American “middle classes” (itself a euphemism) have no political program (or “future”) right now; but that is itself a valuable historical diagnosis.⁴ (In any case, Occupy was a remarkable success in the way in which it put the issue of the 1 percent and of rich and poor back on the political agenda.)

Still, the ghostly past of older tent cities lingers in Occupy’s present, which is however mightily amplified by its echoes in Seattle, the Arab Spring, and new kinds of IT-driven mass demonstrations/occupations everywhere. It is the form of these movements and their relationship to our perpetual present which is politically interesting, and not their results or consequences in any older revolutionary sense.

Struggling, in the botched ending of *Sein und Zeit*, to find a mediation between the existential experience of the individual and historicity itself (or in other words the collective), in a footnote Heidegger hit on Dilthey’s then-novel concept of the “generation.” In his case, as we know, it was an ominous discovery: the point, however, is that the generational experience is relatively uncommon and contemporaneity (now used in art history as a substitute for postmodernity) is no quick fix: rare enough, said Mallarmé, are those who are even contemporary with themselves.

But the unusual trajectory designed here between *The Road* and *Things We Didn’t See Coming* suddenly struck me as a new and altogether significant symptom: garden-variety dystopias have been with us everywhere for some time (and I wish I didn’t have to confess I think McCarthy’s novel is one of the them), but here, for the first time, I get the feeling that dystopia has become a major genre and that this promotion is itself the sign that we are seeing a new generation emerge: there has not been

one since the Sixties, in my opinion (and I should add that I'm not myself a Sixties person).⁵ But the Sixties formed our idea of what a generation was, and has caused us to lose sight of the fact that what constitutes a generation, among other things, is a new idea of the generation itself, which is say, of time.

The concept of time that was already working its way out during the modernist period is what I will call retroactivity, its first full enunciation already reached by Freud in his notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (or in other words how a later event like puberty could reach back into childhood experience and transform the latter into psychosis). Here the present rewrites the past or even constructs it as though for the first time (as in Proust, for example); and tradition becomes invented.

The new concept of time I see emerging in these papers now revises this one in a new way, consistent with the displacement of the traditional conception of dystopia by what seems to me a new version of dystopian time. It is as if the past, having been "deconstructed" (into the positing of its own presuppositions), now slowly faded away, leaving only two dimensions of time behind it.

It has, for one thing, no cause: it may be post-catastrophic, but the catastrophe is not registered, not even remembered or forgotten. (Indeed, McCarthy's trace of it—"The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions" is the mark of his failure to break with the older, traditional dystopian genre.)⁶ No future either, but not in Edelman's sense of the repudiation of Utopia and politics itself: rather, simply a lowering of Husserl's "protensions," a weakening of the time sense and the obsessive-compulsive worry ("Sorge"!) about what to do next, and what to do after that, and after that. This is truly a reduction to the present; but Amsterdam's book makes it clear that it is a present quite different from what we might have imagined (and indeed that my own thought that it constituted a "reduction to the body" is also probably not right either). "Bare life" it is certainly not; but his hero might well have wandered through the tents of Occupy at some stage. The external forms of social power come and go here like the weather, too high up in the stratosphere to be observed directly. Is it political? The question is poorly articulated, and it should rather be phrased, How is it political, the fact being that we simply do not know yet (nor does the opportunistic hero have anything much to tell us in this respect; he is closer to the picaro, to Lazarillo de Tormes, than to the anonymous hero of *The Road* or to *Mad Max*). At any rate, all these essays seem to me to end up here, in the contemplation of this enigmatic new temporality, the time of the desert of unemployment so to speak.

Notes

1. See Marija Cetinic, "House and Field," in this issue (35-44).
2. See Brent Ryan Bellamy, "Figuring Terminal Crisis in Steven Amsterdam's *Things We Didn't See Coming*," in this issue (19-34) 19, 27; Cetinic, "House" 36; Sasha X, "Occupy Nothing: Utopia, History, and the Common Abject," in this issue (61-70) 62-65.
3. See Jeff Diamanti, "The Cultural Work of Architecture: Fixed and Social Capital at FIAT," in this issue (45-60).
4. See X, "Nothing."
5. See Vincent Adiutori, "The Road is Mapped: Cormac McCarthy's Modernist Irony," in this issue (3-18), and Brent Bellamy, "Figuring."
6. Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Vintage, 2006) 52. See Adiutori, "The Road" 11, and "Figuring" 22.

The São Paulo Fraction: The Lineaments of a Cultural Formation

Maria Elisa Cevasco

The title to this piece is proposed as an homage to Raymond Williams's justly acclaimed 1980 essay, "The Bloomsbury Fraction." Although he recognizes the many problems of method and reliability involved in the study of small groups, he does acknowledge that no history of contemporary culture could be written without attention to them. In his characteristic manner of following the dialectical imperative of making connections, he boldly states that "the level that matters, finally, is not that of the abstracted ideas, but of the real relations of the group to the social system as a whole."¹ If Williams is right, the only manner of starting this presentation of a contemporary Brazilian cultural formation I named "the São Paulo Fraction" — a fraction, that is, of the Brazilian intelligentsia — is by trying precisely to establish what those relations to the social whole are.

I expect that their history, not only in itself but also as a typical formation of the post-1960s Left, will make a small contribution to a much-needed mapping of the different paths taken by specific Left formations at the onset of globalization. What are the possibilities open to such a group? What kind of social role do they play? How do they describe and interpret social reality and the political options it offers? What difference does their existence make for gathering forces for social transformation?

First an attempt at description. The group is composed of middle-class intellectuals who would be proud to be described as traitors to their own class. Though most of them lead a very bourgeois life — supported, in most cases, by university salaries — they all oppose the prevailing middle-class ethos and position themselves as an intelligentsia in the classical sense of an independent group of thinkers who possess intellectual and political influence. Some of them are political party members: one of the current members of the group was the Press Secretary for the first Workers' Party government, and another became the mayor of São Paulo. Others have informally advised presidents and ministers. In a peripheral country like Brazil, this transit between intellectual and political life is not rare, but it is unusual that the ideas of such an informal and

apparently fortuitous group should have any influence in high-level politics. And I use the word “informal” advisedly. In one of the key members’ recollection, the origin of the group could not be more trivial or prosaic. In the late 1970s, reunited in São Paulo after studies in Paris and Vienna, a couple of friends decided to meet on Sunday evenings to chat. As Paulo and Otília Arantes had a young child who loved pizza, they decided to meet at a pizza parlor. With losses and additions, sometimes there are as many as thirty people and sometimes only five or six, but always under the sign of friendship and common interests, the group has been meeting every single Sunday till the moment I write. As in the very beginning, there are no official obligations or rewards, people simply go there and some stay on because they are interested in meeting and talking about whatever question is posed by the social conjuncture. Those questions are likely to set up an intellectual agenda and references to arguments discussed in the noisy and combative discussions can be traced in an essay published months later or, more often, in a piece published in the press in São Paulo by any one of the members.

When we examine more closely what I have called here an apparently fortuitous group of friends we begin to make the first connections. Paulo and Otília Arantes were former militants of Juventude Universitária Católica (JUC), that is, Catholic Youth at Universities, a left-wing branch of the Catholic Action that aimed at spreading Catholicism and social consciousness to university students. Roberto Schwarz came from a leftist Jewish family who had fled Nazi Vienna to get established in São Paulo. He had been engaged in one of the many militant groups that were to make the fateful decision of mounting armed struggle against the military dictatorship after 1964. They had all gone to Paris precisely to escape police persecution. In Paris, Roberto met Grecia de la Sobera, a Paraguayan studying the humanities. Back in Brazil, the two couples were joined by Modesto Carone and his wife, Marilene, a psychoanalyst who was to start an ambitious project, sadly interrupted by her early death, of translating Freud into Portuguese from the original German and not from the Spanish or English versions. Carone, a journalist and lawyer before his training as a Germanist, had had strong connections with theater groups then closely aligned with the popular struggles that were growing all over and were part of the forces of change that were to determine the violent reaction of the status quo in 1964. Carone took part in the collective creation of plays with Gianfrancesco Guarniere, a promoter of epic theater in Brazil, and with Augusto Boal, the creator of the later, better-known Theater of the Oppressed. They all had close links with the Centers of Popular Culture (CPCs), who put up plays at factories, universities, and to the peasant movements who were radicalizing in important ways before the coup. So one could see, represented around the table at the pizza parlor, three fractions of the militant Left: the Catholic branch — it is useful to remember that the 1970s saw the expansion of Liberation Theology and of the Christian Base Communities who were to serve as one of the rallying points for the organization of the Landless People Movement in the 1980s; the militant Left who

opted for armed struggle and had been crushed in the violent repression that marked the darkest years of dictatorship from 1968 to 1974; and the cultural Left, who had been responsible for an extraordinary flourishing which included not only the new theater, but also, *cinema novo*, Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, and popular music, as bossa nova met the samba at the favelas. Architecture of course had been through its high modernist moment in the construction of Brasilia in the late 1950s. As Roberto Schwarz puts it in an appraisal of the years immediately before the coup, with consequences that lasted until repression set in, "[t]he country was unrecognizably intelligent. Political journalism improved dramatically and so did humor. Even deputies in parliament made some interesting speeches."² It seemed then that, as in many other countries where the 1960s brought strong winds of change, Brazil was finally going to become a socially integrated country where historical injustices would be redressed. Of course all those high hopes were deflated by the U.S.-supported coup. It was clear then that the only path open was to oppose the regime. The key question was what form this opposition should take. The eventual political differences in the group were all subsumed, as they were for the majority of the Brazilian Left, by the necessity to fight the common enemy, the military dictatorship. It was then, as Paulo Arantes was to recollect later, that the fateful turn to focus the debate on anti-authoritarianism, rather than, as in the more radical 1960s, on anti-capitalism, was made.³ It was perhaps the beginning of the end of higher hopes for a distinctively leftist model of society and the beginning of yet another crisis for the Left: all of its many forms had been defeated by the coup.

It is good to bear in mind, before we get immersed in the particularities of the group, that, as Nicholas Brown succinctly and accurately puts it,

what happened in the coup of 1964 was not unique to Brazil; the Brazilian case is a particularly dramatic instance of a global phenomenon of the end of political modernism grounded in great utopian projects: from the disappointment that followed the apparent seizing of historical initiative by the African independence movements to the dissipation of First World 1960s countercultures into the "commodified dissent" of alternative lifestyles. The ultimate horizon of the moment we are discussing, in other words, is the turning of the Cold War toward the consolidation of a U.S.-led market hegemony, globalization as it is currently understood.⁴

But before we go on to describe how the group reacted to this situation and to the downturns in the years of struggle for re-democratization, I would like to tell you about their intellectual formation. This is fundamental as a decisive feature of this generation in that they do not separate, in their thinking about society, culture from politics. The core members, Modesto Carone, Paulo Arantes, and Roberto Schwarz, and most of the members who joined later on, had all been students at the School of

Humanities at the University of São Paulo. This university is a peculiar project of the Brazilian bourgeoisie and exemplifies a number of the contradictions of this class: the university was founded in 1934 by a rising bourgeoisie, which had accumulated money through coffee plantations and was on the high tide of a rapidly industrializing economy. It was, however, founded as a public university in the French model, one open to all that could pass the entrance examination, thus testifying to the enlightened side of the founders. However, in an unequal society, there was no danger that the poor would ever get there in any significant number, thus demonstrating the conditions of possibility of such enlightenment: the bourgeoisie can profess modern democratic ideas, provided they can never be put into real practice. And thus the public university was there to cultivate the children of the bourgeoisie.

However, it turned out better than this. As in many other circumstances in ex-colonies, the university took recourse to foreign aid. The first courses in the humanities were largely conducted by foreign missions. It was thus that intellectuals like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Fernand Braudel, Roger Bastide, and later Michel Foucault taught there. But in his recollection of those formative years for the humanities in Brazil, Antonio Candido, who studied and taught there and, born in 1918, is still the central figure in Brazilian cultural criticism, singles out somebody less famous, Jean Maugüe. A friend of Jean-Paul Sartre's, he brought to the group of students, who were to become the first generation of Brazilian academic intellectuals, his unconventional Marxism. With Maugüe, they learned that more than disciplines in a university curriculum, philosophy and criticism were powerful means of understanding social reality. This intellectual attitude thrived among young critics in a country where the basic inequalities of social life end up by determining a "peculiar engagement" that is the hallmark of the work of its most relevant thinkers. Soon, the university founded for the children of the bourgeoisie was able to start a tradition of modest — because still within the framework of the existing social relations — radicalism. The first important work to come out of this generation was marked by the effort to understand the peculiarities of Brazilian society, very much including the ways it dealt with poverty or with racism, and the problems of interpreting local cultural production according to standards and models that were produced elsewhere. They tried to respond to the many challenges of formulating relevant thought in the peculiar conditions of a new country, still in the process of cultural formation, and in great need of interpretations of social reality that contributed to effective social change.

Of course, as intellectual work alone can never do, they did not succeed in producing a more just society, but they planted a seed that to this day invigorates the best intellectual work produced in the country. The young students of the late 1930s at the University of São Paulo soon became the leading figures in Brazilian cultural life, with the most influential work in sociology, film criticism, drama studies, visual arts, and literature. We all learned from them to value the social import of work in the humanities. Adapting a formulation by Candido, we can say that in this

influential tradition the task of the humanities is “to discover and interpret social reality.” To discover reality because in unfair societies where opacity is of the essence, we must work to find out the true lineaments of our social life; and to interpret reality because the objects of study of the humanities, be they works of art, institutions, or social projects, are materializations of the meanings and values that constitute such societies. The work of interpretation entails, as of necessity, a position with respect to existing social and economic relations. Those are strongly tinged by international relations which determine them. Thus, the interpretation of cultural products ends up by demanding a point of view on the current stage of world capitalism. As we can see, there is little space in this stance for the generalities that constitute hegemonic cultural criticism in central countries.

This may be one of the reasons why Candido’s work parallels the liveliest traditions of the Left. In a former colony, which had embarked late and on the peripheral side in the uneven process of capitalist modernization, and where few of the apparatuses of so called “civilization” took hold and none ever got fully formed, his work illustrates how the relative autonomy of the cultural can sometimes perform miracles. On a theoretical level, his work represents a clear departure from both the detailed attention to the words on the page that characterized the internal approaches to literature, and from the reductionism of looking at literature as a direct reflection of society that characterized sociological approaches and also most contributions of leftist literary criticism. He deftly superseded those hegemonic tendencies in his work, whose main impulse, in his jargon-free language, was to “show how the external becomes internal,” that is, how social forms shape aesthetic forms. This dialectical approach opened up a series of possibilities and constitutes Candido’s own contribution to the ongoing process of literary hermeneutics. His work attests that the logic of literary form develops at its own level the logic of History. Once this is established, one can begin to optimize the cognitive potential of cultural criticism. In doing so, his intellectual project finds an affinity with the most fertile endeavors of cultural criticism elsewhere, in its effort to construct a theory of society using aesthetic elaboration as indexes of social forms. He saw the shaping force of society in artistic forms, and, reversibly, the ways in which art granted a unique knowledge of society. In an unassuming way — after all, his work aimed at forming other critics — he developed a notion of literary form that has parallels in the works of thinkers in the dialectical tradition, most notably the Adornian notion of form as sedimented social content and Raymond Williams’s assertion of the interconstitutive character of aesthetic form and social formation. In this sense, his trajectory is part of the main developments in Western cultural criticism.

Let me give an example to try to demonstrate this. His central book is *Formação da Literatura Brasileira: Momentos Decisivos* (1959) — *Formation of Brazilian Literature: Key Moments*. In this seminal study, he writes the history of the formation of a national literature on the periphery. He identifies the double fidelity that defines cultural

experience in new nations where local specificities and foreign modes of describing reality clash and constitute a specific dialectics which is the defining trait of Brazilian intellectual experience. The key moments the title refers to are the Neoclassical and the Romantic. The first is linked to the last moments of the colonial period in late eighteenth century and the other to the first fifty years of the independent country in the nineteenth century. Aesthetically they are contrasting and successive schools, but in Brazil they gravitate in the same force field generated by Independence, proclaimed in 1822. The process of Independence takes a long time and this confers an unforeseen common trait to literary schools which are opposed elsewhere. Thus, for instance, in spite of their universalism and conventionality, the shepherds of Neoclassical poetry are sensitive to the colonial situation and to the autonomist appeal. An analogous redefinition obtains in the case of the Romantic poets who, regardless of the subjectivism and individualism peculiar to the school, bear in mind the unromantic obligations of intellectuals with the tasks demanded by the construction of the new country, very much including bureaucratic ones. The force of attraction of national independence modifies, to a certain extent, the canonical, that is European, direction of the two great currents of sensibility. From another angle, those are alterations that point to the extra-European course of Western History, illuminating it in a peculiar way.⁵

This aspect of Candido's work — that is, the ways in which the study of a national question can clarify and interrogate the functioning of the international system — and his commitment to the necessity of understanding a social reality that claims for transformation, opens up a space that is going to be filled up by the work of members of the group I am trying to describe here. Their contribution was diverse — Roberto Schwarz became, of course, one of the key cultural critics of the contemporary Left; Otília Arantes became a professor of aesthetics at the University of São Paulo with books on visual arts, architecture, and urbanism; Paulo Arantes, a professor of philosophy and a polemical observer of Brazilian political life with works on Hegel side by side with essays on the latest attack of organized crime in São Paulo; Modesto Carone, a professor of German literature and translator of Kafka into Portuguese, became a novelist and the author of *Resumo de Ana*, among other works of fiction. This very powerful novel covers the generations of a family in twentieth-century Sorocaba, a city ninety kilometers from São Paulo that used to be known, for its industrial development, as the Brazilian Manchester. Their historical experience gives the lie to the myths of progress and modernization that rule our ideological life as it examines the process from the point of view of the majority, the ones who pay its many prices.

One main feature unites their diversity. As many other Latin American intellectuals, they work under the pressure of what Candido calls a peculiar type of engagement which is different from the one in European countries: they always see their work as a necessary contribution to the still-incomplete formation of their national culture. Their work is a permanent effort at understanding, using categories which were made

elsewhere, what Schwarz calls the matter of Brazil, the constellation formed by a peculiar complex of relations and positions that constitute our local social life viewed in a world-historical perspective. The São Paulo Fraction set out to specify the dialectics of our social experience by understanding the links between what happens, or fails to happen, in Brazil and the international movement of capital. In the process, they completed the formation of a Brazilian tradition of critical thought, one that fulfills the intellectual tasks determined by their location. As such, their collective output represents an intellectual alternative to the continuation of a Left tradition in post-revolutionary times.

Their way of approaching this imperative of configuring the peculiarities of the Brazilian was strongly influenced by another powerful intellectual formation to come out of the University of São Paulo, known as either the Seminar on Marx or the Capital Group. This was constituted by a number of young professors who, in the late 1950s, got informally together to study *Capital*. Many members of the group were to become prominent in their respective disciplines. Schwarz, then a student of social sciences, was part of the group. Another was then a young professor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, an exponent of dependency theory before he became president of Brazil in 1994. Michael Löwy, who is now established in Paris, is well known for the combination of militant engagement to thorough analytic research; the historian Fernando Novais, and the economist of socio-solidarity and a member of Lula's government, Paul Singer, are the better-known names. The *Capital* group's contribution to the theme of the matter of Brazil is better captured in Schwarz's recollection of the seminar, published in 1995. He tells us that contrary to the ideas that had been hegemonic both on the Right and on the Communist Left that thought of the country as being one stage behind the international (in fact Western European and later North American) norm of development, they followed Trotsky's lead and conceived the country as functioning, or rather malfunctioning, under the laws of uneven and combined development. This allowed them to achieve what Schwarz calls a powerful "new intuition of the country."

This new intuition consisted in a point of confluence and of inflection of the local tradition and a thorough and heterodox study of Marx. The central figure of Brazilian Marxism had been Caio Prado Júnior. He is part of a triad of intellectuals that is usually credited as being the "inventors of Brazil," referring to three key works, published in the 1930s, that offered powerful and influential interpretations of the country from different political and ideological perspectives. According to historian Emilia Viotti da Costa — an emeritus professor at Yale and an occasional member of the Sunday gatherings — Gilberto Freyre, whose widely acclaimed *The Masters and the Slaves*, came out in 1933, gives a right-wing interpretation of the country whereas Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, whose *Roots of Brazil* was published in 1936, gives the view from the center. They both aim at explaining the national character and they both make use of an interdisciplinary approach that combines sociology, anthropology, and psychology to present the sociological matrix of the country. They present, though

from different angles, a culturalist explanation anchored in our Iberian and agrarian roots. They stress an idea of Brazil as the place of cordiality and plasticity, where there would be no rigid barriers between the classes or the races. They both recognize the strong influence of the patriarchal family. Freyre mourns the disappearance of our colonial past, in his reading, a time capable of producing an admirable way of life. For Buarque, the emphasis is on the surpassing of its inequities and the advancement of a democratic society. Prado gives the view from the Left as he looks at the political evolution of the country from the point of view of economic and social contradictions determined by our historical evolution.⁶

Of the three classics of the interpretations of Brazil, the *Capital* group developed, as it was to be expected, the point of view made available by Prado and particularly his “national” reading of Marxism. For him, Marxism was not an orthodoxy, as defended by the Communist Party, but a way of approaching reality that enabled the explanations of the specificities of historical development. Thus, studying the historical formation of Brazil, “he did not look for Feudalism where there had been none, as did the majority of the Brazilian Left, but concentrated on trying to understand the singularity of the Brazilian experience.”⁷ This enabled him to give a much more convincing explanation of the specificities of our colonization, which was based on the production, in big properties under a regime of slavery, of the goods demanded by the international capitalist market which was developing by then. In this sense, our colonization was an integral part of capitalist modernity. The collective output of the *Capital* group would reinforce and expand this line of interpretation of Brazil.

Their first procedure was to correct the view of the country as being one or two stages behind in a process that produced “progress” in the outside world whose standard of development the country could one day achieve. This was the ideological basis of the continuous and relatively fruitless efforts to catch up that fed the adage of Brazil as the country of the future. Well-trained in Marxism, but in opposition to the tenets of the Communist Party, this group of intellectuals was able to realize that conditions in the country are not an exception but a result of the unequal development of world capital. This generation was further able to see that it was fruitless to try to conceive of the peculiarities of the country outside a contemporary system of relations. Contrary to received wisdom, Brazil is not to be seen as an anomaly or as a result of simple backwardness. It is an integral part of the world system whose notion of progress is qualified by the very existence of places like it. This stance underwrites the most significant contributions of the group and informs the outlook of the works of the members of the São Paulo Fraction. Their long-term collective effort was to detail the forms of interdependence between their diverse objects of study, their location as Marxist intellectuals on the periphery, and what this location does to the international categories of thought they cannot avoid. In the process, they gave continuity to the task of interpreting Brazilian social reality and constituted a resonant voice of the impasses and insights of our intellectual Left.

Let me try to specify the characteristics of this resonance. As years went by, more and more intellectuals — in the vast majority academics linked either by formation or by professional ties with the University of São Paulo — became members of the informal gathering. Throughout the 1980s, local politics dominated the informal chats — the end of the dictatorship in 1985, the founding of the Workers' Party in 1981 — the Trotskyist intellectual and art critic Mario Pedrosa, one of Otília Arantes' objects of study, signed membership file number 1 of the new working class party. Candido was a member of the first National Directory of the party between 1981 and 1984. The many drawbacks of those years of democratization of the country fueled the conversations and their echoes appeared in the main books published by the members in the 1980s and 1990s. Perhaps the central focus of the matter of Brazil as constructed by their different works is the theme of so-called modernization. Under different guises, this theme is a constant in many peripheral countries as modernity is the term that defines what it takes to be no longer in a subaltern position in world affairs. The nations at the edge of capitalism are condemned to "inventing" their own strategies of development, at the risk of repeating and reproducing the conditions that generate backwardness. The theme has been, of course, recurrent in Brazilian intellectual history, and, among other places, it got translated into a series of books on the formation of Brazil in which different intellectuals tried to come to terms with our lacks and discrepancies *vis-à-vis* the international norm. We saw that Candido's main work is precisely called *The Formation of Brazilian Literature* and Prado's *The Formation of Contemporary Brazil* (1942). To this we could certainly add economist Celso Furtado's *The Economic Formation of Brazil* (1959), and Raymundo Faoro's "The Owners of Power, Formation of the Brazilian Political Patrons" (1958). The members of the *Capital* group continued this legacy and worked very much within the frame of development theories. Famously, Fernando Henrique Cardoso's 1964 book, *Industrial Entrepreneurs and Economic Development*, ended with the two alternatives then visible: "sub-capitalism or socialism?" The contribution of the São Paulo Fraction was to develop in another frame of reference. The country was not in a process of formations that would lead to integration in modern capitalism. In their view, modernization had happened and it was our lot in the contemporary world, with economic progress for the very few and the same old inequality for the majority. The forms that capitalist modernization took in the periphery was to become their central theme.

In 1985 indirect elections marked the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of civilian rule. In 1987, Schwarz published his fourth book of essays, significantly entitled *Que Horas São? What time is it?* Though ironic, the title reminds us of the necessity to interpret the Brazil that was coming out of twenty years of military rule, coupled with fifteen years of economic growth that had accelerated industrialization and fostered the expansion of our dependent capitalism. In 1989, we had the most polarized of our elections: Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, from the Workers' Party, ran under a leftist program and was defeated by an upstart politician, Fernando Collor de Mello, who

was to be impeached for corruption two years later after having launched a process of opening up the country to foreign exports and of privatizing state companies under the ever-present banner of modernization.

Besides assessing the current moment, it was necessary to try to define what kind of country we had become and sort out the elements of permanence among the elements of change. The fifteen essays that compose the book, written between 1979 and 1986, offer complementary views on the themes of the matter of Brazil as seen historically and in its present manifestations in a country more fully integrated in international capitalism. They include theoretical interventions on the perceived feeling of continuous discrepancy between our local experience and the peculiarities of the contemporary world, analysis of the diverse manifestations of this feeling in contemporary literature and film, as well as a study of achievement of the dialectical method in *Candido*, and a platform for discussion of the cultural politics of the Workers' Party. The title of one of the essays sums up, in a string of adjectives, the main questions historically involved in the study of Brazil: "Complex, National, Modern, and Negative." The substance to all those qualities is given by the specific dynamics of Brazilian society as materialized in the later novels of Machado de Assis, our great realist novelist born in 1839. The study of his works is Schwarz's lifelong project. In the process he was to interpret a central theme of the general culture of the country, intervening in a debate that reaches far beyond the academy as Machado is widely read, taught at secondary schools and widely acknowledged as our true classic.

The essay in "Que Horas São?" presents a reading of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas* (1880) that demonstrates that the greatness of Machado stems precisely from this dialectics between aesthetic form and social processes that art powerfully reveals. "Complex" refers at first to the fact that the loose form of Machado's novel, in which the dead narrator seems never to be able to concentrate his attention on what he is telling us from beyond the grave, changing subjects, dictions, and opinions as he pleases, is in fact the result of careful composition as each turn of his whimsical narrative reveals the authoritarian and malignant aspects of his capriciousness. This capriciousness, which forms the principle of composition of the novel, is more than a personal trait. It ends up by revealing a movement that is descriptive of the latitude that personal freedom can reach in a social situation in which the rules of modern civilization at the same time apply (Bras had been a well-formed "modern" bourgeois on a par with the Western mores and knowledge of his time) and do not apply, as he can subvert and disregard them as he pleases. And he can do all this without stepping out of character and ceasing to be recognized as a representative of Brazilian social reality, whose "national" character is formed by the conviviality of the bourgeois norm — capitalist mode of production with its accompanying ideology of liberalism — and its contrary, slavery and appalling social differences. As Schwarz puts it, "Machado has worked out a technique that allows for the ever-renewed and never-completed subordination of current bourgeois reality to personal arbitrariness."⁸

Bras Cubas is an example of the possibility of norm and capriciousness living together in the same person, and this very possibility functions as a strong questioning of the validity of those so-called “universal” norms. The many implications those characteristics have had for thinking about Brazil and how the local situation illuminates and criticizes the global one are summarized in his claim that

the law of Machado’s prose would be something like the miniaturization or the diagram of the ideological to and fro of the Brazilian ruling elite, articulated with the international market and with Western progress, as well as with slavery and the local forms of social dependence among free men that go with it. This to and fro epitomizes the vexations of the nation, but it does something else as well, as it also points to the global history in which Brazil is a partner, although a morally condemned one: the bourgeois order in its totality is not ruled by the bourgeois norm.⁹

A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism, Schwarz’s full-length book on Machado, whom he considers one of the best interpreters of the specific movement of Brazilian society, came out in 1990. This book marks one point of completion of his intellectual project as he takes the full consequences of some of the traditions that made his work possible and takes them one decisive step further. Marx has shown that social reality is itself formed. From Candido, he develops the notion that literary composition is not, as hegemonic cultural criticism would have it, a stroke of genius but a socio-historical result of “forms working on other forms.”¹⁰ He demonstrates that the work of art concentrates a complex of social and historical relations that is the task of criticism to unravel. He makes us see that literary form is a configuration of actually existing social relations, an abstraction that uniquely allows us to intuitively grasp the social whole and thus makes possible its critique. From the Seminar on Marx he takes the ways in which we can only think of Brazil in terms of the world system of which it is an inescapable and revealing part. Thus the explanation of the matter of Brazil as configured in our greatest novelist has consequences that reach beyond the national sphere. If Adorno is right and art is the unconscious historiography of our times, Schwarz’s studies of Machado constitute a relevant contribution to Western Marxism and a definite step in defining the unstated project of the São Paulo Fraction, one that was, so to speak, imposed on them by their situation, that is, to constitute what Nicholas Brown, following Fredric Jameson, calls a spatial dialectics, a way of thinking predicated on place and on the explanatory potential of thinking the world system through the periphery and testing the international categories of thought against our social reality.¹¹

That is also the focus of Paulo Arantes’ intellectual project. After a book on Hegel and time and a critique of Habermas’ notions of modernity, he turned his full attention to Brazil and engaged in the reconstruction of the formation of what he calls the São Paulo

Intellectual Party, the ground from which his own thought sprang. In 1992, he published *O Sentimento da Dialética na Experiência Intelectual Brasileira* (*The Feeling for Dialectics in Brazilian Intellectual Experience*) in which he demonstrates how the interpretations of Brazilian literature in the works of Candido and Schwarz succeeded in forming — the theme of formation being, as we saw, a constant in Brazilian intellectual endeavors — a dialectical tradition of explaining Brazil. In 1994, he published *Um Departamento Francês de Ultramar* (*A French Department Overseas*), a study of the formation of a branch of Brazilian philosophy under the influence of the French mission that started the department of Philosophy at the University of São Paulo. This study clarifies the turns of European philosophy as seen in the works of Brazilian philosophers who make explicit the consequences of new philosophical fashions. A good example of this is how the emptying out of political significance as deconstruction developed mostly notably in France and the U.S. was already clear in local imitation. For a number of local thinkers, the dismantling of the opposition center and periphery in discursive practice was a way of no longer questioning the stark realities of real life in a divided society and imagining that our social life was conducted in an “in-between place” of indeterminacy and undecidability. In this sense, the ways philosophy was conducted in the country helped interrogate its practice elsewhere.

Paulo and Otília Arantes have programmatically made a very productive effort at passing on their way of thinking to other generations. Otília Arantes directed the Center for the Studies of Contemporary Art from 1979 to 1992 and edited an influential academic journal, *Arte em Revista*, together with her students. Paulo Arantes taught courses which gathered most of the students interested in leftist thought. Their formative influence is clear in the works of the younger members who began to publish in those years: Iná Camargo Costa published a history of epic theater in pre-1964 Brazil, Isabel Loureiro, today president of the Brazilian section of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, published in 1995 a book on Rosa Luxemburg, continuing a tradition of making the key figures of the Left better known in Brazil — in the 1980s, Schwarz and Carone had translated essays by Adorno and Benjamin into Portuguese. I myself would eventually write on Raymond Williams and Fredric Jameson in the years to come.

The numbers in the Sunday gatherings increased as a group of younger professors from the São Paulo state universities joined in. We had started a Marxist periodical called *praga* — which in Portuguese means both Prague, denoting the heterodox affiliation of the group, and an unexterminable weed, thus suggesting the group’s opinion on the always-announced death of Marxism. The group included André Singer, a sociologist and a very active member of the Workers’ Party who was to become Lula’s spokesperson in his first term as president in 2003 and Fernando Haddad, who was to become the minister of Education in the same government and the mayor of São Paulo in 2013.

The 1990s marked a moment of greater polarization in the group. Characteristically this can be more clearly seen in reactions to the connections between a political and an

intellectual question. Politically, the 1990s were marked by an election for president that opposed two tendencies on the Left: the Social Democratic Party, founded in 1988 and inspired by the tenets of the third way, and the Workers' Party, with Lula running for the second time. Cardoso got fifty-four percent of the votes, Lula, twenty-seven percent. Although the members of the pizza gathering supported the more radical program of Lula, we had to recognize that finally, and in a very restricted sense, we had a person from our own ranks in power: a president who had been a key member of the São Paulo Intellectual Party, a man who had been a Marxist and a competent analyst of the Brazilian peculiarities and should know how to ameliorate them. But soon the very few illusions some people in the Sunday gatherings may have harbored were dispelled: the third way means, as we all know, giving up the essential first step to any kind of fundamental change, the critique of capitalism. Soon the government was following the policies defined by the Washington Consensus that prepared the crisis-ridden peripheral countries to join in globalization in the terms dictated by the United States and its free-market orthodoxies. It was an irony of history that our first ex-Marxist president was to preside, for eight years, over the spread of neoliberalism and its ideologies of no alternatives.

In such an intellectual climate, the one the French so aptly named *la pensée unique*, Schwarz recommended the translation of the works of a little-known German thinker, Robert Kurz, into Portuguese, for which he wrote an enlightening preface. He was also a member of a group that edited a magazine called *Krisis*.¹² Schwarz had come across his 1991 book *The Collapse of Modernization* and saw the potential of his critique and its suitability to current political debates in Brazil. Contrary to the received wisdom that the collapse of the Second World meant the victory of the First which held the standards and — as we were painfully aware in Brazil — the recipes for their kind of progress, Kurz maintained that when viewed from a strictly Marxist perspective, that is, in terms of the history of the world system of production of commodities, what we were facing was in fact a crisis of capitalism. He argued that after the Second World War the development of the productive forces, an imperative as we all learned of the logic of commodity production, reached an original level of expansion largely due to the coupling of advanced scientific investigation and the productive process. This link was made even more dynamic by the globalized market sustained by U.S. military might. This has created qualitatively new conditions for the age-old competition among capitals which always presupposes the obsolescence and consequent discarding of the older ways of production. This model cannot but create crisis after crisis. The 1980s had witnessed the debacle of Latin America, structurally incapable of paying the heavy infrastructural prices to reach the new level of productivity. The fact that the technological character of this new level meant the closing down of jobs made the new crisis even more poignant as, for instance, in the case of Brazil, it created a perverse amalgam of the old poverty of a backward nation with the new poverty of the unemployable. Capitalism was no longer able to exploit labor power, and this

is an index of the development of crisis everywhere. The gigantic effort of belated industrialization — and Kurz reminds us that this was the main aim of socialism in the former Soviet Union — was cut short by the new competitiveness, leaving large areas of the globe excluded and immersed in the immiseration of permanent unproductivity. This is the sense in which the crisis of the Soviet Union is a crisis of capitalism, which is structurally unable to integrate all but the very few. The crisis started from Third to Second World and then spread to areas of the First World. Our moment in history is characterized, according to Kurz, by the collapse of capitalist modernization.

Kurz's ideas took up a number of Sunday evenings as economists and historians in the group debated its many implications. His ideas on the necessary underdevelopment of development, to use a suggestive title of former dependency theorist Andre Gunder Frank, resonated with the ways of interpreting Brazil that were made current by the works of the members of the *Capital* group. The fact that one of those members was then the president of the country led an extra grain of political passion to the debates. If Kurz was right, Fernando Henrique's policies were totally wrong and would lead to social catastrophe. Paulo Arantes soon became a vociferous opponent of the government, writing in the papers and giving interviews criticizing the neoliberal turn. He started a new and important book series, characteristically called *Zero à Esquerda* (*Zero to the Left*). The series, which had in its editorial board a number of members of the Sunday gatherings, ran from 1997 to 2001. It made available pointed critiques of the present moment, most notably Francisco de Oliveira's *Os Direitos do Anti-valor* (*The Rights of Anti-Value*) and José Luiz Fiori's *Os Moedeiros Falsos* and *O Brasil no Espaço* (*The Counterfeiters and Brazil in Space*). The series also published translations of the oppositional works of the likes of Fredric Jameson, Ignacio Ramonet, Giovanni Arrighi, and others. Paulo Arantes himself published a hilarious compilation of quotes by well-known members of the government he patiently collected from the press. It was an acerbic comment on what had happened when members of the São Paulo Intellectual Party got to power. In an article published in the leading newspaper of the country in 2001, called "Black Out," he states that in the era of Cardoso we had witnessed the "historical transformation of intelligence into stupidity."¹³ We had then come full circle from Schwarz's assessment of the expansion of intelligence in the pre-coup 1960s.

Schwarz himself took other consequences of the political impasses of the times which were not, of course, merely national but did call for national specification. In an essay called "End of Century" he spells out the national consequences of the change in the international conjuncture as presented by Kurz:

the failure of developmentalism, which had revolved the whole society, opens up a new specific period which is essentially modern and whose dynamics is disintegration. If this is so, the order of the day is not the abandonment of national illusions but their specified critique, the

following up of their disintegration which is one of the real and timely contents of our historical moment.¹⁴

While the *Capital* group had tried to write and think in order to “save Brazil,” Schwarz at the turn of the century was going to write, in the essays composed in the 1990s and published in 1999, the chronicle of the disintegration of our society as viewed from its cultural manifestations. A good example of this is his review of Paulo Lins’s *City of God*. In this novel, the peculiarities of the new social disintegration are portrayed in the life of a big favela in Rio, the very site of the former disintegration as the favelas grew over the outbreaks of Brazilian belated industrialization. Another good example of how disintegration is portrayed is to be found in his comments on Otilia Arantes’s book *Urbanismo em Fim de Linha: E Outros Estudos Sobre o Colapso da Modernização Arquitetônica* (*Urbanism at the End of the Rope: Essays on the Collapse of Architectural Modernization*) in which she studies how architecture, both modern and postmodern, performs the functions called for by the necessities of the development of capital. He published in 1997 what is perhaps the most radical of his books on cultural criticism, *Two Girls*, where he compares Machado de Assis’s classic *Dom Casmurro* with a diary written by an adolescent girl in the interior of Brazil at about the same time.¹⁵ One of the many themes of the book is to present two different critiques of Brazilian style progress, one by our most sophisticated writer and another from a young girl whose main talent was to observe and reflect accurately the matter of Brazil, in her case, an observation untouched, due to her age and location, by the prevailing ideology.

In the same year, Paulo and Otilia Arantes published *O Sentido da Formação* (*The Directions of the Formation*), a study of the specificities and revealing potential of the process of formation of different spheres — literature, criticism, painting, and architecture — in our rarefied social experience. This book sums up a line of thought that is central to the treatment the São Paulo Fraction gives to the matter of Brazil. The idea is to examine “the objective social knot” that inflects the inescapable efforts to achieve the ideal of a cultural *formation* that would give density and continuity to the interpretation of our singularities. The first essay is significantly entitled “Procedures of a Critic on the Periphery of Capitalism.” The title deliberately echoes Schwarz’s work as it proposes to examine how Candido’s *Formation of Brazilian Literature* has surpassed our usual dichotomies — the most constant one being an oscillation between aping the foreign ways of saying or creating anew a putative originality — that compose the ideological comedy of Brazilian intellectual life. The most accurate descriptions of this comedy come precisely from Schwarz in his studies of the cultural conditions of possibility for the appearance of a master like Machado in our modest milieu. This modesty is composed, among other things, by what he calls nationalism by subtraction, one whose practical matrix is our never-achieved independent insertion into the contemporary world. One of the cultural results of this situation is that

In Brazil intellectual life seems to start from scratch with each generation. The craving for the latest products from the advanced countries nearly always has as its reverse side a lack of interest in the work of the previous generations of Brazilian thinkers, and results in a lack of intellectual continuity. [...] You do not have to be a traditionalist or believe in an impossible intellectual autarky to recognize the difficulties. There is a lack of conviction both in the adopted and soon discarded theories and in their relationship to the movement of society as a whole. [...] Outstanding analysis and thesis on the national culture are periodically cut short and problems that have been identified and tackled with great difficulty are abandoned and thus left undeveloped. [...] It is not a question of continuity for the sake of it but of the constitution of a set of real and specific problems which have their own historical duration and insertion and draw together the forces in presence that demand intellectual confrontation.¹⁶

Following Schwarz, Paulo Arantes argues that Candido's work has a twofold significance in this process. He has achieved an original and pertinent account of the decisive moments of the formation of a national literature. In the process, he has also demonstrated the formation of a tradition of cultural criticism. He gives a historical account of the intellectual accumulation that made possible Candido's work. He notes how the author tries to avoid the endless discussions on methodology — a constant feature of Brazilian criticism and a telling symptom of the difficulty of achieving substantial thinking in our rarefied intellectual atmosphere — by letting theory in through the back door. Candido's main categorical invention is thinking the fledgling of a national literature in terms of the formation of a literary system that is an organic interconnection of works, authors, and public. This process is made more complex in the adverse conditions of a colonial cultural life which lacks an internal pole and is inescapably geared towards the metropolis. In Candido's account this formation is seen as the result of a more or less deliberate accumulation of internal literary connections which end up constituting a formal and differentiated intellectual milieu which can be regarded as representative of the nation. From a certain point onwards, a threshold is reached and mutual reference starts to work as an efficient and productive mechanism both to assimilate foreign influences and to produce a particular point of view on the world: a national literature is formed. The difference the existence of this mechanism makes to a younger country is decisive, even though it does not guarantee the benefits which get attached to ideological conceptions of an emancipated country. The historical discernment for the differences that separate the literature of an ex-colony from its European models is one of the achievements of the work. He singles out and analyzes the discrepancies between the two of them. Those discrepancies may configure aesthetic inferiorities but also superiorities. The original is not always superior to the imitation and the latter can be, even if involuntarily, innovative. The

discovery of the aesthetic and spiritual peculiarities of decolonization opens up a *sui generis* world. Even though they keep the denominations of the European models, the literary modes function in a different way on the periphery demanding an original type of comparative studies and questioning the pretensions of universal validity of those models. In the process of studying the formation of a national literature in contraposition to a colonial order and specifying its particularities, Candido has taken the first decisive steps in the formation of a cultural critic on the periphery. So, in a sense, this first essay depicts the achievement of two kinds of formation.

The second essay in their book examines how Gilda de Mello e Sousa, a former professor of aesthetics at the University of São Paulo, studies the formation of Brazilian painting. In the book Paulo and Otilia Arantes reread two key essays she wrote in the mid-1970s, one commenting on the precursors of Brazilian painting in the nineteenth century and the other on Brazilian modernism, a fusion, as they put it, of “cubism and rain forest,” referring to the high moment of the local tradition proclaiming its maturity in the programmatically nationalist works of the modernists Di Cavalcanti, Anita Malfatti, Tarsila do Amaral, and Cândido Portinari.¹⁷

Gilda de Mello e Souza inflects the triumphalism of the modernists and takes an historical view. Following Candido, she points out the double fidelity characteristic of the arts in the periphery in the works of Almeida Junior (1850-99), whom she considers as the founder of a Brazilian tradition in painting. On one hand, there is a feeling for the landscape that needs to be discovered by national painting, intent on finding the “real country hidden behind the forests” and animals that had dazzled the European painters visiting the country. In this movement, Almeida Junior, who had studied in Paris with Alexandre Cabanel, reenacts in different circumstances the characteristic movement of the impressionists, leaving the studio and painting “en pleine air” to use the expression they put into circulation. On the necessary other hand, Almeida Junior does depict the Brazilian — as for instance in his famous *O Caipira Picando Fumo* (1893), a portrait of a rural worker in the interior of São Paulo state, cutting up tobacco to make a straw cigarette, but with an eye and techniques trained in “less uncivil places.”¹⁸ What singles him out as the founder of a national tradition is his capacity to depict what Gilda de Mello e Souza calls the peculiar rhythm of the corporeal movements of the “caipira,” thus starting the line of development of plastic figuration of the Brazilian experience.

This is precisely the program of the modernists who in 1922 gathered in São Paulo to announce an aesthetic rupture with all previous styles — Anita Malfatti and Di Cavalcanti in painting, Heitor Villa-Lobos in music, and Mario and Oswald de Andrade in literature, to quote the better-known names. They proposed a new discovery of Brazil whose objective was the aesthetic destruction of the European traits of the well-educated Brazilians — though mediated, in the case of painting, by the familiarity with abstract European art. The idea was to highlight the discrepancies that make up the country where bourgeois and pre-bourgeois features coexist. In the

hands of the moderns, this coexistence was not to be seen as a disgrace or a sign of insurmountable backwardness, but as a sign of the possibilities of assimilating the traits of progress without paying its price, and thus achieve a happy pre-figuration of a post-bourgeois era. As Schwarz wryly puts it in an essay published in *Que Horas São?* on the work of Oswald de Andrade, modernism in Brazil was, in spite of its important works, both a myth and a product of an euphoric nationalism. But in the view of their contemporaries this was not so. Commenting on the modernist painters, Mario de Andrade saw in their normative nationalism the inaugural moment of a peculiarly Brazilian form of art. In the process, he disregards precursors like Almeida Junior. Everything begins anew with their paintings. Mario de Andrade fails to recognize that what he calls the immanent Brazilian character of, say, Tarsila do Amaral, is also the expression of a certain kind of repatriation of an upper class which used to be very uncomfortable amidst the embarrassments and shortcomings of a backward nation: with modernism, this upper class was able to proclaim, not least in the colors and motifs — always programmatically Brazilian — of their painters, that it was finally at ease in their own country. To be modern was to be able to see the “advantages” of our peculiar situation. Gilda de Mello e Souza shows in her essays that what is really typically Brazilian is this social blindness and the intermittence in our processes of formation, in which each generation has to start as if it were from scratch, thus preventing formative crystallizations that would give impulse to the internal influx. This is one more of the many manifestations of the lack of social continuity — and of class consciousness — in the life of the country.

The last essay in the book is written by Otilia Arantes and is an examination of the question of formation in architecture. As yet another manifestation of the central movement in the process of aesthetic figuration of our determined historical reality which cuts short continuity and density, she studies the memoirs written by one of our two main names in architecture, Lúcio Costa, published when he was ninety-three. Of course, she does not argue that the seeds of modernism, planted in Brazil by none other than Le Corbusier himself, did not flourish and Brazilian modernist architecture was never formed. But she does point out how the peculiar situation of Brazil illuminates the ideology of modernist architecture in the country and elsewhere. This is particularly clear in the local acclimatization of conjunction of project and technological developments that is the hallmark of the movement. In Brazil, there is a discrepancy between modern architecture and technical development. In a train of thought akin to Oswald de Andrade’s illusions, a number of local architects celebrate this discrepancy as one of the “advantages of backwardness” as it gives them the chance to exercise their plastic creativity, free from the utilitarian constraints of core societies which would, in this account, lack imagination. Equally misplaced were the critiques of international architects, such as Pevsner, Max Bill, Alvaar Aalto and others, of the “programmatic lack of discipline, formal excess, and irrationality in the adequacy of means to ends” in the globally renowned local production. Otilia Arantes

points out that this artificial polemic reveals the falsity of the project of modernist architecture in general:

in a country where everything has still to be formed, how to implant an architecture directly linked to technological progress? The incongruity between doctrine and social premises is the rule in cases of grafting... but in this case, despite the real distance between advanced center and belated periphery, it gave occasion to an inversion of roles, turning the discrepancy into an achievement as the distortions in the copy revealed the deep truth of the original. The aesthetic trait, celebrated as the national attribute, exposed the integral formalism of modernism, whose play of forms is a sign of the abstract space organized by capital, which was the underside of the Modern Movement. [...] Once it was functional and beautiful in the colonial outskirts of the system, where in principle it could never have worked, the New Brazilian Building and its enormous symbolic charge, which was much more institutional and monumental than properly social, triumphed on the periphery and by this very success revealed the true reasons of the New Architecture.¹⁹

At the end of the essay, Otilia Arantes asks what is to be done with our great collection of modernist architecture in the present. The answer outlines the frame of reference that made possible this assessment of the contradictory movements of formation of Brazilian intellectual and artistic forms, namely the exhaustion of the project of formation as we go through the process of a Brazilian style collapse of modernization in a moment in which

capitalist globalization has divided up world space between a small number of victors and an immense mass of the vanquished. This new situation of dependency — at least the old kind of dependency left open a space in which the national State has some room to maneuver — has deprived architecture from its main façade, that is, the idealized discourse of being part of a process of national construction of a more integrated nation.²⁰

But what capital “takes away with one hand, it gives back, in a more degraded form, with the other one.” Our collection of modernist architecture monuments has a secure place in the new demands of the market as

at the height of the new worldwide homogeneity provoked by the new wave of implacable adjustments to global markets, we have witnessed an apparently opposed movement...that of the repositioning of difference, from the individual to the national ones: something like a cultural

sublimation of the social economic regression whose function is to forge merely symbolic identities, in the absence of the destroyed objective social references.²¹

In this new climate, the formalism of modernist architecture is very functional indeed as it allows our monumental modernist architecture to be sold in the global cultural market as both international and regional, as witness the success of our second great architect, Oscar Niemeyer, to this day a Brazilian master of international architecture. The possible coexistence of two antagonistic conceptions in the perception of Niemeyer's work is yet another sign that the current internationalism is as abstract and formal as the forms of capital that are its determinants.

This book sums up the intellectual results of the examination of the dialectics of formation on the periphery and its relations with the new version of the old world order which keeps on demanding, and challenging, rational explanations. In Brazil, the new century started with the demise of the social-democratic/neoliberal government as Lula was elected president. The people at the pizza parlor all unanimously supported his candidacy, even though some were alarmed by the contents of a document he made public six months before the election. In "Letter to the Brazilian People," which looked more like a letter to the Brazilian elite, its bankers, and the international funding agencies, he stated that he was going to pay the international debt — which he did in his second term — and that the way to economic growth was stability and social responsibility. He stated that there was no leeway for economic changes. It was possible to recognize in those intentions the structural continuities we were to expect in a so-called oppositional government. This has been a constant in Brazilian history. Schwarz himself, in his seminal essay "Misplaced Ideas," first published in 1977, had characterized a movement that gets repeated in every cycle of change. This movement can be summed up in the following motto, "Instead of supersession, permanence," and it describes how in every moment of apparent change we also have its opposite, the reposition of the old order. Schwarz gives a number of examples — the most well-known being our Independence from Portugal in 1822 and the enthronement of the heir to the Portuguese crown as our first emperor. One example in particular stands out in comparison to Lula's "Letter." Schwarz refers to a document issued by the revolutionary government of a short-lived revolt in Northeast Brazil in 1817. It says "Patriots, your properties, even the ones most contrary to the ideal of justice, will be considered sacred." The message sent by Lula to the Brazilian elites sounded the same note, thus demonstrating the structural permanencies that were going to coexist with the "supersession" his candidacy symbolized.

The group soon split again over Lula's government. Paulo Arantes joined a new party, the Party of Socialism and Freedom (PSOL), composed by those on the Left disillusioned by Lula's accommodations and eager to create a political space for change. In the last election in 2010, their candidate, who ran on a strictly leftist platform, got

one percent of the vote. Little by little, throughout Lula's two terms as president, a sort of disillusioned consensus was formed. We all knew the government was not on the Left and was making the most spurious arrangements — both political and economic, very much including cases of corruption. And yet, it was the best government we had ever had. It began to really alter the life of the very poor and to reduce the scandalous social inequality of Brazil, though it did not alter significantly the concentration of wealth. It launched a series of polemical measures such as the “Bolsa Família” that distributes money to over thirteen million families who lived below the poverty line. This, as well as other measures and the modest but steady economic growth, have reduced the population living in extreme poverty to 4.8 percent. It was twelve percent in 2003. The minimum wage increased and so did the credit to people with small incomes. Programs like “Luz para Todos” (Electricity to Everybody) and “Pro-UNi” — a scholarship program to open up access to tertiary education — made a big difference in the lives of many. The collapse of modernization could then be reconsidered, as the system was still able to deliver some of its promised goods.

How did the group, which is small but influential and representative of a certain kind of heterodox Marxism, react to this version of old times? The Sunday discussions were as lively as ever, but, perhaps as an index of perplexity, the group decided to have a seminar a month, in which either somebody from the group or an invited guest would present a text dealing with the contemporary crisis. This new move was viewed by some as an index that the great originality of the Sunday gatherings — its informality and independence from the university coupled with a strong intellectual and public presence — was being exchanged for yet another run of seminars, the same experience we have at universities. A number of the essays discussed had been written by members of the group themselves and I want to update this sketch by commenting on two of them, both published in 2009, as they reveal two types of intellectual reaction to and appraisal of the new situation.

The first one is by Schwarz, and it traces the theme of the collapse of modernization in Brazil as aesthetically materialized in Chico Buarque's fourth novel. Chico Buarque is the son of Sérgio Buarque, author of one of the classic interpretations of the country, *Roots of Brazil* (1936). He is also, according to many, the greatest composer and, according to almost everyone, the best writer of lyrics of Brazilian Popular Music. The novel, significantly called *Spilt Milk*, is narrated by a very old man, Eulalio Assumpção, who is lying on a hospital bed and recounts the story of his traditional Brazilian family to the nurses and attendants, or just to himself, as we cannot be sure anyone else is listening in the busy public hospital. His great grandfather came with the Royal Family fleeing from Napoleon in 1808 and went on following the trajectory of the Brazilian elites, getting involved in production, rackets, and exploitation. The narrator's father had been a senator and an intermediary in the sales of outdated French weapons to the Brazilian army. In the 100 years of the narrator's life the family goes through decline and he ends up penniless on a public hospital bed. Like the hero

of Machado de Assis's classic *Dom Casmurro*, our narrator fell in love with a woman of a lower social rank — in this case, a woman who is suspiciously too dark-skinned for comfort in a racist, though mixed, family. Like Machado's narrator, Eulalio is extremely jealous of his wife: both his love and his jealousy get mixed up with class and race differences. The wife leaves him with no explanation. Like Machado, Chico Buarque lets his narrator expose himself and his class. From the point of view of traditional families, Eulalio's life gets worse and worse — his daughter marries beneath her, to an immigrant, her son is a Communist in the Chinese line, and Eulalio's great-grandson is black and has a son who is a drug dealer. Schwarz shows that, from the point of view of the narrative itself, nothing has changed much as the antecessor of the drug dealer was a slave trader, to point out just one of the many structural similarities between what the unreliable narrator considers the apogee and the decline of his family. If Machado's *Dom Casmurro* marked the first successful attempt at artistic elaboration of the matter of Brazil, Chico Buarque gives continuation to this literary tradition as his book depicts the contemporary effects of the same historical process that engendered it. As Schwarz puts it:

It is as if the present continued the informality of the patriarchal past multiplying it by one thousand, reaching the scale of the masses, for better or worse. Maybe this is the spilt milk it is no use crying over: inequality has persisted, the decorum and the dressed-up authority of the prosperous have disappeared but law and rights have not prospered. It is what in the interval between long ago and nowadays used to be called modernization without a bourgeois revolution. Without either longing for an iniquitous past or adhering in a subaltern way to what is, [the novel] is a wonderful breath of fresh air.²²

So, in a sense, he reads the novel as the current chapter in the long process of registering the specificities of a Brazilian-style collapse of modernization.

The second essay looks at what has actually changed in the country. "Ideological and Social Roots of Lulism" is written by the sociologist André Singer and analyzes the political possibilities opened up by the relocation of votes in Lula's reelection in 2006. His research shows that a class fraction changed its traditional support to right-wing candidates to vote for Lula. Borrowing a term coined by his father, the economist Paul Singer, a member, as we saw, of the *Capital Group*, he calls them the subproletariat — that is the underpaid workers who do not achieve the minimum conditions that would allow them to take part in class struggle. They represent almost half of the Brazilian work force. In 1989 they all voted for Collor against Lula. Their lot did not improve in the next governments and worsened during the neoliberal period. Taking his inspiration from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, André Singer sees this subproletariat as isolated and unable to organize. Like the peasant smallholders studied by Marx,

this class fraction projects its aspirations in a leader in power, hence their support for Lula. They are both progressive and conservative: they do not support social conflict — they are mostly, for instance, against strikes — and are in favor of state intervention to ameliorate social conditions. One of the many results of this change in the political basis of the government has been to dislocate the positions in the political debate:

in the older alignment the Left would organize the low and middle segments of the middle classes — mainly industrial workers and public servants around a Left ideology, that is, a class discourse. The center would aggregate the middle classes around the discourse of the modernization of capitalism and they would be the ones to mobilize the subproletariat against the Left in crucial moments. Thus the political conflict was filtered among the middle sectors.²³

This is no longer true. The subproletariat is difficult to organize — they favor a strong state and change within the prevailing social order. This new state of affairs presents a number of difficulties for the Left. For one thing, it does not constitute subjects of history:

the difference between the Right and the Left is not perceived by those electors as positions for or against the reduction of inequality but in how to obtain it. The Left is identified as the option that puts order in risk and they preferred a constituted authority that could protect the poorest without challenging stability.²⁴

This of course forces the Left to redefine a class discourse in the shadows of a truly popular leadership with all the dangers it may entail.

This change has a detectable material base: the program of family allowance, the increase in the minimum wage, and the expansion of credit, all of which indicate a different politics, less dependent on international ties as it focuses on the expansion of the internal market as one of the means of attaining economic stability. André Singer does not affirm this in his article but it is possible to suggest that this material integration of the very poor may have promising political effects. It is true that nowadays they do not fully perceive the structural limitations of capitalism as their lot did improve but they are sure to reassert themselves as they have conditions that allow them to perceive that the system requires inequality and that they are the ones who pay, and have paid for generations, its human costs.

I don't think many intellectuals of the São Paulo Fraction would agree to this position. If we judge from the intellectual output, Paulo Arantes, for instance, would consider this expectation a pious act. He has started a new book series called *State of Siege* — his own contribution is a book called *Extinction* (2007) in which he traces the

end of politics and its substitution for a permanent state of siege that has structurally similar effects in the lack of rights of people in Baghdad and in the favelas in Rio. Asked by a well-meaning journalist what can be done in times of extinction, he quips:

You are in fact asking me to tell you what is to be done after the end of the world. Nothing short of the Leninist question in an Adornian scenary, something like Brecht waiting for Godot. This is made even more unusual when we look at the situations as filtered by Slavoj Žižek's Utopian angle of a Lenin reborn from the ashes in 1914.²⁵

This catastrophic outlook has not prevented him from fully and generously engaging with the Landless People Movement. At the moment, he coordinates and teaches a number of courses at the Movement's school for the formation of cadres. He has also launched a call in an Internet portal for contributions on the difficulties and tasks of thinking from outside the dominant system. He maintains a study group at the University of São Paulo in which different authors present their work on the most candent themes of present-day Brazil. He is one of the intellectual mentors of a number of activists, including members of the Movimento Passe Livre (MPL), that is Movement for Free Fares, the movement that was behind the June 2013 demonstrations. These started as a protest against an increase in bus fares in São Paulo and ended up spreading all over the country, with as many as a million demonstrators in different cities in Brazil over a period of three weeks. The protesters soon enlarged their demands: free transportation, as the Movimento Passe Livre demanded, better public health and education, end of corruption, cancellation of the big stadium constructions in preparation for the World Cup in 2014 — a frequent banner in the streets was "Let us apply FIFA construction standards for stadiums to public hospitals." It was clear that demands were once again on the agenda, and the lore of Brazil as a success story, as an emergent world power, was virtually forgotten. For the first time in the history of Brazil we had huge mass protests in a scenario of full employment, economic and political stability. The real growth achieved under Lula and, more modestly, under his successor Dilma Rouseff — there was a fifty-five percent increase in the minimum wage between 2003 and 2011 — seemed to have opened a space for the return of the repressed demands, the same ones, in a sense, that had granted the Workers' Party its hegemony: support for universal health care, free public education, opposition to the recessive demands of capital; in sum, a Leftist agenda.

The demonstrations seemed to prefigure new times in Brazil. The members of the Sunday gatherings had useful insights about this new turn the Left had to react to. Arantes aptly pointed out that, after June, the future is over and politicians have to deal with dissatisfaction right now. In the blurb of what I think was the first book on the subject, published as early as August 2013, Arantes thus summarized the effects of the June Days, as the demonstrations were called, perhaps too hopefully, on the Left:

Until the next round, when other actors finally enter the stage, we will know whether the June Days did indeed begin to dismantle the consensus between the Right and the Left over the *modus operandi* of capitalism in Brazil. In the last 20 years, the country has become a great manufacturer of consent, everybody enthusiastically begging to be exploited. Have we reached the limit to all this? This is what the historical *faux pas* that detonated all the process suggests. For the first time, the violence inherited from the dictatorship and enhanced by the “democracy” that had kept politics within the juridical and repressive apparatuses did not work. A threshold was crossed and we still need to know which one. And we need to do this very soon. Whatever will come of it? “It is already coming,” as a taxi driver told me the other day.²⁶

Whatever is coming, it is likely to put an end to what I want to call the conformist Left. In an essay called “A Trajectory of Our Times” published in his collection of essays that came out in 2012, Schwarz offers what I think is the specification of a typical course taken by many on the Left. As such it represents an *aggiornamento* of the study of the Brazilian matter as constituted by the works of the São Paulo Fraction. Schwarz analyses Caetano Veloso’s autobiography, published in 1997. Born in 1942, Veloso witnessed the great movements that define twentieth-century Brazilian history: he joined in a number of Leftist movements, most notably in the groups that volunteered to spread Paulo Freire’s method in the early 1960s, renovated Brazilian music as a leader of the scandalous Tropicalism, was in a military prison for two months, exiled in London for a year, and came back to become the central figure in Brazilian culture he still is.

Schwarz reads the autobiography as a great realistic novel, one that reveals the contradictions that make up social life. He treats Veloso as a typical character in the Lukacsian sense: as an embodiment of the historical forces in movement in a particular social situation. Veloso then personifies and reveals the specificities of the moves that took the Brazilian Left from a revolutionary position in the 1960s — when superseding historical inequality in the country equated superseding capitalism — to a so-called more realistic position in which the Left no longer questions the system but tries to ameliorate it. The fact that the turn is narrated as lived experience adds to our understanding of the formation of what I am tempted to call, following Raymond Williams, a new structure of feeling, one that dominates much of the Left today, very much including the Left in power. Just to give an example, the current president, Dilma Rousseff, had been in a military prison after the coup.

Appropriately for an artist, Veloso relates this key movement that marked a whole generation and created the conditions for the establishment of this accommodated Left in relation to an aesthetic experience. He tells us how he reacted to a scene in the remarkable film *Entranced Earth*, directed by Glauber Rocha. This 1967 film, part

of Rocha's courageous interrogations of the ways of the world from a Third World perspective, reflects on the consequences of the coup scarcely three years after it had happened. The scene is the one in which at a political demonstration, the protagonist, the poet and intellectual Paulo Martins, who had joined the forces of revolution, gets very angry at a working man who respectfully calls him doctor, a treatment the poor reserved for every middle-class man. Paulo Martins turns to the camera and addresses the audience saying: "Do you see what the people is? An illiterate, an ignorant, a depoliticized man." The scene dramatizes the many consequences of the shock of reality the coup represented for the Left. In the film, the discrediting of the workers is a sort of emotional historical unburdening. The scene also shakes the ideological certainties of the Left: the workers were not revolutionaries, they still related to the ruling class in paternalistic terms, and the populist politicians — the film shows the process of elections in Eldorado, a thinly disguised Brazil — allied with the adversaries, joining forces with the enemies of yesterday in the name of remaining in power. The distance between certain Marxist certainties and social reality were disheartening. All this did not alter the grotesque figure of the political leaders and of class domination — in fact the coup was precisely a class realignment that meant business, that is, exploitation, as usual. The revolution, the guiding impulse of the social ebullition that the coup was meant to put out, was more necessary than ever, but it had met a big historical opponent — nothing less than an alliance of the national ruling class and the interests of the country that was on its way to win the Cold War and become the hegemonic power in a thoroughly capitalist world. The main tone of *Entranced Earth* is of a historical despair in the face of defeat.

As Schwarz makes clear, however, our protagonist goes in the opposite direction, thus demonstrating what cultural products can reveal of one's true political position. This is how Veloso describes his reaction to the scene:

I experienced this scene, and the scenes of indignant reactions it caused in discussions among friends in bars — as the center of a great event whose short name, "the death of populism," would not then have occurred to me so easily (and thus I would search for a thousand ways of describing it to myself and to others)....it was the very faith in popular forces — and of the very respect that the best felt for the men of the people that had been discarded as a political weapon or as an ethical value in itself. I was prepared to face this hecatomb, and I was also excited to examine its intimate phenomena and to foresee its consequences. Nothing of what was to be called Tropicalism would have taken place without this traumatic moment. Thus when the poet in *Entranced Earth* decreed the failure of the faith in the liberating energy of the "people" I, in the audience, did not see the end of possibilities, but the announcement of new tasks for me.

Schwarz reads this passage as the climax of the change that marks Veloso's trajectory and makes it a trajectory of our times:

It is important to notice that Caetano Veloso is not using populism in the usual sociological implication it has in Latin America, that is, of personal leadership over not fully integrated urban masses. In his sense, the term indicates something of a different order. He means the special role reserved for the working people in the conceptions and hopes of the Left, who recognized them as the victims of social injustice, and for this very reason, as the subjects and natural allies of a liberating politics. The respect that the "best" felt — and do not feel anymore? — for the men of the people, the semi-excluded and the excluded in whom they contemplated the hard truths of our class society, is linked to this conviction. "But perhaps it is I myself I despise in their eyes," wrote the poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade in 1940, thinking of the factory worker. Thus when Caetano Veloso incorporates as his the words of Paulo Martins, acknowledging and saluting through them the death of populism, of the very respect the better people had for the men of the people, he is also marking the beginning of a new time, a time in which the socio-historical debt to the downtrodden — perhaps the main propeller of Brazilian critical thinking at least since Abolitionism — does not exist anymore. In this movement he dissociated himself from the ones that had recently been defeated by the coup, who were, in this sense, all populists. This marks a considerable change, one that puts him in opposition to what had been, until then, his own camp: the socialists, the nationalist and the Christian Left, the progressive tradition of Brazilian literature at least since the last decades of the nineteenth century, and also the people who were merely enlightened enough to see that the internal, not to say dialectical, link between wealth and poverty is a given of modern consciousness. Paulo Martins' disillusion is turned into a disavowal of obligation. This rupture, unless I am mistaken, is at the origin of the new freedom brought in by Tropicalism. If the people, as the antipode of privilege, is not the virtual bearer of a new order, this order disappears from the horizon, which is decisively lowered.²⁷

I want to argue that this turn is just a very explicit example of a movement that is characteristic of large portions of the Left, and not only of the Brazilian Left. Veloso's turn represents the defeat of a way of thinking, which is, as we saw here, one of the contents of the scene in *Entranced Earth*: the oppressed will have to make a revolution so all of us can be free. As in the case of Brazil in 1964 they did not; the conclusion that some arrived at, among them of course our protagonist, is that class struggle, to revert to classical language, is no longer possible. Of course this is one of the key ideologemes

among the victors of the Cold War, one that has dominated the political scene up until now. What makes Veloso typical of what I am trying to characterize as the conformist Left is that for him the presumptive end of class struggle is perceived as a liberation and an opening to new kinds of politics, notably identity politics and the politics of hedonist liberation. Identity politics is, as we all know, very well-intentioned but, as the politics of ecologists nowadays, cannot achieve its equalitarian goals within the terms of the current system. In this sense his trajectory depicts the moment in which the revolutionary impulse becomes mere rebellion that aims at liberating ways of living, the body and sexual desire, but has no regard either to collective action and liberation and does not interrogate the system that tolerates rebellion only up to a certain well-defined point. Is it not an accurate description of 2010s Left in Brazil and elsewhere? Once again, the periphery makes explicit the movements of international ideologies.

And thus we have come all the way from the 1970s to the present. What can one conclude about this formation? Of course its first characteristic is what Paulo Arantes would call its municipal size. It is also not institutionalized, has no manifesto or mandate. It congregates important and less-important Marxist intellectuals. Their joint contribution has been, as I tried to show in this piece, the elaboration of the matter of Brazil. They completed the project of the formation of heterodox Marxist criticism in the country. In their work, the path opened up by Antonio Candido to turn criticism into a project of discovering and interpreting social reality reached a higher point as they added to the initial project a decidedly Marxist point of view. This has enlarged the interest of the study of the Brazilian matter as the specificities of the country were studied in relation to the movements of world capital. As such, their local angle has helped clarify the total picture. They have taught a generation to think about the country in ways that take into consideration the necessity and also the structural limitations to change. Most of all, they have kept the Leftist intellectual conversation going. They have thus kept open a space that may be occupied by more effective forces in a less-alienated future. And all this while also having a great time over pizza and wine.

Notes

1. Raymond Williams, "The Bloomsbury Fraction," *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980) 158.
2. Roberto Schwarz, "Cultura e Política — 1964-1969," *O Pai de Família e outros Ensaíes* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1978) 69.
3. Paulo Arantes, Intervention at the Debate "Reverse Hegemony," University of São Paulo, 23 September, 2010.
4. Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005) 188.
5. I owe those formulations to oral communication with Roberto Schwarz. But, see also Roberto Schwarz, *Two Girls and Other Essays* (London: Verso, 2012).
6. Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Conversas com Historiadores Brasileiros*, ed. José Geraldo Vinci de Moraes and José Marcio Rego (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2002) 78.
7. Bernardo Ricupero, *Caio Prado e a Nacionalização do Marxismo* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2000).
8. Roberto Schwarz, "Complexo, Moderno, Nacional e Negativo," *Que Horas São?* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987) 121. Reprinted in *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture* (London: Verso, 1992).
9. Roberto Schwarz, "Complexo" 124.
10. See Roberto Schwarz, "Adequação Nacional e Originalidade Crítica," *Sequências Brasileiras* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1999) 24-46.
11. Nicholas Brown, "It's Dialectical! A Review of Fredric Jameson's *Valences of the Dialectic*," *Mediations* (Spring 2009).
12. Selections from *Krisis* and related publications *Exit!* and *Streifzüge* are available in *Mediations* 27.1-2 (Fall/Spring 2013-14).
13. Reprinted in Paulo Arantes, *Zero à Esquerda* (São Paulo: Conrad, 2004) 17.
14. Roberto Schwarz, "Fim de Século," *Sequências Brasileiras* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1999) 160.
15. The book is now translated into English in the collection *Two Girls and Other Essays*.
16. Roberto Schwarz, "Nacional por Subtração, Ó *Que Horas São?*" (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987) 30. Reprinted in *Misplaced Ideas* as "Nationalism by Elimination" (1-18).
17. Paulo and Otilia Arantes, *O Sentido da Formação* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1997) 80.
18. Arantes, *Sentido* 78.
19. *Sentido* 128-29.
20. *Sentido* 131-32.
21. *ibid.*
22. Roberto Schwarz, "Brincalhão mas não Ingênuo," *Folha de São Paulo* (28 March 2009) E9.
23. André Singer, "Raízes Sociais e Ideológicas do Lulismo," *Novos Estudos Cebrap* (November 2009) 101.
24. Singer, "Raízes Sociais" 88.
25. "Entrevista com Paulo Arantes," *Revista Cult* (October 2007).
26. Authors' Collective, *Cidades Rebeldes: Passe Livre e as Manifestações que Tomaram as Ruas do Brasil* (São Paulo: Boitempo) 2013.
27. Roberto Schwarz, "Um percurso de nosso tempo," *Martinha versus Lucrecia* (São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 2012) 78-79. Translated as "Political Iridescence" in *New Left Review* 74 (May/June 2012).

Mass Online Education: Dialectic of Enlightenment 2.0

Carolyn Elerding

In the 1930s, Walter Benjamin celebrated the mass culture made possible by technological reproducibility — cinema in particular — on the grounds that lay expertise and distraction empower and liberate proletarian spectators.¹ Responding to the contrary during their extended written correspondence, Theodor W. Adorno argued that popular entertainments are more regressive than progressive, because they obscure the cause underlying the need for distraction: worker exploitation.² Today, the continuing development of socio-technological systems involving the broadcasting of automations, such as online pedagogical environments, ought to stimulate a revival of the culture industry polemic, beginning where Adorno and Benjamin left off.³ The argument partakes of a dialectic in which the democratization of culture through technological mediation is harnessed ideologically to capitalist processes of producer and consumer exploitation. Since many of the beliefs and practices associated with online education are modeled directly upon those observed in “new” media usage during leisure time, the culture industry problematic has become newly and somewhat differently relevant: for instance, not only are many forms of online education broadcast on a massive scale that attracts and depends upon corporate interests, but they also reflect arguably popular design principles, and the content is often generated by users themselves.

Formal online education, with its ambiguously material apparatuses based on social media designs (and the often-overlooked fine print bundled into their usage), seems to offer solutions to fiscal and social challenges.⁴ For students, it poses a viable alternative to — and is often perceived as an improvement over — prohibitively expensive tuitions and campus living. For institutions, it may reduce costs to a significant degree. While it is frequently assumed that the quality of online education compares poorly with conventional schooling, the broadest and most troubling potential consequences are often overlooked. In the process of virtualization, the formerly public responsibility of ensuring access to education is easily belayed from public institutions to private individuals and their families while corporate entities

profit by mediating the process. Costly consumer electronics and home Internet service provide the bulk of the necessary infrastructure and, to a significant extent, can even replace classrooms and facilitate the obsolescence of embodied instructors. In addition, interaction in virtual classrooms is typically supported by the use of corporate, rather than non-profit, browsers and interactive media, thereby producing easy and ubiquitous targets for direct and indirect monetization schemes.⁵ Large-scale, radical digital restructuring is frequently justified by rhetoric that reveals a widespread need for more complex and reflexive understanding of the historical trajectories of technological development, the enlightenment humanist tradition, and socioeconomic inequality.

The current expansion of online education intersects with the tension between the societal benefit of improved access to higher education as opposed to the dangerous precariousness of instructional labor and the privatization of what has commonly been seen as a public sphere. As such, it reveals the continuing dynamism of the “dialectic of enlightenment” Adorno theorized in the 1940s with Max Horkheimer, in large part as a response to Benjamin’s distraction theory. Writing that “power and knowledge are synonymous,” Adorno and Horkheimer traced the ruinous growth and eventual primacy of domination within the (not entirely contemptible) development of Western civilization’s liberal concept of social progress through the widespread cultivation of individual reason, an unexpectedly wayward process resulting ultimately in the domination of nature, including humanity’s own: “[r]uthless toward itself, the Enlightenment has eradicated the last remnant of its own self-awareness.”⁶ Due to insufficient critical reflection, demythologization had resulted in a blindness associated with myth and fetish, hypostatized in products of the culture industry.⁷ Where Benjamin found the enrichment of the “lay expert” in immersion in sound cinema, Adorno saw commodification leading to the “withering of imagination and spontaneity” already increasingly crippled by the “objective” composition of cultural goods: “[t]hey are so constructed that their adequate comprehension requires a quick, observant, knowledgeable cast of mind but positively debar[s] the spectator from thinking, if he is not to miss the fleeting facts.”⁸ In discussions of online education, as elsewhere, arguments over the supposed authenticity or inauthenticity of “mere” representations are sometimes erroneously conflated with this much more sophisticated, valid, and important insight regarding the rationalization to the profit motive that normalizes variety and detail into a streamlined, prepackaged unit. The latter should be of central concern in academic circles.

Writing in the late 1960s, Adorno argued that, despite the influence of the culture industry over all social reproduction, education and the Western tradition of enlightenment could “still manage a little something” against the ascent of barbarism, which in his day as in ours frequently took the shape of racism and genocide.⁹ If this remains true, academic workers — including the tenured professoriat — must not delay in resisting the possibility of widespread intensification of inequity by

technological means in our sector, and that must do so without denying the value of new technological affordances. At the same time, a dialectical understanding of the term “enlightenment” must be maintained, one that resists bourgeois, imperialist, and essentializing impulses. Those with strong formations in historical materialism and in leftist critique could make pivotal contributions in this endeavor, and not only at the postsecondary level.¹⁰ To this end, in this essay it is argued that exploring the tensions between Adorno and Benjamin’s Marxist media theories adds depth and clarity to considerations of technological determinism, mediation, and political economy, providing a comprehensive critical lens through which to observe contemporary developments in technological mediation. In addition, an Adornian-Benjaminian framework is justified geographically. Adorno wrote his numerous works on communications and media during his years in the United States as a researcher at the Princeton Radio Research Project and as one of many European exiles residing in Hollywood. His work, deeply informed by his close relationship with Benjamin, thus offers an ideal starting point for critiquing infrastructure and industrialized culture in the United States.¹¹

Dialectical Materialism and Technologically Mediated Culture

Writing that “power and knowledge are synonymous,” Horkheimer and Adorno traced the insidious growth and eventual centrality of violent domination within the development of Western civilization’s liberal concept of enlightenment or social progress through reason. Benjamin, too, pursued these themes in the years leading up to the war: “[t]here is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism,” he wrote in the definitive statement of historical materialism entitled “Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian.”¹² Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno argued, had resulted in a disastrous subordination of nature and, consequently, of humanity’s role within in it: “Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.”¹³ Foremost in their concern was industrialist fascism, the combination of capitalism with right-wing nationalist ethnocentrism, whereas today the devastating effects of high-tech finance and climate change, as well as other forms of environmental devastation, are among the highest priorities for critical thought. Horkheimer and Adorno insisted that, due to insufficient critical reflection, demythologization had resulted paradoxically in the blindness of myth and fetish, hypostatized in products of the culture industry.¹⁴ Where Benjamin hoped for the perceptual evolution and enrichment of the “lay expert” in immersion in sound cinema, Adorno and Horkheimer saw standardized commodification that would lead to the “withering of imagination and spontaneity,” as well as to a dulling effect on the human sensorium which cleared the way for barbarism, the decline of civilization.¹⁵

Much of the productive dissonance pervading Adorno’s and Benjamin’s

mutual interest in media and perception develops out of the interrelated issues of technological determinism and the social significance of mass culture, and is therefore deeply germane to mass online education. Conventionally, argumentation over the accelerating technological transformation higher education has undergone continuously since the early 1990s is characterized by narrowly deterministic and otherwise non-dialectical perspectives. They occur in a variety of forms, in most cases tending toward one of two poles. The first of these extremities is an optimistic conceptualization of technological progress as smoothly linear and inevitable, characteristic of the teleological narratives of various currents found throughout the history of dialectical materialism and peculiar to contemporary neoliberal rhetoric, as well.¹⁶ Both Benjamin and Adorno resisted the attraction of this more sanguine pole, without veering toward its opposite by denying technology's social value. Both criticized the determinist element of Marx's vision, which Adorno later summarized in 1968 as the expectation that "the primacy of the forces of production would inevitably arrive and necessarily explode the relations of production," citing the threat of atomic warfare and increasingly pernicious social inequality as examples to the contrary.¹⁷ At the same time, both respected the prognostic capability of Marxist theory in determining the range and degree of revolutionary potential under particular circumstances. Adorno felt that the most auspicious moment had passed with little chance of returning, whereas Benjamin retained, or at least expressed, a greater sense of hope for a redemptive future.¹⁸ The other major determinist tendency is toward a pessimistic belief that technological development leads — inevitably — to harm. Counterexamples to this expectation are abundant, though it is difficult to argue against the contention that technological change tends toward the dystopian when fueled by profit-seeking or by military expansion — as in modernity it typically has been.

Adorno's understanding of the relation of society and technology is too complex to be associated with either of these polar extremes, though he has been criticized, famously, for his pessimistic outlook.¹⁹ Adorno emphasized throughout his life that technological development depends largely upon capitalist relations of production, the entrenchment of which had intensified during his lifetime despite improved conditions among many in the working classes of the wealthiest regions.²⁰ Benjamin, whose life ended before the end of the war, assigned much greater autonomy to technology. Like Marx, Benjamin viewed technological development positively as facilitating humanity's eventual liberation from capitalist oppression.²¹ However, his critique, rather than reflecting what would later come to be called "vulgar" Marxism, in many ways presaged positions associated with postmodernism and poststructuralism. Benjamin celebrated the mass culture made possible by technological reproducibility — cinema in particular — on the grounds that lay expertise and distracted consumption, as opposed to erudite bourgeois contemplation, contributed to the empowerment and liberation of proletarian spectators.²² Responding to the

contrary during their extended written correspondence, Adorno argued that popular entertainments, standardized and commodified by the culture industry, were more regressive than progressive, because they obscured the cause underlying the need for distraction: worker exploitation.²³ Elsewhere, Adorno further insisted that leisure-time pursuits in general, including hobbies and recreation, also tended toward the exploitation of worker-consumers, though indirectly by extracting value from labor time camouflaged as free time.²⁴ The revolutionary potential Benjamin located in technologically mediated mass culture was, in Adorno's view, unfortunately and unavoidably embedded in the "second nature" projected and consolidated by the culture industry.²⁵

Neither does Benjamin's perspective tend toward a polar extreme. The dialectical complexity of his stance is most clearly articulated in the second version of Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," written in late 1935 and early 1936, which remained unpublished during his lifetime. Considered by many including Benjamin to be the definitive version, though it is not the one most widely read, it contains nineteen fragments (there are fewer in the more widely read third version, which remains a locus classicus of film theory), each clarifying a significant theoretical point regarding the ongoing historical development of media technology.²⁶ In the opening paragraphs Benjamin emphasizes the "prognostic value," as opposed to dogmatic veracity, of the tendential "laws" Marx applied in predicting a deepening exploitation of the working classes in conjunction with the development of circumstances necessary for capitalism's self-destruction.²⁷ While both Benjamin and Adorno used these principles to navigate between optimistic and pessimistic determinisms, they were by no means in agreement on the political significance of mass mediation.

Benjamin described material history as structured by the relation between economic base and cultural superstructure and, crucially, as discernible in changes in the technological mediation of perception:

Since the transformation of the superstructure proceeds far more slowly than that of the base, it has taken more than half a century for the change in the conditions of production to be manifested in all areas of culture. How this process has affected culture can only now be assessed, and these assessments must meet certain prognostic requirements.²⁸

Therefore, rather than prescribing avant-garde artistic practices, as many critics among his generation did, Benjamin sought to elucidate the historical linkage of art with the development of means of production, particularly media technology.²⁹ The primary political value he saw in defining these tendencies in artistic production lay in analyzing the processes by which the conventional aesthetic notions of "creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery" — in other words, aura — could be activated

and manipulated by fascist tendencies or, alternatively, neutralized by revolutionary practices.³⁰ Therefore, influenced in part by Dadaism, Benjamin's purpose was also to interject into art theory new concepts "completely useless for the purposes of fascism" and meanwhile "useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art."³¹

Though mindful of the dangers presented by powerful modern media technology — in the context of fascism, for instance, which sought to mobilize the masses through an aestheticization of politics without altering existing property relations — Benjamin remained focused on technology's ability to alleviate repression and foment revolutionary social processes.³² With respect to the revolutionary potential of mass mediation, rather than interpreting content Benjamin underscored the complex relation between media and perception, which he argued that earlier scholars were ill-equipped to account for due to the stage of technological development in which they worked.³³ He ascribed this general lag in critical apperception to a delay in super-structural changes, such as innovations in technological mediation, relative to transformations of the economic base.³⁴ Benjamin experienced his own moment as one in which, due to technological development, it had become possible to apprehend the social implications of mid-nineteenth-century European cultural production to an unprecedented extent, and in doing so suggested predictions of his own building upon those of Marx. Benjamin focused his prognostications on the revolutionary potential of technologically mediated changes in perception.

Adorno's works on media were far less hopeful, and after the war (and Benjamin's death) he concentrated increasingly on literary and musicological subjects. In 1968, years after returning to Europe, Adorno published "Is Marx Obsolete?" in response to sociological debates regarding the continuing relevance of the concept of capitalism in the wake of accelerating technological development, rearticulating his lifelong non-deterministic pessimism and the Marxist elements of its basis. Many of the hypothetical socioeconomic tendencies Marx formulated had indeed, Adorno explained, been realized historically — though often in contradictory forms, while some had not. A few had, as Adorno put it, "come spectacularly true." Thus, he argued, both the concept of capitalism and the need for its continued critique remained.³⁵ In the late 1960s, however, many sociologists claimed — as many do now in the digital age — that totalizing industrial expansion had obviated the notion of capitalism itself, making "the very concept of capitalism, the difference between capitalist and non-capitalist states, and the very critique of capitalism redundant."³⁶ To this, Adorno conceded that, in industrialized regions, whether capitalist or communist, the affordances of technological progress had partially negated the separation of society into antagonistic classes of capital and labor and that it had even lessened some of the suffering of the working classes.³⁷ However, he denied that late capitalism represented a substantive break with industrial production, claiming instead that industrial processes remained the models upon which all other behaviors, including

less-physically-tangible forms of labor, were based.³⁸ In other words, in his view the relations of production retained fundamentally capitalist configurations revolving around the ever-expanding generation and extraction of profit.

Equally committed to a Marxist view of history, Benjamin nevertheless found hope in the same mass culture that Adorno identified with ideological standardization and later with consumerist complacency. While Adorno saw the sameness generated by the culture industry as fundamentally regressive, Benjamin located the revolutionary potential of mass culture in precisely this repetitive, even monotonous character. According to Benjamin, the phenomenon of distraction first found its political value in cinema, primarily in the form of background listening and viewing, though also in the pattern of a continuous stream of varying shock effects that repeatedly “jolt the viewer, taking on a tactile quality.”³⁹ Distracted consumption empowered the mass audience because the artwork was absorbed by the spectator, whereas in the case of auratic contemplation an opposite process dominated, in which the viewer was absorbed into the artwork. Distracted perception was casual, tactile, and optical, and also determined mainly by habit rather than through focused scrutiny. It prepared the masses for new tasks and modes of perception necessary to their mobilization. Film, particularly due to its shock effects, was a “training ground” for revolutionary apperception.⁴⁰

One of the most important similarities between the two theorists was their mutual emphasis on the political economies of mass reproduction of inscriptions, though the commonalities between them do not extend much further into the details of their arguments. Tracing the historical development of reproducibility from the woodcut through the sound film, Benjamin noted a qualitative change induced by the mass replication made possible by industrialization.⁴¹ Cinema, he stressed, was a crucial object of study because it was the first artistic medium in which the principle of mass reproduction was wholly inherent, due mainly to the great costs involved in film production (a process which was further challenged by a continuous series of economic crises and war) and also to film’s capacity for endless editing, as distinguished from such media as painting and sculpture.⁴² Furthermore, Benjamin argued that aura — the prestigious, authoritative, and therefore socially distancing sense of authenticity suffusing traditional objects of aesthetic contemplation — was anathema to technological reproduction.⁴³ Since technological reproduction can include changes to the formerly lofty and unattainable work of art in addition to replicating and relocating it, the traditional value of the eternal “here and now” of the one-of-a-kind masterwork is subverted, rendered accessible, repeatable, and ephemeral.⁴⁴ The effect of auratic bourgeois art, which originated in cult, religion, and ritual magic, was first attenuated by the indexical, evidentiary qualities of photography (“which emerged at the same time as socialism”) and then finally erased, Benjamin proposed, in cinematic works designed for reproducibility.⁴⁵ Benjamin extrapolated a social and political significance from the “withering” of the unique

auratic experience in favor of a “mass existence” that far exceeded the field of art.⁴⁶ The processes of replication, and the reduction of physical and cultural distances accompanying them, corresponded to a revolutionary duality: the “shattering of tradition which is the reverse side of the present crisis and renewal of humanity.” Thus, Benjamin hailed cinema as the most significant catalyst of social change in the early twentieth century.⁴⁷

Adorno, however, remained unconvinced, arguing that the auratic haze was replaced by a “technological veil” that was equally fetishistic. This veil, to which Adorno referred frequently in the decades following his first formulation of the concept with Horkheimer in the early 1940s, designated the substitution of nature by a second, technologically mediated world that, in presenting an illusory social unity, precluded the imagination of alternatives to capitalism: “[t]he totality of the processes of mediation — in fact, of the exchange principle — produces a second deceptive immediacy. It allows one to attempt to forget what is divisive and antagonistic when it lies before one’s very eyes, or to repress it from our consciousness.”⁴⁸ Thus, while Adorno shared Benjamin’s aversion to bourgeois culture, he and Horkheimer nevertheless consistently argued that the Enlightenment tradition, including its high estimation of master artworks, was worth salvaging through critique. However, he and Horkheimer were far from confident that enlightenment would, indeed, change course: “[i]f Enlightenment does not assimilate reflection on this regressive moment, it seals its own fate.”⁴⁹ Thus, while Adorno and Benjamin shared a critique of capitalism and a vision of a communist future, they could not agree on near- or middle-term cultural strategy.

Whereas Adorno warned that the most powerful agent of this second nature was mass culture, Benjamin was far from distressed by the culture industry’s artificiality. Benjamin situated cinema within a dialectic of mimesis in the history of images in which each work of art embodied a volatile polar tension between its “cult” value and its “exhibition” value. The former corresponded to conventional auratic art based on a “first” or prior technology of “semblance,” as opposed to the latter correlating to mass reproduced culture — perhaps counterintuitively, since reproduction evokes repetition rather than difference — a “second” technology of “play.”⁵⁰ Benjamin described the second technology as “wholly provisional” or impermanent and functioning — again, unexpectedly given the positivist connotations scientific method is frequently accorded in critical theory of the period — “by means of experiments and endlessly varied test procedures” as well as by the differentiation of humanity from nature. That is, the second technology was defined by the dynamic license of play instead of by the static rigor of imitation.⁵¹ If art, and by extension all mediation, involves both seriousness and play in varying compositions, the loss of auratic semblance results in an expansion of “space for play” [*Spielraum*], which in Benjamin’s early twentieth-century experience was widest in cinema due to its particularity as a medium constituted by dynamic temporality and montage technique.⁵² In addition,

the scale and mechanization of cinema's mass reproduction constituted a quantitative difference from previous forms, and this led into a qualitative metamorphosis of the social function of art and thereby to new modes of distracted apperception.⁵³

In Benjamin's theory, cinematic liberation took a variety of other forms as well. In an extended riff upon the polysemy of the term "reproduction," he placed social reproduction explicitly in parallel with technological reproduction so that mass reproduction represented reproduction of the masses.⁵⁴ In a variety of ways, the performance of the film actor, unlike that of the stage actor, was analogous to the daily rhythms and contours of the industrial production process and therefore to modern life in general. For instance, acting in a film studio under the gaze of a team of directors and producers resembled the experience of undergoing stringent evaluation by a panel of expert judges.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the actor performing before a camera was, in a sense, being measured by and against mechanical equipment, evoking a parallel with the standardization characteristic of industrial production processes.⁵⁶ In addition, the actor was alienated, from his labor and from himself, insofar as the continuity of his performance, and hence the coherence of his own experience, was first fragmented into multiple takes which were then edited and rearranged in sequence, and then it was divided and dispersed through mass replication and distribution.⁵⁷ In a different sense as well, to survive the performance was "to preserve one's humanity in the face of the apparatus," despite the loss of personal aura or self-presence, and in this way to triumph over the dehumanization of industrialization by redefining humanity, far more important than succeeding in playing a role convincingly.⁵⁸ Moreover, in a manner analogous with democratic representation, the actor's consciousness of the mass audience, like a politician's awareness of her constituency, assigned a large measure of control over the production process to its spectators.⁵⁹ Benjamin portrayed the proletarian film audience heroically as a society of experts on popular culture. In addition, film journalism and the use of non-actors in narrative cinema radically multiplied the number of individuals represented onscreen, undermining traditional distinctions between artist and public.⁶⁰ Cinematic self-estrangement thus acquired a useful and revolutionary valence, though as Benjamin notes, one that would not assume its full political advantage until it was uncoupled from film capital.⁶¹

While Benjamin celebrated the development of mass media as progressive, Adorno identified it as posing serious impediments to enlightenment. Adorno's principal contention rested upon the potential influence of technological reproduction on revolutionary class consciousness, which he felt Benjamin had hyperbolized. Describing the mercurial boundary between the proletariat and the petit bourgeoisie, Benjamin invoked a figure-and-ground relation: "the same class struggle which loosens the compact mass of the proletariat compresses that of the petty bourgeoisie."⁶² Benjamin concluded the lengthy footnote on this topic by reinforcing two observations: first, that the petit bourgeois mass can transform into an affiliation of proletarian cadres under appropriate conditions, and second,

that the proliferation of fascism relies upon the petit bourgeois mass, inferring that control of the conditions shaping the petit bourgeois mass may prove to be of pivotal political importance — and not only for the left. Benjamin used the term “mass” in a highly specific way: the mass of the petty bourgeoisie was the conventional subject of mass psychology — a mere mass determined by emotional reaction, as opposed to a conscious class.⁶³ Consciously or otherwise, fascism was adept in using the forces of mass media to pressurize and mobilize the compact mass. Benjamin identified a clear distinction between two basic forms of massification differentiated by degrees of class consciousness: while the “loosened” masses of proletarian cadres held great potential for revolutionary “innervation,” a desirable form of unification among individuals, the petit bourgeoisie tended toward a harder, more compact or dense and reactionary texture of massification with a fascist orientation. The loosely amalgamated solidarity of the proletarian cadres followed a “collective ratio” or reasoning, balancing individuation with infra-subjectivity, which Benjamin described as the “most enlightened form of class consciousness,” specifying that it was based on action, the performance of specific tasks, apparently opposing it to consciousness defined solely by thought or discourse.⁶⁴ Later, though Adorno maintained that the historical possibility of achieving revolutionary class consciousness on a mass scale had passed, he nevertheless insisted that the

undiminished persistence of suffering, fear, and menace necessitates that the thought that cannot be realized should not be discarded. After having missed its opportunity, philosophy must come to know, without any mitigation, why the world — which would be paradise here and now — can become hell itself tomorrow.⁶⁵

Of course, Adorno and Benjamin’s conceptual landscape was revolutionary in scale, whereas the focus of the remainder of this essay will be on the potential influence online education may have in pedagogy in the higher education political economy, a vital engine of social reproduction closely linked with potential sites of mass revolt but only very indirectly capable of igniting insurgency. Just as unionism is only one of many — very complex — possible steps toward resolving socioeconomic inequality, so is the virtualization of education merely one of many topics requiring analysis in the context of organizing resistance in the academic workplace.

However, this Adornoean-Benjaminian interpretation suggests a number of provocative questions, eliciting appropriate depth and detail, each deserving of more attention than there is space for here: does the freedom of composition offered by today’s digital media provide more room for play, for semblance, or for more of both? What proportions are desirable? Which pedagogical elements could or should be repeated, and which allowed or encouraged to differ? Is there reason to retain some sense of tradition, heritage, canon, or merit? Might new enlightenment traditions be

developed? How important is the medium in determining apperception? With what political consequences? In the context of massification, what is the significance of online education's potentially global scale? Might the current onslaught of digitalized documentation, testing, and standardization be welcomed as, ultimately, a process of anti-capitalist liberation, as Benjamin envisioned in the case of cinema? How precisely might these apparently unstoppable procedures reinforce a beneficial relationship between labor and technology more than capital? What would empowering distraction look like in an academic setting? Is it anathema to an institutional context? Does it already exist? If so, to what extent is it market-driven? Is pedagogy itself an auratic cultural form? Can it be rendered as popular or populist? Which historical particulars make it possible to decide between the non-deterministic pessimism and optimism of Adorno and Benjamin in a given context? Perhaps a brief series of events at a particular institution can begin to indicate the framework's usefulness.

Incident at San José State

Traditionally, distance-learning facilitated through various media technologies has offered an alternative degree route only pursued by a small percentage of college and university students, a less-fortunate subset of a relatively privileged group.⁶⁶ Until recently, most distance learners were designated as non-traditional (usually older) vocational students often burdened with disabilities, childcare responsibilities, work schedules, or remote rural residence. As the Internet became increasingly integrated into a wide variety of procedures and practices at colleges and universities during the 1990s, accredited distance learning nevertheless remained a relatively minor concern in mainstream higher education. Despite the increased access made possible by the naturalization of a wide variety of online procedures and practices during the 1990s, credit-bearing online courses remained auxiliary.⁶⁷

The emergence of widely available high-speed Internet and Web 2.0 technology in the early 2000s permitted a stronger degree of immersive mediated interactivity. In light of that development and the recent economic depression, a keen interest in online education as a mainstream option for college and university students has emerged. Many decision makers appear to view "e-learning" as the salvation and future of higher education (and of the global eminence of the North American academic system) and opposition to this mentality has been vociferous. The conversation continues to involve coalitions of high-level administrators and other select decision-makers from various institutions, and its defining characteristics remain stable: pressing demands for action, technologically deterministic optimism combined with ambiguity regarding the appropriate paths to follow, and an unwillingness to enact legislation on the matter.⁶⁸ Dissenting voices have appeared in large numbers of news and editorial items, especially in academic-related, but non-peer-reviewed, periodicals. Technological innovation and real economic changes have combined with these various attitudes to continue shaping online education,

pointing toward a new organizational form of unprecedented scale and centralization, the increasingly simulated and automated interactivity of the Massive Open Online Course or MOOC.⁶⁹ MOOCs have garnered particularly impassioned discussion and serious media attention since their first appearance in 2010.⁷⁰ At first, they were offered on a non-credit-bearing, experimental basis. Soon, however, MOOCs could be completed for credit at a small number of institutions, and higher education decision-makers seemed hopeful that the discovery of a viable business model allowing for the charging of tuitions was imminent.⁷¹

In June of 2012, the perceived stakes of online education achieved notoriety. President Sullivan of the University of Virginia was forced to resign for not responding as desired to apocalyptic rhetoric from members of the board of trustees regarding the supposed urgency of instantiating an extensive online education program at the university. During the following weeks, board members resigned, the campus community — students, faculty, alumni, and staff — demonstrated, the governor considered expelling the entire board, and finally Sullivan was reinstated.⁷² Email messages leaked to student and professional journalists indicate that leading board members had been trading editorials from right-wing corporate news publications in which online education, specifically in its MOOC manifestation, was presented as the sole solution to university budget crises, precisely because of the savings in labor costs presented by inexpensive automation technology.⁷³

Since then, a few institutions and programs on the cusp of launching or expanding online offerings have become sites of contestation. In Spring 2013, for instance, faculty at Amherst College passed a resolution against joining edX, a nonprofit MOOC provider affiliated with Harvard and MIT, though they emphasized that they were not opposed to the presence of online education among their institution's course offerings in general. They indicated that they were uneasy about the massive format and required more time before deciding upon such an important influence on the institution's future. Two weeks later, a council representing the undergraduate faculty at Duke University voted against joining a consortium of ten institutions that would offer credit-bearing online courses provided by 2U, a for-profit company utilizing an interactive, real-time format for small class sizes rather than a MOOC design.⁷⁴ In both cases, faculty governance bodies cited the same reasons for intervening in existing contracts about which they had been consulted. The nature of the online education in question was quite different in either case, however, suggesting that it was the technological reproducibility of pedagogy itself that was truly at issue. Otherwise, faculty throughout the United States have remained relatively circumspect, aside from notorious resistance among California State University faculty to contracts with MOOC providers, apparently intended to begin "flipping" classrooms as a prelude to obviating the role of professors.⁷⁵

In May 2013, members of the philosophy faculty at San José State University, an historically public institution, organized a department-wide refusal to pilot an

online course featuring celebrity Harvard professor Michael Sandel lecturing on the theme of justice.⁷⁶ They published their rationale in an open letter requesting Sandel's "solidarity" but otherwise avoiding identifiably leftist rhetoric and only reluctantly raising the vital issue of labor displacement. They convincingly argued that the impersonal, standardized form of the edX course offered little to no pedagogical improvement over traditional teaching methods. In doing so, they refuted edX President Anant Agarwal's repeated public assertions that traditional lecture-and-notetaking pedagogy had been rendered obsolete, ostensibly because contemporary students learn best by means of the same media practices they engage in during their free time as consumers and producers of user-generated content online.⁷⁷ The SJSU faculty countered this naïve techno-optimism with a determinism of their own, though a pessimistic one contending that, despite the fine quality of Sandel's pedagogy, the format of the edX course transmits a hollowing out of Enlightenment humanism by distributing technologically mediated and reproduced — in other words, automated — pedagogy. In doing so, they explained, edX perpetuates and deepens the inequities of an already-stratified higher education system, thus serving to intensify class disparity rather than attenuate it, the latter being central to the traditional mission of public higher education in the United States. In this way, they argued, the democratic values of public higher education in the United States risk subversion.⁷⁸

Recognizing Sandel's decisive position as a public figure in the chain of production, the SJSU philosophy faculty addressed their critique to him rather than to edX management, in the form of an open letter. At issue was the popular technique blending of pre-fabricated online material into traditional face-to-face courses via a contract with edX. Seeing no purpose or benefit to mandating the use of pre-recorded material, even though authored by an acclaimed intellectual, the faculty contended that the ultimate aim of the university administration was to use online course materials to replace teaching labor, of which there was no shortage. They argued that attempting to solve long-term financial problems quickly in this way would nevertheless undermine the "quality of education" at their institution as well as exacerbate other "social justice" issues. The philosophers of SJSU justified their position by defending the value of specialized scholarship for pedagogy and the efficacy of conventional teaching methods, and by criticizing the principle of standardization.

The SJSU faculty performed a spectacularly nuanced critique of the lessons about social justice students would learn, not from the explicit content of Sandel's lectures and others like it, but rather from traces of the material's non-local, non-universal site of production — in other words, from its technological mode of delivery and its socioeconomic consequences. Arguing that minorities are less underrepresented among the faculty and student body of SJSU than they are at Harvard, the authors of the open letter imply that racial privilege and bias are reinforced by materials

produced there to be broadcast elsewhere. Next, the link between racial and class privilege is brought to the fore, as they express their fears that contracts between outside course providers and public universities attended primarily by students of more modest means, which are typically based at the most elite institutions, would catalyze the stratification of an allegedly homogeneous higher education system into two classes of contrasting quality. Here, the rhetoric becomes more colloquial, as if daring readers to take issue with working-class belonging:

one, well-funded colleges and universities in which privileged students get their own real professor; and the other, financially stressed private and public universities in which students watch a bunch of video-taped lectures and interact, if indeed any interaction is available on their home campuses, with a professor that this model of education has turned into a glorified teaching assistant. [...] Teaching justice through an educational model that is spearheading the creation of two social classes in academia thus amounts to a cruel joke.⁷⁹

If the broader issue of socioeconomic stratification (class) was held for a time at arm's length via projection onto the university system itself, the authors insulated themselves in this way only until the denouement of the argument.

On the socioeconomic significance of technological mediation, the philosophy faculty of SJSU exhibited a justified, non-deterministic pessimism in pointing out the direction in which contracting with outside course vendors would lead. They prefaced their warning with an acknowledgment that technology may indeed be used auspiciously — when automated materials are both developed by the teaching professors themselves and complemented with ample opportunity for interaction with students. Otherwise, the tendency is for technology to lower the quality of pedagogy, which is why they denied the advantage of licensing pre-packaged material. Furthermore, they argued that localized faculty control over design and content (what Marxists will recognize as the means of production) is essential to keeping curriculum current based on faculty research and experience, as well as direct interaction with diverse students. For this reason, massive broadcasting projects were also rejected as unacceptable. Addressing the context of financial emergencies (perceived or real), the SJSU philosophers diagnosed the importance of historical context and timing in deciding whether to concentrate upon a sense of possibility or a pessimistic stance: outside contracts can easily be used as the first stage of restructuring an institution or system in general and — finally addressing the labor issue directly — can therefore promote maximal virtualization of instruction in the long term and is furthermore a difficult decision to reverse. Again at this point, the tenor shifted toward the vernacular as the SJSU philosophers' letter culminated in denouncing the salient motive behind academic outsourcing as financial, rather than

pedagogical, as had been maintained by administrators and by representatives of edX: “[i]t is time to stop masking the real issue of MOOCs and blended courses behind empty rhetoric about a new generation and a new world.”⁸⁰ Gesturing to the lack of faculty oversight involved in the edX agreement, the authors of the open letter also gave pride of place to pedagogy in their argument, unsurprisingly emphasizing the necessity of the high-quality commodity they belabor in the institutional production process over the value of their own labor-time.⁸¹

Sandel responded that his goal in providing free lectures online was a broadly demotic one, too — namely, to provide free lessons in ethics to the global public — and that he was dismayed by the exploitative potential that had surfaced.⁸² In answer to the SJSU faculty’s call to action, Harvard professors from various disciplines united to confront their institution’s administration, demanding the opportunity to negotiate an ethical framework for governing Harvard’s involvement in online education.⁸³ Their attempt marks the beginning of what could and should become a substantial movement among college and university instructors elsewhere, especially since the SJSU incident resulted in increased faculty oversight and expanded critical insight into the technology tycoon “venture philanthropy” that has underwritten many online education “enterprises.” As education becomes increasingly digitalized, concerns must compete for attention with excitement over possibilities for expanded access and with enjoyment in exploring new tools and practices, not to mention naïve optimism for technological “progress.” The inevitability of change is mistaken for improvement. Education, both technologically mediated and face-to-face, is often treated unquestioningly as a beneficial process with the potential to alleviate poverty and redistribute resources. In the meantime, consensus emphasizing marketization and efficiency is rarely challenged. Recently, President Obama’s advisors have directed him to allow market forces to decide the future of online education in the United States.⁸⁴ As the SJSU philosophers rightly pointed out, this amounts to a Faustian bargain in which industry is permitted to demand “ready-made employees” with one hand while opposing proportionate taxation for public education and government services in general with the other. Meanwhile, privatization corrodes the public from within.

The philosophy faculty’s open letter is an outstanding specimen of collaborative writing that indicates a level of workplace solidarity that, sadly, has become remarkable. It, and other documents like it such as FemTechNet’s White Paper, could even be described as an indication of the pivotal role of the petit bourgeoisie, or at least of the tenured professoriat, perhaps the only group both able and likely to prevent the crass virtualization of the higher education system. In each case, the attempt to appeal to broad, if professional and liberal, audiences on a provocative, radicalizing political level is effective.⁸⁵ These compositions are compelling manifestoes and should be utilized as such across disciplines, even if the defense of elite liberal arts humanism as a labor market and the invocation of undefined placeholders like “social

justice” and “democracy” ring hollow to all but the most highly educated and fortunate fraction of a percentile. Their primary importance is in providing encouraging signs of politicization among the scholars most capable of expressing it convincingly, those who have maintained contact with critical theory in both its poststructuralist and Marxist traditions under the shadow of neoliberalism.

The SJSU philosophy faculty’s intervention suggests that Adorno’s relatively grim perspective is the most relevant to urgent circumstances. Once pressing issues are addressed, it becomes possible to focus on the neo-humanizing potential of Benjaminian play. Meanwhile, from the point of view of labor, the vast majority of people who do not benefit from increasing socioeconomic stratification, “a compelling urge toward new social opportunities is being clandestinely exploited in the interests of a property-owning minority.”⁸⁶ The perspective achieved by tracing the constellation of tensions Benjamin and Adorno lived almost a century ago suggests that assuming a high probability for the most exploitative outcomes is not deterministic but rather the best strategy for avoiding negative, even catastrophic, outcomes.

If the profit motive defined by the theory of surplus value remains the strongest social dynamic, especially as it is underwritten by the complacency of privilege and the rhetoric of crisis, it is also true that the unpredictable, indeterminate potential Benjamin described as play persists in its social influence as well. Thus, a synthesis of both Adorno’s and Benjamin’s positions on technologically mediated culture provides something like a comprehensive view. Online education, for example, presents both possibilities in dialectical tension with one another, though it seems likely that, without critical reflection, the gambles of the powerful will lead to more extensively reified consciousness, massification without innervation. What is needed for the responsible development and implementation of educational social technologies is critical subjectivity. At the same time, if enlightenment can only be sustained by moving education online, placing it on “life-support,” as it were, doing so in a critically reflective manner may provide an opportunity to avoid throwing the “baby out with the bathwater,” to borrow the cliché that Adorno used so effectively in *Minima Moralia*.⁸⁷ The awareness with which online education is cultivated could prove decisive in determining the future of higher education.

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigit Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin; trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn (Cambridge: Belknap, 2008) 19-55. Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" exists in multiple versions. Unless stated otherwise, all references are to the second version, now widely considered the Urtext. The first version, Benjamin's handwritten draft, is unpublished. The third version was the first to be published (in *Illuminations*). For a full explanation of the differences among versions, see Miriam Bratu Hansen's "Room for Play: Benjamin's Gamble with Cinema," *October* 109 (2004) 3-45.
2. Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*, ed. H. Lonitz., trans. N. Walker (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999) 130-31, and Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: U California P, 2002) 349.
3. Recordings, animation, and software programming are all automations.
4. *Inside Higher Ed* (<<http://www.insidehighered.com/>>) and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (<<http://chronicle.com>>) contain hundreds of editorials regarding the potential harm and benefit of online higher education from the standpoints of various stakeholders. An online panel of four humanities professors (Ian Bogost, Cathy Davidson, Al Filreis, and Ray Schroeder) published by the *Los Angeles Review of Books* provides a concise overview of many of the most salient arguments from a professional academic perspective (<<http://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/moocs-and-the-future-of-the-humanities-a-roundtable-part-1>>). *The New York Times* education page contains dozens of articles representing many viewpoints, as well (<<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/e/elearning/>>). For students the central issue tends to be access, whereas for institutions it is finances, and for instructors the most salient questions are those of pedagogy and labor, as has been the case in general since the earliest emergence of online education (see, for example, "Will the Future of Online Education be User-Friendly?" by Tama Leaver in *Fibreculture* 2 (2003) <<http://two.fibreculturejournal.org/webct-will-the-future-of-online-education-be-user-friendly/>>). What is new is the intensified rate of privatization incentivized by neoliberalism and justified by the global economic crisis in the current atmosphere of austerity. Many, like Cathy Davidson, prefer to emphasize the potential for new beginnings and explorations (<<http://www.hybridpedagogy.com/journal/10-things-learned-from-making-a-meta-mooc/>>). For a critique of online education in general, see "The Choices Report" produced by the University Committee on Planning and Budget Systemwide Academic Senate of the University of California, particularly 29-31 (University Committee on Planning and Budget, "The Choices Report," Systemwide Academic Senate, University of California [March 2010] <<http://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/reports/ucpb.choices.pdf>>). What is certain is that online education is growing quickly: see Alexandria Walton Radford, "Learning at a Distance: Undergraduate Enrollment in Distance Education Courses and Degree Programs," U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (October 2011) <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012154.pdf>>, and I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, *Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States*, Sloan Consortium (Boston: Babson Survey Research Group and Quahog Research Group [2014]) <<http://www.onlinelearningsurvey>.

- com/reports/gradechange.pdf>.
5. National Media Consortium (NMC), "Agile Approaches to Change," *The Horizon Report: 2014 Higher Education Edition* <<http://www.nmc.org/pdf/2014-nmc-horizon-report-he-EN.pdf>>. For a provocative discussion of social media user agreements, see Jamie Skye Bianco's 2009 article "Social Networking and Cloud Computing: Precarious Affordances of the Prosumer," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 37 (1-2) 303-12. Numerous theorists have described exploitation and indirect value extraction online, particularly in the context of user-generated content on social media. *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory* (London: Routledge, 2012), edited by Trebor Scholz, contains significant essays on the subject from the past twenty years by Tiziana Terranova, Lisa Nakamura, McKenzie Wark, Jodi Dean, and many others. Another useful example is Aleena Chia's 2012 article "Welcome to Me-Mart: The Politics of User-Generated Content in Personal Blogs" *American Behavioral Scientist* 56 (5) 421-38. The journal *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism, and Critique* has recently (in the past few years) published dozens of articles on critical political economy of media and communications, including Christian Fuchs' influential work on "Google Capitalism" (10.1: 42-48).
 6. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002) 2.
 7. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic* 11.
 8. *Dialectic* 100.
 9. Theodor W. Adorno, "Education after Auschwitz," *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 2005) 204.
 10. As is well known, many of the same problems appearing in higher education already plague the K-12 system, including the defunding of public schools combined with privatization of services and vilification of instructors organized in unions.
 11. For more on Adorno's years in the United States and his work on media and communications, see David Jenemann's *Adorno in America* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2007), as well as Richard Leppert's introduction in *Adorno's Essays on Music*. Adorno has remained largely unrecognized as a media scholar for several reasons, including his emphasis on high aesthetics. The availability of significant texts has been an obstacle. *Current of Music*, for example, was not published in any form until 2006. However, as Jenemann writes, "[t]o dismiss Adorno as politically and socially detached is also to misunderstand how thoroughly he immersed himself in America's myriad forms of entertainment and communication. Despite Adorno's genuine horror at many elements of the culture industry, during his stay in the United States he nonetheless dedicated himself to its study from top to bottom, learning the principles of broadcasting, production, and transmission as well as the economic and technological conditions under which mass-culture texts were consumed" (xvii).
 12. Walter Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigit Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin; Trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008) 124.
 13. Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs" 1.
 14. "Eduard Fuchs" 11.
 15. "Eduard Fuchs" 34, and *Dialectic* 100.

16. It should be noted, however, that the rhetorical power of optimistic teleology has been pivotal strategically for the left, particularly during periods of persecution. In Benjamin's theory of history, he explicitly rejects linear and incremental progressive models, yet he also explores a secular messianism (see his essays "On the Concept of History" and especially "Eduard Fuchs").
17. Theodor W. Adorno, "Is Marx Obsolete?" trans. Nicolas Slater. *Diogenes* 16 (1968) 9.
18. These differences correspond to opposing orientations to the loss of autonomous subjectivity. In the "Dedication" of *Minima Moralia* to Horkheimer, for instance, Adorno writes of "the old subject, now historically condemned, which is still for-itself, but no longer in-itself. The subject still feels sure of its autonomy, but the nullity demonstrated to subjects by the concentration camp is already overtaking the form of subjectivity itself" (Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott [London: Verso, 2005] 16).
19. ...which remained relatively stable from the 1930s through the end of his life in 1969 as did many central components of his theoretical apparatus.
20. Adorno, "Marx" 4.
21. Benjamin, "Work of Art" 19.
22. "Work of Art" 39, 54, 56-57.
23. Adorno and Benjamin, *Correspondence* 130-31, and Leppert, "Introduction" 349. The chapter in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* entitled "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" responds to Benjamin's essay point by point. See, for instance, 100 on the topic of distraction.
24. See Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Moscow: Progress, 1965) Chapter 25.
25. *Dialectic* 99.
26. The main elements of Benjamin's argument are present in both the second and third versions of the "Work of Art" essay: the technological reproduction of art in mass culture, immanent to the media of photography and film (and, a contemporary scholar might add, augmented geometrically in digital media), had reorganized modern art and sense perception by erasing the aesthetic power of the original artwork and thus giving birth to the distracted expertise of the industrial masses (4). However, the most detailed discussion of massification and class consciousness is found in the second version, which is why it is given preference in this analysis.
27. Benjamin, "Work of Art" 19.
28. *ibid.*
29. *ibid.*
30. "Work of Art" 19-20.
31. "Work of Art" 20, 38-39.
32. "Work of Art" 38, 41.
33. "Work of Art" 23.
34. "Work of Art" 23, 28. Althusser and others would challenge the conceptual validity of the base-superstructure relation. Benjamin's use of it was far from "vulgar," as is evident.
35. "Marx" 4.
36. "Marx" 1. Examples include sociologists George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson, whose notion of online "prosumption" is derived from the popular "futurist" Alvin Toffler's work.
37. "Marx" 8-9, 12.

38. "Marx" 4.
39. "Work of Art" 39.
40. "Work of Art" 40-41.
41. "Work of Art" 20-21, 39.
42. "Work of Art" 20-21, 28, 44n9.
43. "Work of Art" 21-22, 43.
44. "Work of Art" 21-23.
45. "Work of Art" 24, 27.
46. "Work of Art" 22, 25.
47. "Work of Art" 22.
48. "Marx" 15.
49. *Dialectic* vi-xvii.
50. "Work of Art" 25-26, 48-49n23.
51. "Work of Art" 26.
52. "Work of Art" 26, 48-49n23.
53. "Work of Art" 25-26.
54. "Work of Art" 34, 54n36.
55. "Work of Art" 30, 31.
56. "Work of Art" 30.
57. "Work of Art" 30-32, 35.
58. "Work of Art" 31.
59. "Work of Art" 33, 49n24.
60. "Work of Art" 33-34, 36.
61. "Work of Art" 32, 33.
62. "Work of Art" 50-51n25.
63. "Work of Art" 50.
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 74. Steve Kolowich, "Duke U.'s Undergraduate Faculty Derails Plan for Online Courses for Credit," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (30 April 2013) <<http://chronicle.com/article/Duke-US-Undergraduate/138895/>>.
 75. National Commission on Higher Education Attainment, "Open Letter." For discussion and article archives on the subject of online education in the California system, see Christopher Newfield's and Michael Meranze's blog, "Remaking the University": <<http://utotherescue.blogspot.com>>.
 76. The term "public institution" has been complicated in the United States and has become more so, which is why the modifier "historically" is added in order to designate the historical formation of a school designed for general education and supported through taxation and governmental land grants. In general, tuitions have never been free, and nor have admissions been truly "open." Admissions are increasingly competitive, and at many institutions tuitions have risen exponentially in recent years; therefore the term "general" may no longer apply. Moreover, many historically public institutions are rapidly becoming privatized through corporate management of various services.
 77. Department of Philosophy, San José State University, "An Open Letter to Professor Michael Sandel from the Philosophy Department at San José State U.," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2 May 2013) <<http://chronicle.com/article/The-Document-Open-Letter-From/138937/>>.
 78. Harvard was the first incorporation established in what would later become the United States, and it piloted the first program for soliciting "permanent funds" (funds for reinvesting) early in the twentieth century and has continued to do so on an expanding scale (See Bruce Kimball and Benjamin Ashby Johnson, "The Inception of the Meaning and Significance of Endowment in American Higher Education, 1890-1930," *Teachers College Record* 114.10 [2012] <<http://www.tcrecord.org/library/abstract.asp?contentid=16669>>, and "The Beginning of 'Free Money' Ideology in American Universities: Charles W. Eliot at Harvard, 1869-1909," *History of Education Quarterly* 52.2 [2012] 224).
 79. Department of Philosophy, "Open Letter."

80. "Open Letter." For a variety of perspectives on the recent status of the California system of higher education and on the potential role of online education in its future, see *Representations* 116 (2011) and the "Choices Report" generated by the University Committee on Planning and Budget Systemwide Academic Senate of the University of California.
81. It is important not to make too much of this from a philosophical standpoint, given that the faculty's union representation may have helped to shape the parameters, at least, of their argument.
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85. FemTechNet White Paper Committee, "Transforming Higher Education with Distributed Open Collaborative Courses (DOCCs): Feminist Pedagogies and Networked Learning," *FemTechNet Commons* (30 September 2013) <www.femtechnet.org>.
86. Benjamin, "Work of Art" 34. For Adorno's thoughts on education and political economy, see the essays in *Critical Models* entitled "Education after Auschwitz" (191-204) and "Taboos on the Teaching Vocation" (177-90). With Horkheimer, Adorno mentions close relationships among rationalization, mass culture, and education several times (*Dialectic* xvii, 23, 135, 161-63). In every case, he reserves only a very slight measure of hope — more of a wish than a hope — that Western civilization may surpass its own limitations.
87. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* 43.

Imagination Run Riot: Apocalyptic Race-War Novels of the Late 1960s

Julie A. Fiorelli

W. E. B. Du Bois's 1920 short story, "The Comet," describes a spiritual communion between a white woman and a black man, an event so scandalous that it first requires the apparent annihilation of the rest of humanity in a comet's crash.¹ Du Bois's story suggests the monumental difficulty of overcoming racism in the early twentieth century. Over forty-five years later, after the victories of the Civil Rights movement, one might expect a different sentiment; yet, several American novels from the late 1960s have such trouble projecting an end to racial inequality that, as in "The Comet," the struggle to produce it reaches apocalyptic proportions.

The three novels that this essay examines — John A. Williams's *Sons of Darkness*, *Sons of Light: A Novel of Some Probability* (1969), Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1969), and Chester Himes's *Plan B* (begun in 1968 but never completed) — are part of a remarkable proliferation of novels by African-American authors projecting the possibility of large-scale, catastrophic race war from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s.² Depicting planned black revolts against white-dominant, capitalist society, these authors display exasperation with the unfulfilled promise of the Civil Rights movement — in particular, the inability of civil rights legislation to address persisting social and economic inequality. They dramatize the anger and frustration expressed in more than 400 violent disturbances, mostly in Northern cities, from 1965 through 1969, as well as in the birth of the Black Power movement in the mid-1960s.³ Some of the later novels also critique the limitations of Black Power leadership. Among these novels, the three I have chosen are notable for their particular narrations of apocalyptic race war, and for commonalities of form and political critique on which I will elaborate throughout this essay.

Despite their striking historical and narrative resonance with each other and their importance for understanding this turbulent period, these three novels have received relatively sparse critical attention. Early work relating these texts to each other considers literature as reflective of history: Charles Peavy asserts that the novels

mirror a contemporaneous feeling of racial battle's inevitability, and Jerry Bryant critiques them as derivative of an overblown Black Power rhetoric.⁴ Kali Tal and Mark Bould more usefully emphasize the novels' imaginative power, tied to their use of science fiction subgenres — for Tal, “black militant near-future” fiction, and for Bould, “Black Power SF.”⁵ Despite their different approach, Tal and Bould also stress the novels' inability to, as Bould puts it, “picture the future for which [they yearn].”⁶

I agree with prior critics that the novels place into question the viability of black revolution. This questioning, however, is more than a reflection of historical circumstances; I assert that these authors use the speculative mode to produce an imaginative *testing* of late-1960s notions of black revolution. Further, although the novels do not represent a better future, their narrative limits and the authors' aesthetic choices should not be considered disabling. Rather, I argue, they enable the novels to reveal the constraints and contradictions of contemporaneous black-white binary discourse, including its elisions of intraracial class difference and black-white interdependence. This revelation takes place through a shift in the novels from various forms of the thriller to apocalyptic fiction. Thus, while I agree with Tal's and Bould's broad assessments of these novels as speculative fiction, we must analyze the authors' more specific generic choices to understand the dimensions of the political impasse with which these novels grapple, and how they grapple with it.

I will begin by discussing the literary representation and historical conditions of the urban rebellions and responses to them; I link this to binary racial discourse, which can be seen during this period in political stances as dissimilar and oppositional as white racist notions of black inferiority and varieties of black nationalism. I will then describe and problematize the spatial reinforcement of this racial discourse in representations of the black ghetto. I follow this with an analysis of how the novels test late-1960s notions of black revolution — in particular, how these novels fulfill political needs and desires of the period by enacting Black Power conceptions of black leadership and organization, and by adopting violence as a political tactic. Finally, I will explore how the novels' ultimate shift into apocalyptic fiction elucidates the contradictions of contemporaneous racial discourse, even if the novels cannot resolve them. Because two overarching concerns of this essay — the political and the formal — are embodied in social regulation and aesthetic representation of space, spatial relations will receive particular attention.

Rebellions and Racial Discourse

In *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, protagonist Dan Freeman surveys a grisly scene:

Smoke filled the street, there was broken glass everywhere, overturned cars, empty cartridge cases, discarded loot, an abandoned pair of handcuffs, a pair of nylon stockings lying in a pool of congealing blood. [...] In the broken window of an electrical appliance store stood a color

television console...cops on the screen fired at an unseen sniper on a rooftop, the deep voice of the narrator sounding as if he were commenting on a high-budget Hollywood film about the Normandy invasion.⁷

In this fictional rendering of the aftermath of urban rebellion, Greenlee suggests the racial tension and violence that rocked urban centers, particularly in the North, during the mid- to late 1960s. Strewn about this scene curiously devoid of people are artifacts pointing to these rebellions' social context: the discarded loot displays persisting economic disparity; the abandoned handcuffs indicate the police repression one-sidedly depicted on the glowing television screen; the pool of congealing blood reflects the human cost of ghetto conditions. What this scene portrays above all is the racial battlefield that the urban ghetto had become, a battlefield suggestive of race relations nationwide, as famously characterized in the Kerner Commission's 1968 report: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal."⁸

This sense of black and white as two distinct and irreconcilable groups, long a feature of U.S. race relations, was driven home by the rebellions and reactions to them, in turn further deepening the sense of division.⁹ The rebellions — or "riots," as they were typically called — demonstrated that despite the abstract, legal equality established in *Brown v. Board* (1954), the Civil Rights Act (1964), and the Voting Rights Act (1965), as well as the expectations that the larger movement had raised, the lives of black Americans had not appreciably improved.¹⁰ In fact, as Bayard Rustin wrote in 1965, conditions had in many ways worsened since 1954: black employment was even more endangered; schools were still segregated; and black youth were trapped in urban ghettos that bred "unimaginable demoralization."¹¹ The rebellions were intensely discussed and studied by black and white journalists, social scientists, and political figures. Most joined Rustin in attributing them to underlying social and economic problems. For instance, the Kerner Commission cites continued racial prejudice and discrimination; insufficient employment, education, and social services; poor and overcrowded housing; frustrated hopes and a sense of powerlessness; and the legitimation of racial violence.¹²

The novels respond to these conditions by presenting individual black leaders and their networks of conspirators, who attempt to harness or channel the energy of urban rebellion into what they consider to be more constructive tactics for black revolt. In *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light*, protagonist Eugene Browning, a former professor turned reformer for an organization modeled on the NAACP or Urban League, grows frustrated with the slow pace of change. Gaining funds through his network of black political contacts, he hires a mob hit on a white police officer who has murdered a black youth. This assassination, meant to bypass the aimless violence of urban rebellion, unexpectedly sparks further assassinations, street violence, and guerrilla warfare. In *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, Dan Freeman, the first black CIA

agent, uses his CIA know-how and experience as a social worker to train a network of street gangs in guerrilla warfare; this guerrilla campaign is catalyzed by urban rebellion. In *Plan B*, black entrepreneur Tomsson Black uses white liberal funding and the commodity distribution network to deliver guns to black males in urban centers. His plan to later lead a well-equipped black army in revolt against whites is disrupted when blacks prematurely turn the guns against the white power establishment. In all three novels, tactical violence results at some point in all-out race war.

This ultimate descent into race war notwithstanding, these novels mobilize the sentiment among some black radicals of that time that the rebellions were not just spontaneous expressions of anger, but nascent revolutionary impulses. Charles V. Hamilton writes, "We cannot term these events riots. [...] They are, in fact, revolts. [...] The entire value structure which supports property rights over human rights, which *sanctions* the intolerable conditions in which the black people have been *forced* to live is questioned."¹³ Few whites seemed to share this hope in the rebellions' political potential; as a 1967 *Newsweek* article recounts, many expressed heightened concern that was also "vitally lacking in affection. Fear and resentment have apparently displaced their weight in sympathy, and the white man's endorsement of massive aid to the ghettos may seem to him an imperative more pragmatic than moral."¹⁴ Self-interest prevailed, as the government sent to the ghetto not only aid, but also massive police and military force.

These differing responses to urban rebellion illustrate how, on both sides of the color line, the rebellions brought into stark contrast the views and lives of whites and blacks in the U.S. This contrast was one of perceived and actual separation, tied to economic disparity.¹⁵ In turn, the sense of absolute racial difference continued to play an important role in maintaining economic differences, even beyond the death of Jim Crow. The end of Jim Crow made blue-collar laborers much more available to capital during a period when technological innovation had reduced such positions in urban centers. These seemingly contradictory trends, both outcomes of the laws of capitalist competition, increasingly pushed black workers into an always-ready, low-wage, surplus labor army — last hired, first fired.¹⁶ Black workers' employment continued to be partially conditioned by their particularity: racial discourse about the intractable nature of the "hard-core unemployed," continuing *de facto* hiring discrimination, and persisting black educational and economic disadvantage helped to manage this population. The common identification of "the man" against whom the black man struggled as the *white* man, "whitey," "Chuck," thus identified how class and racial oppression overlapped in the consolidation of blacks on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder.

Black Space or Racial Battleground: The Black Ghetto

As I have indicated, the economic underpinnings of the black-white binary take on a spatial dimension in the black ghetto; the racialization of this space helped, in turn,

to reinforce the binary. While racial segregation in the South had been the focus of the Civil Rights movement, in the mid- to late 1960s political agitation shifted to the Northern ghetto. The black urban ghetto developed during the Great Migration to the North and West that began around World War I and was further encouraged by the spatial concentration of production under Fordism.¹⁷ By 1966, twenty-six percent of the urban population was black, and as of 1968, the twelve largest central cities contained over two-thirds of blacks outside the South.¹⁸ Within these urban centers, blacks were spatially constricted first by restrictive housing covenants and then, in the 1950s and 1960s, by race-biased FHA lending practices. During this latter period, black residential encroachment on white areas, housing agents' predatory practice of buying up white urban property to sell at higher prices on contract to blacks, and employers' relocation to suburban locales sent whites to urban peripheries. This outward movement — beyond the reach of impoverished, immobile inner-city blacks — contributed to falling black employment and reduced funding for public services. The black ghetto's continued circumscription by steadily receding white residential areas yielded economic advantages for landowners, as a former New York City official explains: "[t]he all-white sections are essential to successful slum development...until we decide to turn *them* into slums. [...] With a 'whites only' barricade...there will be no escape for our selected [minority] tenants."¹⁹ As a result, the urban ghetto became an increasingly neglected, isolated, and entrapping space.

Spatial entrapment is clearly portrayed both in contemporaneous social scientific writing and in the novels. In *Dark Ghetto* (1965), psychologist Kenneth Clark confides, "Harlem had been my home. My family moved from house to house, from neighborhood to neighborhood within the walls of the ghetto in a desperate attempt to escape its creeping blight."²⁰ Urban blight is conveyed in excessively vivid detail in Himes's *Plan B*.²¹ Himes's thoroughly unromantic depiction of Harlem presents ghetto residents living hard, desperate lives in squalid, stiflingly hot environs:

It stank from the yearly accumulations of thousands of unlisted odors embedded in the crumbling walls, the rotting linoleum, the decayed wall paper, the sweaty garments, the incredible perfumes. [...] It stank from gangrenous sores, maggoty wounds, untended gonorrhea, body tissue rotten from cancer or syphilis.²²

Himes's grotesque catalogue links stink, decay, and disease, and characterizes both humans and their environment as objects of profound neglect. The motif of disease is also prevalent in Clark's work, which, rather than attributing the "pathology of the ghetto" to black cultural inadequacy, portrays its "symptoms" as externally imposed and exacerbated by spatial entrapment.²³

The enclosed and concentrated nature of the ghetto heightened the sense of its blackness, in contradistinction to the space around it; responding to the intensely

negative portrayals of this space, some attempted to reimagine it. Most significant to the novels is the view of the ghetto as a physical manifestation of black Americans as an internal colony. The three novels' protagonists are exposed to Third World anticolonial struggle, and in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* and *Plan B*, the Northern black ghetto is described as an occupied territory regulated by an alien police force. In response, individuals and militant groups in all three novels adopt guerrilla tactics and affect the language of anticolonial revolutionaries; for instance, Freeman's secret organization calls itself the "Chicago chapter of the Mau Mau."²⁴ Such appropriations demonstrate the inspiration that African American intellectuals and political figures of the time gathered from anticolonial struggles, and the parallel that they drew between these struggles and those of blacks at home.²⁵ Reviving ideas from the Black Belt Thesis of the 1930s, many blacks saw the race as a nation within a nation, with the Northern ghetto — rather than the Southern Black Belt — now the most visible site of colonial oppression within the United States.²⁶ Harold Cruse argues in "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American" (1962) that "[t]he American Negro shares with colonial peoples many of the socioeconomic factors which form the material basis for present-day revolutionary nationalism."²⁷ These factors included not only cultural starvation and psychological oppression, but also economic exploitation and political subjugation.²⁸ Exploitative white merchants and landlords and brutal police tactics in the black ghetto were seen as local evidence of economic and political control by white society.

The notion of the ghetto as colonial space was a means for black Americans to imagine their struggles as connected to a larger, international political phenomenon, and to conceive of black America as a political entity in its own right. Black political identity was therefore expressed as black liberation, and separation was taken as the necessary outcome of colonial relations rather than a mark of inferiority — thus the need, for instance, to "defend the ghetto," as articulated in a Black Panther Party flyer (see Figure 1).²⁹ Yet, as both the novels and other writings of the period reveal, the notion of the American ghetto as colony has limitations. First, while the concept of internal colonialism refutes the attribution of black inferiority to a culture of poverty and, unlike some aspects of black nationalism, has the virtue of casting racial oppression in political and economic terms, it nevertheless takes as its model a political situation — imperial administrations, ruling over majority native populations, being ousted through guerrilla tactics — that is less practical for a minority population in a highly-developed United States.³⁰ Second, the dominant notion of the ghetto as isolated and separate from the rest of American society, while powerful, is only partially true, as illustrated by the importance of black surplus labor and by the policing and economic exploitation of the ghetto, as well as the physical incorporation of ghettos into larger cities. In truth, the ghetto is part of a greater American society in need of change; thus, national liberation is an awkward fit in the American context (putting the claims of territorial nationalists aside). The view

Defend the Ghetto



DEFEND THE GHETTO

IN OUR STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL LIBERATION, we are now in the phase of community liberation, to free our black communities from the imperialistic control exercised over them by the racist exploiting cliques within white communities, to free our people, locked up as they are in Urban Dungeons, from the imperialism of the white suburbs.

OURS IS A STRUGGLE against Community Imperialism. Our black communities are colonized and controlled from outside, and it is this control that has to be smashed, broken, shattered, by whatever means necessary.

THE POLITICS IN OUR COMMUNITIES are controlled from outside, the economics of our communities are controlled from outside, and we ourselves are controlled by the racist police who come into our communities from outside and occupy them, patrolling, terrorizing, and brutalizing our people like a foreign army in a conquered land.

THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY IS THE REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION STRUGGLING TO FREE OUR PEOPLE FROM OPPRESSION, BY POLITICAL AND PHYSICAL MEANS. WE HAVE TO GET ORGANIZED, AND WE HAVE TO DEFEND OURSELVES. --- JOIN THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY ---

BLACK PANTHER PARTY

1808A Fulton Street, Brooklyn

Figure 1. Defend the Ghetto, *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: Da Capo, 1995) 180

of the ghetto as separate black space might be considered a repression by blacks of their incorporation into an American economic and political system, and by whites of American society's complicity in and dependence on the ghetto.³¹

This repression becomes clearer when we further examine the characterization of

the ghetto as war zone in both the novels and contemporaneous public discourse.³² On a literal level, the destruction of urban rebellions sometimes resembled actual war zones, and police and military units at times used great force and high-powered weaponry to put down rebellions.³³ Guerrilla warfare was threatened by more militant blacks and openly speculated upon by white writers.³⁴ While, as I have indicated, this kind of warfare is suggested by the colonial analogy, the use of war rhetoric crystallizes the high-stakes, specifically *American* political and social conflict erupting in the urban ghetto. Conceived of as a battlefield where antagonisms between the races were increasingly played out, the ghetto — generally designated as marginal black space — was actually quite central to American race relations.

Testing Black Revolution: Organization and Tactics

These novels take the idea of racial warfare and literalize it in their speculative visions. Their fictional revolts assume forms that fulfill certain political desires held by Black Power advocates, while simultaneously testing late-1960s notions of black revolution. Particularly noteworthy are 1) their enactment of common Black Power conceptions of black leadership and constituency in their production of black organization to channel the energy of urban rebellion; and 2) their use of violence as a tactic. As I will show in the subsequent section, what comes to be tested through the novels' narrative fulfillment of Black Power desires is not only the idea of black revolution but, more generally, the racial binary in which it originates.

All of these novels make blacks the primary planners and agents of revolt. As epitomized famously in Stokely Carmichael's 1966 declaration at the James Meredith march, Black Power largely spurned the Civil Rights movement's cross-racial organizing; Carmichael and Hamilton claim in *Black Power* that because white and black interests conflict long-term, Black Power means eliminating black dependence on whites.³⁵ To be sure, black independence — ideological, financial, and institutional — was to a fair degree rhetorical and aspirational, yet the novels' black leaders take up this aspiration by establishing their independence from and actively working against a white power structure.³⁶ In *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* and *Plan B*, their constituencies are all black. Himes's *Plan B* makes this most blatant: Tomsson Black's college-educated recruits revere him for his revolutionary politics and because "he was black, black as a man can be, black as any of them, and even his name was 'Black'."³⁷ Himes perhaps pokes a bit of fun at black militants' racial loyalty, but his protagonist undertakes the monochromatic model of organizing in all seriousness.

In addition to enacting independent black action, the novels' forms of organization fulfill contemporaneous desires to channel the energy of rebellion into revolt. Each novel presents a structure for this: an anonymous agent ordering a targeted political assassination; street gangs using CIA training and government weapons; a black-run corporation and its network of gun-delivery men. These structures fill a need for political leadership displayed in the rebellions and acknowledged by Black Power

advocates; for instance, Bobby Seale urged in 1968,

Don't sit down and let a spontaneous riot happen in the streets where we get corralled and a lot of us are shot up. [...] I'm only trying to contribute to the leadership. [...] The man doesn't have us outnumbered, he has us *out organized!*³⁸

Organization here is presented as self-defense, as making blacks' numbers count.

Self-defense is important to the second aspect of black revolution tested in these novels: the tactic of violence. The growth of self-defense and paramilitary groups and of references to guerrilla warfare and self-defense in Black Power writings indicates desires for which the novels' revolts provide a kind of fantasy fulfillment.³⁹ The novels' protagonists are at times reluctant to use violence, but they feel compelled to it by the violence endemic in American society. *Plan B* depicts this vividly; as Bould asserts, the novel moves "into the past, telling the history of the rape-, sodomy-, and incest-prone white southern family who originally owned the land on which Black establishes his headquarters; and into the future, as a race war engulfs the U.S."⁴⁰ This temporal shuttling establishes the history of the U.S. — past, present, and future — as excessively, even absurdly violent. For Tomsson Black, black violence is the natural solution to the violence of the nation.⁴¹ The novels distill and transform the common sentiment among Black Power advocates that white violence could *only* be met with black violence, as argued in *The Black Panther*: "the white ruling class, through its occupation police forces, agents and dope-peddlers, institutionally terrorizes the Black community. [...] Black people picking up the gun for self-defense is the only basis in America for a revolutionary offensive."⁴² Here the Panthers rhetorically transform self-defense into a revolutionary offensive, turning a weapon of the white aggressor into a weapon for resistance.

This turning is crucial to enabling violent revolt in the novels. Responding to the violence perpetrated through the racialization of space, the protagonists all navigate and re-purpose space — the sites and networks of the existing system — to subvert it. Henri Lefebvre asserts that "[a] revolution that does not produce a new space has...failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses"; the protagonists' re-purposing nevertheless disrupts the operations of the current system and might be considered a preliminary step.⁴³ In *Sons of Darkness*, Browning re-purposes his national network of black reformist and radical contacts to fund the mob hit. In *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, Freeman transforms CIA headquarters into a site to be spied upon, the streets of Chicago into a training ground, and gang organization and networks into a revolutionary army. In *Plan B*, Black converts a former plantation into a site for producing revolution and re-purposes the commodity distribution network to distribute weapons in cities nationwide. Black revolution's requirement

of spatial navigation and transformation to enable tactical violence displays the deep connections among spatial regulation, violence, and power in capitalist American society. These connections are made even clearer in the novels' shift to apocalyptic fiction.

The Shift to Apocalyptic Fiction

Of course, important to these novels' testing of black revolution is not only black revolt's organization and tactics, but also its outcome. While these revolts satisfy certain political desires of the period, they do not bring resolution; this breaks forth narratively in the novels' apocalyptic turn. Apocalypse deals above all with the demise of the current world, often through large-scale catastrophe, a struggle between good and evil, and final judgment.⁴⁴ Of particular note are apocalypses' imminent end of an old time and transition into a new, as well as the destruction of old space that often accompanies it.

Spatial destruction, more than the end of time, is what is actually narrated in the novels. In *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, typical urban rebellion explodes into large-scale revolt: "Oakland blew first, then Los Angeles, then, leap-frogging the continent, Harlem and South Philadelphia. [...] Every city with a ghetto wondered if they might be next. The most powerful nation in history stood on the brink of panic and chaos."⁴⁵ At the end of the novel, Freeman is shot and, after offering his gang some final instructions, bleeds to death "to the rapid crackle of automatic weapons, the spit of rifles, the explosion of grenades."⁴⁶

The aesthetics of disaster, Susan Sontag asserts, are achieved partly through their grand scale.⁴⁷ This is especially true in *Plan B*, in which the level of destruction grows ludicrous after blacks turn their guns on the police. The weapons the police and military bring into the city to "keep the peace" obliterate entire buildings and cause what Himes appropriately calls "over-kill" of blacks and whites alike.⁴⁸ The apocalyptic mode is signaled both by the sheer magnitude of violence and by features reminiscent of catastrophe science fiction. Police cruisers bear "red eyes blinking like Martian space ships," and a tank resembles "some kind of strange insect from outer space."⁴⁹ These descriptions highlight the alien nature of occupying police forces; the feeling of horror grows with the invention of new methods to quell the rebellion, including paralyzing gas and electronic devices to locate blacks with guns.⁵⁰ The final, catastrophic stage of race war is the survivors' descent into savagery: black males driven underground are said to kill hapless whites by biting their throats out, and whites hunt them for sport.⁵¹ By the end of the novel, the end, indeed, seems near.

In *Sons of Darkness*, the sense of apocalypse is found less in the level of narration than in its tone. Browning's mob hit unexpectedly causes the assassination of a number of white cops by random blacks, and then, in as many as fifty cities, the ominously-described invasion of black neighborhoods by members of a police conspiracy:

The raids began at midnight. [...] The cops proceeded to walk from block to block, sapping, punching and kicking anything black within their reach. They moved silently; they might have been on parade, so lined were their ranks; they spoke no words.⁵²

The tone becomes more menacing as the scale and reach of violence grows. Guerrilla violence destroys bridges and tunnels connecting Manhattan to the rest of New York. In the midst of this destruction and continuing street violence, Browning flees the rapidly disintegrating city. Reaching the Hamptons, he and his family listen to radio broadcasts of the growing death toll in cities across the country; they hear rumors of whites planning to shoot up black neighborhoods in their area. "It sounds like the end of the world," Browning's wife remarks.⁵³

During the late 1960s, it was generally agreed upon that, one way or another, the space of the ghetto had to change; in the novels, it changes through destruction. But it should be noted that destruction is not limited to the ghetto, as it was during the actual rebellions; rather, it reaches outward into the symbolic and infrastructural underpinnings of white capitalist society. In *Sons of Darkness*, bridges and tunnels are destroyed. In *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, the mayor's office is bombed. And in *Plan B*, possibly the most violent scene takes place in a major shopping district. These violent acts are clearly calculated to strike at the heart of white capitalist society, at the nexus of what Williams refers to as "political power and big business."⁵⁴ As such, they strongly intensify the feeling of the period that in the charred remains of burned-out ghetto buildings lay the larger society in miniature. We can see this in a *Chicago Tribune* piece on the destruction of Chicago's Westside corridor in the 1968 rebellion:

It was the crucifixion of a city, with Madison St. the blackened, still smoldering nail that had been driven into its heart. [...] It was as tho [sic] a flamethrower had played up and down the street, burning our roofs and crumpling walls until they arched inward to meet the heat-blackened, twisted steel structural members that hung into the ruins.⁵⁵

This quotation has the ring of the apocalyptic, of imminent ending; what ends, here and in the novels, is the submersion of racial antagonism. The article indicates that what has been let loose is black aggression, burning and bending the flesh and skeleton of a great city. In the novels, what is let loose above all is whites' hold on their moral reins, as they respond to black revolt with excessive violence. Disaster brings, Sontag remarks, a starting over that entails a release from one's normal obligations and moral responsibilities; it is an end of what one recognizes as society and its manifestations.⁵⁶ Ultimately at an end in these novels are the tenuous structures of civilization that had kept race relations from descending into total savagery.

In these novels, the apocalyptic mode is signaled by the level of destruction and sense of imminent ending; this ending, of course, entails not only space, but also time. As Max Page points out, stories of apocalypse proliferate during periods of crisis and historical transition; their teleological “not yet” is always really about contemporaneous fears and hopes.⁵⁷ David Leigh asserts that African-American history comprises a series of crises; these crises inform African-American typology, which often adopts the model of the Israelites held captive in Egypt.⁵⁸ Apocalyptic African-American folklore and literature at once focuses on the resolution of current conflict and attempts to transcend it via a history of a grander scale.⁵⁹ It typically connects judgment with redemption and freedom.⁶⁰ Apocalypse in the African-American tradition, therefore, while sharing many of the concerns of apocalypse in the Anglo-American tradition, also presents a kind of counter-history, one typically looking forward to a liberatory moment.⁶¹

The 1960s was a period of intense hope, but also, as we have seen, intense concern about the future. Apocalypse in these novels is part not only of literary traditions of apocalypse, but also of contemporaneous black political writings by figures like Malcolm X and Robert F. Williams that attempt to assign meaning to this volatile period.⁶² In 1960s black nationalist rhetoric, apocalypse offers the possibility of a liberatory moment within the context of a long-reaching, monumental struggle. As Arthur L. Smith points out, this renders the black rhetor’s work “sanctioned by history,” which helps define his/her specific group to the exclusion of others.⁶³ Yet those who share this generalized group identity do not necessarily agree on the form of the apocalypse, or its political potential, as we see in the contrast between the apocalyptic political writings of James Baldwin and Imamu Amiri Baraka.⁶⁴ Both Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* and Baraka’s “The Last Days of the American Empire” express a desire for radical change, but whereas Baraka sees the necessity of violently destroying the old society, Baldwin hopes that change can come instead through fulfilling its promise.⁶⁵ Common to all of these apocalyptic texts of the 1960s is the emphasis on blacks and whites as pitched in a battle that will likely have a drastic and violent conclusion. The possibility of black liberation — or alternatively, black extermination — is considered as a radical break from the pre-existing nation; as I have suggested, this historical break is represented in both spatial and temporal terms.

These terms are both relevant to the generic *shift* in the novels. They all begin in one genre — hard-boiled/film noir-style detective fiction in *Plan B*, spy fiction in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, and the thriller (with aspects of both of these subgenres) in *Sons of Darkness* — before transitioning to apocalyptic fiction. In all three novels, the shift occurs at the moment when the planned revolt begins. This shift, which is to some extent more of a layering, signals several changes, including a movement from the reinforcement of national space to the destruction of that space, and a related movement from a temporality associated with realist forms to the more messianic time of the apocalyptic mode.

The novels' opening genres reinforce national space, despite the authors' questioning of that space. While this is true of all three novels, I will limit my focus here to *Plan B* and *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*. Himes's *Plan B* begins in the mode of hard-boiled detective fiction, which shares many traits with film noir. Hard-boiled and noir display anxieties about a changing economic, political, and social order as fears of observation and diffused, pervasive power within the strictly regimented space of the city and, more broadly, the nation; through this lens, these genres reinforce the unassailable quality of national space.⁶⁶ While this aspect of hard-boiled/noir holds true in Himes's detective fiction, in his work the lurking, faceless power of modern society is supplemented by a critique of the nation-state's power to shape, constrict, and/or exclude its racialized subjects. He intensifies the milieu Raymond Chandler describes in his landmark essay, "The Simple Art of Murder" — a degraded world of absurd injustice, without comfort or escape — through the more degraded and circumscribed world of the black ghetto.⁶⁷ As I have suggested, this intensification is enhanced by Himes's use of absurdist humor, which Bould appropriately refers to as "vengefully carnivalesque," and which in *Plan B* reaches manically profuse heights.⁶⁸ Himes's variation on his genre thereby joins a questioning of the nation's ethical fortitude to a display of its power to oppress racial minorities.

Like detective fiction, the spy fiction employed in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* reinforces national space, but it does so in relation to other national spaces. As Michael Denning explains, the spy thriller, born during increased rivalry between imperial powers at the turn of the twentieth century, helps to reinforce national and cultural boundaries, as "the spy acts as a defender or subverter of the nation in the face of the other, the alien."⁶⁹ American spy fictions both expand the spatial imaginary into the international arena and carefully regulate the national arena, allowing readers to imaginatively gauge others' loyalties and eliminate unwanted groups.⁷⁰ Like Himes, Greenlee intensifies and satirically signifies upon his genre, but his satire tends less toward grim farce than toward parody and irony. Greenlee mocks the system, pointing out the absurdity, for instance, of a CIA training operation intent on whittling down a crew of black middle-class recruits to the single black man needed to confirm government integration. After Freeman is selected, his function is made comically plain by his conspicuous display in a "glass-enclosed office in the director's suite."⁷¹ Thus, while the conventions of the spy genre prop up national space, as Freeman's token black presence is intended to do, Greenlee's satirical variation also undermines it, as Freeman's spying on the CIA undermines the nation.

In addition to their spatial attributes, the realist genres of detective and spy fiction reinforce the nation through their notion of time. This temporality is associated with Benedict Anderson's "homogeneous, empty time," a term borrowed from Walter Benjamin.⁷² According to Anderson, within the modern "imagined community," time is conceived as happening horizontally, simultaneously across the space of the nation.⁷³ This time's "steady onward clocking," "[ambling] sturdily ahead," replaces the grander

scale of dynastic/sacred/messianic time that preceded it; it also coincides with the development of capitalism and print culture, both of which, in their proliferation, tie the nation together.⁷⁴ This modern notion of time and the carefully-regulated national space that are strengthened in detective and spy fictions contribute to a sense of national coherence, however spurious; this sense of coherence is seriously disrupted by the transition into the apocalyptic mode.

We have seen how apocalypse is signaled by the narration of spatial destruction; annihilating the old order, the shift to the apocalyptic mode tears through regulated national space as established in the genres of detective and spy fiction. It similarly initiates a temporal change. John Hall describes apocalypse's disruption of realist literature as a destabilizing of everyday existence, an interruption of "unfolding history."⁷⁵ He likens this time to what Benjamin refers to as "chips of messianic time." To restate, within the larger frame of the messianic, which is a diachronic conception of time, apocalypse is imminent, happening in a moment, in the synchronic — it is therefore a chip of messianic time happening in the now.⁷⁶ Distinct from Anderson's empty, homogeneous time, the notion of national community "[ambling] sturdily ahead," apocalypse is an abrupt break, an end of both that place and that time. It therefore presents a narrative problem: while the destruction of space can be narrated, and is narrated in great detail in these novels, the end of time cannot. This may perhaps explain why the novels end with their battles still in progress, without resolution. It is as if there is an unimaginable gap across which the narration dare not step.⁷⁷

So what is the ultimate political import of the emergence of the apocalyptic mode — and its narrative break — in these novels? It might, perhaps, indicate political paralysis in the face of an insoluble dilemma. It might, as Tal and Bould suggest, display a desire for a future that cannot be represented. It might, as Gilbert Muller asserts in his analysis of apocalypse in *Sons of Darkness*, demonstrate "the ability of a single man...and urban minorities to make the American landscape shudder."⁷⁸ All of these are plausible explanations.

In my view, though, we gain a more useful understanding of the import of apocalypse here, and of the novels as a whole, if we revisit the meaning of the term "apocalypse." It derives from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, or "a disclosure of something previously hidden or unknown"; a related word is "revelation," deriving from the Latin *revelatio*, from which the apocalyptic book of the New Testament draws its name.⁷⁹ This meaning demands a consideration of exactly what these novels in their apocalyptic moments are disclosing and revealing. If we review the novels' narration of spatial destruction, their transition into a high-stakes race war, the stripping away of the remnants of civilization that daily prevent the descent into savagery, we find that the apocalyptic battle that spawns from black revolt and its violent white backlash puts the viability of the U.S. as nation into question. It does this by revealing the thinness of white civilization's veneer, how dangerously transparent is its notion of

freedom and democracy — a humanist dream linked to a capitalist system that it helps reinforce. When the dream is compromised, so is the system, as in *Plan B* when white violence causes the stock market to crash, and confidence in capitalism to falter.⁸⁰ On the one hand, the apparent frailty of the system is encouraging, suggesting the liberatory potential of black revolt; on the other hand, black survival seems to depend on the morality that, however weakly, buttresses it. In these novels, the danger of white ethical collapse becomes dramatically real — particularly in Williams's and Himes's enactment of a genocide that many feared during this period — even as such protection of white America compromises the very ideals whites purport to uphold.⁸¹

In this way, despite the revolts' probable failure, the apocalyptic mode brings American brutality fully into view, restoring to a routinized racial violence its sensational and spectacular nature.⁸² It also reveals the contradictions of contemporaneous racial discourse. While the novels in general embrace — or in any case, indulge — a black nationalist perspective, they also point out the contradictions in the idea of blacks and whites as oppositional monoliths. We have seen this in relation to the artificially cordoned-off black ghetto. While the ghetto is black residential space, it is in the novels neither a romantic site of cultural authenticity, nor purely black: whites in the novels continually intrude upon and are heavily invested in the ghetto and in blackness economically, politically, and psychologically.⁸³ Williams perhaps goes the furthest in troubling the opposition of white and black in his sympathetic portrayals of Browning's daughter's white boyfriend and the Italian mob boss Browning hires.

The notion of racial binaries also falters on the attempt to view blacks as a homogeneous body with a coherent set of political interests. Recent political scientists have seen this as a major pitfall of black politics. Adolph Reed, Jr., points out that the much-touted gains of the 1960s went disproportionately to middle-class blacks, whose leadership have generalized those gains because "their legitimacy and integrity are tied to a monolithic conceptualization of black life" that "neatly concealed the system of hierarchy which mediated the relation of the 'leaders' and the 'led'."⁸⁴ This notion of the collective subject was quite commonly held and is clearly presented in the novels; the actual difference between black working-class/lumpenproletariat and middle-class interests becomes clearer as the novels progress.⁸⁵

In all of the novels, the protagonists' access to the spaces and other tools that they use to foment revolt is afforded them by their middle-class status. They are never secure in this class identity, betraying anxieties about the middle-class black American as a kind of race traitor, yet they are still deluded into believing that they can work in the interests and predict the behavior of working-class and/or lumpen blacks.⁸⁶ Browning's targeted assassination causes unexpectedly far-reaching violence; Black's arrogant assumption that poor blacks await his direction is disproved when his revolt starts without him; and Freeman must maintain a cover identity not only to "the man," but to his gang. Browning identifies the problem in *Sons of*

Darkness: “if you’re working inside the system then you’re not working at all.”⁸⁷ The problem, ultimately, is the limitation inherent in trying to change a system with its own, already-adulterated tools.

This sense of limitation is seen in the actual demands put forth by the novels’ militant groups. Like most Black Power proponents, they adopt the colonial analogy but do not seek total territorial separation. Freeman’s short-term goal is military withdrawal from the black ghetto. Browning wants acknowledgment of the value of black life, with the hope that afterwards, “things would improve.”⁸⁸ They both require not total black autonomy or system change, but a reformed nation of racial coexistence. The demands of a radical guerrilla organization in *Sons of Darkness* include full Negro enfranchisement; ten acres, a car, and \$5,000 for every black household; and withdrawal of U.S. forces from Asia.⁸⁹ These demands sound like a combination of those found in James Forman’s pluralist Black Manifesto and the Black Panther Party’s Platform; while Forman and the Panthers differed politically, their and the fictional radicals’ demands seek not an end to capitalism, but fulfillment of Constitutional rights and what they consider a more fair society.⁹⁰ In Himes’s *Plan B*, Black’s ultimatum is a bit more extreme — “grant us equality or kill us as a race” — but it still only insists upon equality within the system.⁹¹ In some ways, the reform-mindedness of these real and fictional groups’ demands is surprising; after all, the Panthers did elsewhere call for international socialism, and the novels do identify or at least suggest racism as inextricably tied to capitalism. This inability to break free from the system of which one is already so much a part reveals a limit on revolution organized solely on the basis of race in the context of the actual conditions of American life.

Indeed, all of the novels, despite identifying and employing binary racial discourse, simultaneously display white-black interdependence. As I have indicated, whites depend upon blacks economically, politically, and psychologically. The black rebels’ inability to break free from whites is clear not only in their practical need to use the existing system as a tool, but also in their requirement of a white audience for their spectacular violence and demands. The power of black violent revolt to disrupt American life notwithstanding, in these novels, the agency of black actors is fundamentally limited to bringing their adversaries to a moral choice. The weight of this choice, however, reinforces white dependence on blacks, as Himes expresses in an interview with John A. Williams: to exterminate black Americans would “destroy America” and what it represents.⁹² In an iteration of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, whites depend on blacks to help constitute their self-image as just, merciful, and democratic, while blacks depend on whites to not exterminate them.⁹³ The novels’ demonstration of the intertwinement of whites and blacks in the U.S. thus exposes the impossibility of separatist political rhetoric.

Another important aspect of black-white interdependence is identified early on in *Sons of Darkness*: “In New York, as in no other place, black and white needed

each other.”⁹⁴ While this quotation refers to the white ruling class’s dependence on black labor, it is nevertheless true that black labor also needs white labor — or, more precisely, the cooperation of the white working class — to achieve revolutionary change. This was argued to varying degrees by many black radicals in the mid- to late 1960s, including the Black Panthers, C. L. R. James, James Boggs, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.⁹⁵ White radicals also saw the need for cooperation; for instance, Thomas Hayden and Carl Wittman advocated an interracial movement of the poor. However, both whites and blacks acknowledged the vast gulf separating white workers from black due to long-term alienation of these groups by the ruling class, white-only labor union policies, union de-radicalization, and white fears of job displacement.⁹⁶ During this time, the conditions, reinforced by the discourse of racial binaries, simply did not exist for class unity across racial lines.

Conclusion

If the ghetto is a battlefield where racial antagonisms surface and explode, one might say that these speculative novels are imaginative, conceptual battlefields on which are played out the contradictions of their times. These novels, as well as the contemporaneous discourse with which they interact, demonstrate the impossibility of resolving the need for system change within the period’s dominant paradigm of white-black race relations. This is because the problem was not prejudice only, but structural inequality and worker exploitation. In the context of class struggle, exploitation was perpetuated by the black-white binary, which helped to maintain a black surplus labor supply and to divide white worker from black. This binary was reinforced through discussions of black pathology and the blighted ghetto as black space. In the public imagination, race to a large degree continued to obscure class differences through the prevalence of white dominance and black subordination and the assumption of the coherence of each of these two poles.

In the novels, the protagonists turn the tables on the dominant power structure by taking up the spaces and the tools — in particular, racial separatism and violence — of capitalist domination and fashioning them to their own purposes; however, this tactic binds the middle-class leader to the system he is attempting to radically change. The unruly persistence of class antagonism thus emerges unmistakably in the novels, both in the dilemma of actual black political heterogeneity, and also in the fact of black-white interdependence in a capitalist system.

The problem of turning the system’s tools to one’s own purposes in the novels is connected to the real-life problem of Black Power advocates’ re-tooling of the racial binary: black nationalist rhetoric, while by no means a mere reversal of white racism, nevertheless became an unwieldy tool for change. Confined by the terms of racial politics, struggling in the absence of cross-racial labor coalitions, and suffering under the gun of severe and violent political repression, many unsurprisingly turned to ethnic pluralism, electoral politics, and black capitalism as answers to black inequality,

rather than the elimination of capitalist exploitation. Ultimately, between the poles of Baraka's and Baldwin's calls to either destroy the white world or force it to fulfill its promise, the Black Power movement could fully accomplish neither.

While the novels satisfy certain political desires of their time — most notably, a kind of Black Power fantasy-fulfillment and imaginative production of leadership and organization, however limited — they cannot exceed their “semantic conditions of possibility” and overcome the historical impasse of late-1960s racial discourse.⁹⁷ To some degree, this dilemma explains the narrative excess, the absurdity and surrealism that break out in the novels: perhaps these aesthetic choices are means of compensating for frustrating limitations. Still, these novels are more than the sum of their limitations; these narrative features are also part of how the novels bear the residue of history, how they reveal the contradictions of that “absent cause” that is “inaccessible to us except in textual form.”⁹⁸ They do so partly by conducting an imaginative experiment, testing black revolution on its own terms.

This experiment is conducted most notably through the authors' formal choices. In the shift to the apocalyptic mode, the novels disrupt the viability of the national space and time that their initial genres reinforce; they thereby push beyond the racialized spaces and social and economic boundaries that constitute the contemporaneous U.S. The narrative break that marks the conclusion of each of the novels, the authors' inability to narrate the apocalyptic end of time — that longed-for moment of liberation — as they do the destruction of the spaces of racial and capitalist domination, is in part a formal problem presented by apocalyptic literature. It also reveals the political problem of the impossibility of narratively reconciling the contradictions of class division and binary racial discourse. The apparent failure to narrate this ending and resolve contradictions is inextricably tied to the novels' bringing these contradictions to a head, as they erupt in the explosiveness of the apocalyptic moment; this eruption importantly reveals not only the brutality and hypocrisy of white-dominant capitalist society, but also the inconsistencies of the racial discourse that reinforces it. Ultimately, then, the novels show that revolution organized along racial lines cannot succeed, but in doing so, *the novels themselves do not fail*.⁹⁹ In 1970, Sondra Silverman wrote that “[o]ne need not argue that riots are part of a revolutionary movement. [...] They are signals for action, not programs or panaceas.”¹⁰⁰ In this manner, one might say that these narrative apocalypses that flash from the violent spark of urban rebellion parallel the urban rebellions themselves; revealing to their readers the conditions of the present moment, they are a kind of clarion call, signaling a need for change that is not yet forthcoming.

Notes

1. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Comet," *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (New York: Washington Square P, 2004) 195-210.
2. John A. Williams, *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light: A Novel of Some Probability* (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1969); Sam Greenlee, *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1969); and Chester Himes, *Plan B* (Jackson: U Mississippi P, 2000). Other examples include Julian Moreau/Denis Jackson's *The Black Commandos* (1967), John Oliver Killens's *'Sippi* (1967), Chuck Stone's *King Strut* (1970), John A. Williams's *The Man Who Cried I Am* (1967) and *Captain Blackman* (1972), Barry Beckham's *Runner Mack* (1972), Blyden Jackson's *Operation Burning Candle* (1973), John Edgar Wideman's *The Lynchers* (1973), and Nivi-Kofi Easley's *The Militants* (1974). In some of these novels, race war, while projected, is either prevented or not very fully narrated/still to come.
3. August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976) 301. Major urban rebellions included Philadelphia in 1964; Watts in 1965; Detroit and Newark in 1967; and Chicago, Washington D.C., and Baltimore in 1968.
4. Charles D. Peavy, "The Black Revolutionary Novel: 1899-1969," *Studies in the Novel* 3 (Summer 1971) 180-89, and Jerry H. Bryant, *Victims and Heroes: Racial Violence in the African American Novel* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997).
5. Kali Tal, "'That Just Kills Me': Black Militant Near-Future Fiction," *Social Text* 20.2 (2002) 66.
6. Mark Bould, "Come Alive by Saying No: An Introduction to Black Power SF" in *Science Fiction Studies* 34 (2007) 221.
7. Greenlee, *Spook* 167-68.
8. Kerner Commission, *The Kerner Report: The 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Pantheon, 1988) 1.
9. In some sense the modern notion of the black-white binary formed around the turn of the twentieth century, as seen in the rise of radical racism, the development of the idea of racial "blood," the investment of whiteness with property value (see Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106.8 [June 1993] 1707-91), and the advent of Jim Crow. Racial divisions were further solidified in a somewhat different form in the 1920s, with a move away from blood and to culture (see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* [New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1988] 10, and Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, Pluralism* [Durham: Duke UP, 1995]).
10. The rebellions have been referred to with terms carrying various political weight, including "riot," "rebellion," "revolt," "uprising," and "disturbance." In the remainder of this essay, I use "rebellion" to refer to these incidents to avoid common connotations of "riot" as not only unplanned or spontaneous, but also senseless and even apolitical. Conversely, "revolt" and "uprising" suggest a level of political organization or scale that seems absent in individual urban rebellions of the 1960s; I do, however, use "revolt" to refer to the planned violence in the novels.
11. Bayard Rustin, "From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement," *The Black Revolt and Democratic Politics*, ed. Sondra Silverman (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1970) 16.
12. Kerner Commission, *Kerner Report* 203-6.
13. Charles V. Hamilton, "Riots, Revolts, and Relevant Response," *The Black Power Revolt: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Floyd B. Barbour (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1968) 174.

14. "After the Riots: A Survey," *The City in Crisis*, ed. Irwin Isenberg (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1968) 76. While some whites dismissed the rebellions as frivolous, Russell Sackett's fear-mongering 1966 *Life* article indicates more prevalent concerns: "the real prospect for rebellion developing from riots...is something more than the wild hallucinations of a relatively few angry black Napoleons. Indeed, some knowledgeable observers say that the extremists number among them some of the best minds of the Negro community" ("Plotting a War on Whitey: Extremists Set for Violence," *Life* 60:23 [10 June 1966] 100B).
15. This sense of white-black separation is exemplified in the popular and in many ways problematic *Black Rage* (1968), in which psychiatrists William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs assert that "[t]he worst slum and the best slum are very close together compared with the distance separating the world of black men and the world of whites" (*Black Rage* [New York: Basic Books, 1968] 71). Similarly, in a parody of the Kerner Commission's statement, Greenlee's Freeman expresses, "there will always be two countries here: one white, rich, fat and smug; the other black, poor, lean and striving" (128).
16. William K. Tabb, *The Political Economy of the Black Ghetto* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970) 27. As Adolph Reed, Jr., explains, Taylorization required a workforce of interchangeable laborers; ultimately, this demand conflicted with Jim Crow's insistence on racial differentiation, as well as its brutality and potential instability (see "The 'Black Revolution' and the Reconstitution of Domination," *Race, Politics, and Culture: Critical Essays on the Radicalism of the 1960s*, ed. Adolph Reed, Jr. [Westport: Greenwood, 1986] 66). Meanwhile, the elimination of blue-collar jobs by mechanization and computerization disproportionately affected black workers who traditionally held those jobs (See Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1969] 190). During the 1960s, the national black unemployment rate was consistently twice that of whites; with underemployment, the disparity was even greater (Tabb, *Political Economy* 107). See Tabb, Chapter 6 for a fuller discussion of the position of the black worker in the American labor market during this time.
17. Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2007) 7.
18. Tabb 8, and Kerner Report 243.
19. quoted in *Political Economy* 14.
20. Kenneth E. Clark, *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) xv.
21. All three novels are satirical but vary in their use of humor, as I will later elaborate on in relation to Himes and Greenlee. Williams, whose work tends more toward literary realism, is the lightest touch; Greenlee's popular spy novel is more overtly satirical and parodic; and Himes's novel is by far the most heavy-handed in its absurdism.
22. Himes, *Plan B* 51.
23. Clark, *Dark Ghetto* 27.
24. *Spook* 207.
25. This phenomenon can be seen in the popularity among black American radicals of texts like Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and Gillo Pontecorvo's film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966).
26. The Black Belt Thesis was a resolution of the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern (1928) that identified black Americans of the South as an oppressed nation within the U.S., thereby framing the struggle for black rights as a national liberation struggle. This thesis, while certainly not the opinion of all black Americans, strongly influenced CPUSA policy on race relations and anti-racist activism during the late

- 1920s and 1930s (Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* [Urbana: U Illinois P, 2005] 17-20).
27. Harold Cruse, "Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American," *Rebellion or Revolution?* Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2009) 75.
 28. Cruse, "Revolutionary Nationalism" 76, and Political Economy" 23.
 29. The notion of black spatial separation took a more extreme form in the territorial separatism of the Republic of New Afrika and the Nation of Islam. The desire to protect black space in some form is expressed in the novels; in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, the initial militant demand is the withdrawal of the National Guard from the ghetto, and in *Sons of Darkness*, the novel ends on the protection of the black domestic sphere.
 30. For an analysis of how black nationalism failed in some ways to diverge from the shortcomings of contemporaneous white politics, see Dean Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001).
 31. The extent of white society's repression of their complicity in the ghetto is blatant in Tom Wicker's claim that it took validation by "bona fide moderates" for the Kerner Report to "be heard in white, moderate, responsible America" ("Introduction," *The Kerner Report: The 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* [New York: Pantheon, 1988] xv).
 32. For instance, a 1967 *Newsweek* article characterizes a brick's breaking a police car window as "a direct hit that turned out to be the declaration of war" ("American Tragedy" 15). In *Plan B*, tanks "cannonading, in the scorched-earth tradition of the U.S. Army" are immediately brought into the ghetto to take down a lone black gunman (64).
 33. For example, more than 22,000 Army troops were deployed to quell the 1968 rebellions after King's assassination (Allen, *Black Awakening* 169). Tanks, helicopters, and advanced weaponry were available to anti-riot units (167).
 34. See Louis H. Masotti and Don R. Bowen, "Civil Violence: A Theoretical Overview," *Riots and Rebellion: Civil Violence in the Urban Community*, ed. Louis H. Masotti and Don R. Bowen (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1968) 21, and Robert F. Williams's "Revolution Without Violence?" (*The Crusader* 5.2 [Feb. 1964] 1-8) and "USA: The Potential of a Minority Revolution" (*The Crusader* 5.4 [May-June 1964] 1-7).
 35. Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (New York: Vintage, 1992) 79-81.
 36. One example of the limit on black independence is seen in the government-funded Ford grants that supported CORE in 1967 (*Black Awakening* 122). Also see Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (New York: Quill, 1984) 559.
 37. *Plan B* 148.
 38. Bobby Seale, "Free Huey," *Rhetoric of Black Revolution*, ed. Arthur L. Smith (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1969) 185-86.
 39. Black self-defense and paramilitary groups of the mid- to late 1960s include the Deacons for Defense, the Black Panther Party, the Defenders, the Black Liberation Army, and the Black Liberators.
 40. Bould, "Come Alive" 222.
 41. The decision to use violence is much more agonizing for Browning, for whom organized, targeted violence is the only logical response when it is "open season on Negroes" (11).

42. "On Violence," *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: De Capo, 1995) 19-20.
43. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell, 1991) 54.
44. David Leigh, *Apocalyptic Patterns in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Notre Dame: U Notre Dame P, 2008) 5.
45. *Spook* 236.
46. *Spook* 247-48.
47. Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966) 213.
48. *Plan B* 127. The following is a sample of "over-kill": "The concussion was devastating. Splintered plate glass filled the air like a sand storm. Faces were split open and lacerated by flying glass splinters" (181).
49. *Plan B* 56, 63
50. *Plan B* 138.
51. *Plan B* 187-88.
52. *Sons* 232-33.
53. *Sons* 273.
54. *Sons* 10. A fuller quotation illustrates the interconnection between economic and political power through spatial proximity: "[a]head of [Browning], a thick slab of glass, concrete and steel, was the Chase Manhattan Building. [...] There was the enemy: wherever there was money and in too many places where there wasn't. And the Woolworth Building, the five-and-dime empire. [...] Down here at City Hall Park was the perfect merging: political power and big business. And just a few blocks away, Wall Street" (9-10).
55. Quoted in Clay Risen, *A Nation on Fire: America in the Wake of the King Assassination* (Hoboken: Wiley and Sons, 2009) 194.
56. Sontag, "Imagination" 215.
57. Max Page, *The City's End: Two Centuries of Fantasies, Fears, and Premonitions of New York's Destruction* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008) 12. We may look, for instance, to a strand of apocalyptic Anglo-American literature at the turn of the twentieth century that forecasts racial Armageddon, in which whites' projected dominance or elimination both betray anxiety about their continuing power during this turbulent period. Examples include John Ames Mitchell's *The Last American* (1889), Agnes Bond Yourell's *A Manless World* (1891), Frona Eunice Colburn's *Yermah the Dorado* (1897), and Stanley Waterloo's *Armageddon* (1898).
58. Leigh, *Apocalyptic Patterns* 184, and Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Long Black Song: Essays in Black American Literature and Culture* (Charlottesville: UP Virginia, 1972) 46.
59. *Apocalyptic Patterns* 184.
60. Baker, *Long Black Song* 47.
61. Examples of apocalypse in African-American folklore and literature can be found in the spirituals and folk tales (see *Long Black Song* 47-49), and in the work of David Walker, Sutton Griggs, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison, among others. While I make some necessary distinctions between the white and black apocalyptic literary traditions, I do not claim their independence from each other (see Montgomery for this kind of argument).
62. The Nation of Islam viewed itself as the instrument of separation between white and black that would precede the ultimate destruction of the white world and the creation of a new (*Apocalyptic Patterns* 197-203). The outcome of apocalypse is conceived as less certain, but the stakes as high, in Robert F. Williams's writings ("USA" 7). *Right On!*, a 1968 film by the Last Poets, similarly urges blacks to "get it

together” so that in the apocalyptic moment, “[t]here will be no more white Christmas — there will be life” (Dir. Herbert Danska [Concept East New York, 1968]).

63. Arthur L. Smith, *Rhetoric of Black Revolution* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1969) 36, 40.
64. *Long Black Song* 55-56.
65. As Baker points out (55-56), Baldwin prefers a peaceful collaboration of the races to the fearful possibility of racial warfare, “the fire next time” (*The Fire Next Time* [New York: Dial Press, 1963]), while Baraka instead hopes that young blacks will “erupt like Mt. Vesuvius to crush in hot lava these willful maniacs who call themselves white Americans” (LeRoi Jones, “The Last Days of the American Empire (Including Some Instructions for Black People),” *Home: Social Essays* [Hopewell: Echo, 1998] 208-9).
66. Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004) 14.
67. Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder,” *The American Literature Archive* <<http://www.en.utexas.edu/amlit/amlitprivate/scans/chandlerart.html>>. Consider the following, from Himes’s *A Rage in Harlem*: “Looking eastward from the towers of Riverside Church, perched among the university buildings on the high banks of the Hudson River, in a valley far below, waves of gray rooftops distort the perspective like the surface of a sea. Below the surface, in the murky waters of fetid tenements, a city of black people who are convulsed in desperate living, like the voracious churning of millions of hungry cannibal fish” (Chester Himes, *A Rage in Harlem* [New York: Random House, 1989] 93). The spatial contrast here between the lofty towers of the church and white university and the submerged, dangerous ghetto starkly depicts the difference between black and white experience. For further discussion of Himes’s intensification of the social critique of hard-boiled detective fiction, see Robert E. Skinner, *Two Guns From Harlem: The Detective Fiction of Chester Himes* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State UP, 1989) 38-41.
68. “Come Alive” 222.
69. Michael Denning, *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller* (London: Routledge, 1987) 14.
70. Much American spy fiction around World War II imaginatively cleansed the nation of unruly ethnic or racial elements; speculative examples include Solomon Cruso’s *The Last of the Japs and Jews* (1933); Albert Nelson’s *America Betrayed: Save the Nation* (1936); and William Twiford’s *Sown in the Darkness A.D. 2000* (1941).
71. *Spook* 47.
72. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006) 24, and Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 2007) 253-64.
73. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 7, 24.
74. *Imagined Communities* 33.
75. John R. Hall, *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009) 3.
76. Hall, *Apocalypse* 263. Here I use “imminent” as distinct from “immanent,” as Frank Kermode refers to that term: “although for us the End has perhaps lost its naïve *imminence*, its shadow still lies on the crisis of our fictions; we may speak of it as *immanent*” (Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1968] 6). In these novels, the end is more than just present, or intrinsic; it is also *impending*.
77. This narrative gap is in some ways similar to the excision in utopian novels of the *passage* to utopia (e.g.,

the shift from Edward Bellamy's flawed Gilded Age to his ideal twentieth century in *Looking Backward* [1888]). One of the differences between this kind of apocalyptic fiction and Bellamy's novel, however, is that on the other side of Bellamy's break lies a description of an idealized nation that critiques current society by comparison; in this apocalyptic fiction, it is the breaking apart of the current society that produces its critique.

78. Gilbert H. Muller, *John A. Williams* (Boston: Twayne, 1984) 96.
79. Maxine Lavon Montgomery, *The Apocalypse in African-American Fiction* (Gainesville: UP Florida, 1996) 5.
80. *Plan B* 182.
81. This fear of genocide is exhibited in John A. Williams's *The Man Who Cried I Am* (1967), in which the discovery of a government plot to exterminate blacks unfolds at the end of a largely realist novel. The suitability of realism as a backdrop for this shocking realization is evident in sociologist Robert Allen's claim that, "The term genocide expresses the gut-level response of many blacks to what they perceive as a growing threat of violent repression. This is no idle fear" (164). Allen cites the death and wounding of "rioters"; Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley's instructions to police to kill arsonists; the stockpiling of arms for riot control; the networking of anti-riot governmental bodies; and the revival of McCarran Act-era detention centers (164-71). Hamilton similarly speculated that violent black revolution would incur repression akin to South Africa's Sharpeville ("An Advocate of Black Power Defines It," *The Black Revolt and Democratic Politics*, ed. Sondra Silverman [Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1970] 60).
82. Lefebvre identifies the visible eruption of violence in capitalist society as consistent with the spatial logic of the state. To produce consensus, the abstract space of bourgeois capitalism serves to conceal the violence that, along with the market, are constitutive of the state; yet, Lefebvre asserts, "violence does not always remain latent or hidden" (57).
83. This view of the ghetto, advanced by some cultural nationalists, is exemplified in Hoyt Fuller, "Introduction: Towards a Black Aesthetic," *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. Addison Gayle, Jr. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971) 8-10. Economic dependence is made clear in the long history of black labor exploitation, especially in *Plan B*. Political dependence is exhibited at the opening of *Spook* when a senator must seek the black vote by accusing the CIA of failing to integrate. White psychological dependence is shown in all three novels in white obsession with black sexuality.
84. Reed, "Black Revolution" 64.
85. For instance, while the Black Panther Party was invested in the power of the lumpenproletariat as a revolutionary force (see James A. Geschwender and Judson L. Jeffries, "The League of Revolutionary Black Workers," *Black Power in the Belly of the Beast*, ed. Judson L. Jeffries [Urbana: U Illinois P, 2006] 145), Cedric Johnson asserts that this kind of view "[downplays] the ideological and political diversity among 'the wretched of the earth'" (18). More insidious was the effect of ethnic pluralism, which often involved community control and investment in black business. Ethnic pluralist demands seek not a change in the capitalist system, but proportional inclusion in it; as such, this ideology supports middle- or ruling-class interests, as Reed indicates (62-64).
86. In *Plan B* and *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* in particular, middle-class identity is accepted only provisionally; for instance, Freeman, who assumes the covers of class-climbing Uncle Tom and middle class playboy, expresses his scorn for "Negro firsters," who sell their souls for "a mess of materialistic pottage" (*Spook* 13-14). Even Browning, who is more thoroughly middle-class, rejects the tactics of middle-

class respectability (*Sons* 11-12).

87. *Sons* 258.
88. *Sons* 23.
89. *Sons* 178-80.
90. National Black Economic Development Conference, "The Black Manifesto," *The Black Revolt and Democratic Politics*, ed. Sondra Silverman (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1970) 75-79, and "What We Want, What We Believe: October 1966 Black Panther Party Platform and Program," *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: De Capo, 1995) 2-4.
91. *Plan B* 200.
92. John A. Williams, "My Man Himes: An Interview with Chester Himes," *Conversations with Chester Himes*, ed. Michel Fabre and Robert E. Skinner (Jackson: UP Mississippi, 1995) 57.
93. In *Plan B*, Himes states: "Paradoxically, it was the whites' guilt and fear that eventually saved [blacks] from extermination. The whites had the means, but they did not have the will. [...] They were more afraid of their own moral condemnation than they were of the dangers blacks posed to them" (143).
94. *Sons* 12.
95. James Boggs (see *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook* [New York: Monthly Review P, 1963]) and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW) (see the film *Finally Got the News*, by the LRBW [First Run Icarus Films, 1970]) assert the commonly held notion of blacks as a revolutionary vanguard for the working class. The Panthers and the LRBW in particular saw the utility of cooperating with friendly whites (see Huey Newton, "Huey Newton Talks to the Movement About the Black Panther Party, Cultural Nationalism, SNCC, Liberals and White Revolutionaries," in *The Black Panthers Speak* 53-55). Also see C. L. R. James, "Revolution and the Negro" (*New International* 5 [December 1939] 339-43) and "The American Working Class" (*Marxism and the Intellectuals* [Detroit: Facing Reality Publishing Committee, 1962]).
96. Carl Wittman and Thomas Hayden, "An Interracial Movement of the Poor?" *The Black Revolt and Democratic Politics*, ed. Sondra Silverman (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1970) 43, 50. For an extended study of union de-radicalization in this period, see Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New P, 2010).
97. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) 57.
98. Jameson, *Political Unconscious* 35.
99. As such, these novels differ widely from *The Black Commandos*, which produces a much more optimistic (although no less destructive) outcome involving super-humans, unheard-of inventions, and flying saucers. This example shows that at that time, the only way to really produce a "happy ending" was through a *total* break with reality, one that readers might enjoy, but would not believe.
100. Sondra Silverman, "Epilogue: The Phenomenon of Ghetto Life," *The Black Revolt and Democratic Politics*, ed. Sondra Silverman (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1970) 93.

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Realizing Capital: Financial and Psychic Economies in Victorian Form

Anna Kornbluh

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Realizing Capital

Joshua Clover

"Psychic economy" is a metaphor of such seduction that we scarcely register it as metaphor at all. This is in a sense something metaphors are meant to do: match two logically independent terms to make one or both of them newly thinkable. Or, from a more skeptical position, a metaphor provides a subjective understanding of an object that excludes other understandings so successfully that it can appear itself objective, an incontestable truth. So: metaphor as either model or ideology. This is a hint of the lability that makes metaphors so anxiety-laden (and poets so dangerous, if one is to believe the old stories).

Realizing Capital pivots around a central claim regarding this particular metaphor, its power, and how it came to hold sway. In the book's accounting, the understanding of one's mental life as being structured like an economy — indeed like *the* economy — arose from the lived experience of a concrete economic situation: nineteenth-century British capitalism. In this telling, finance offers up the crucial hinge for a literary study of the era with the term "fictitious capital." If said term is these days most commonly heard in Marxist debates, the opening chapter — in a superlative archival jaunt — tracks the rhetoric of fictitious capital to its pre-Marxian locus in the writings of British bankers and journalists. Walter Bagehot, David Morier Evans, and others, it turns out, expended no small amount of energy wringing hands over this seemingly new mutation, discussing it often in the most literary of terms.

From this archive the book leaps to the literature of the following period, with chapters on Dickens, Eliot, and Trollope serving as demonstrations of the ways that the idea of psychic economy was taken up, worked through, critiqued, and finally hypostatized in Victorian literature. This is not the book's key argument, however;

merely its first move. From there it argues, quite persuasively, that the order of cause and effect becomes reversed in the general understanding — via a particular logic we shall revisit — such that the peregrinations and fearsome volatilities of the economy, particularly its irrational aspects, can be forgiven as inevitable effects of psychic economy.

The book is not the first to pursue the mind of capital into the BritLit of the nineteenth century and before. In a generic sense, the argument resembles that of Mary Poovey's *Genres of the Credit Economy*, which endeavors to demonstrate the ways in which novels taught publics to trust or at least accept a variety of modern and increasingly abstract financial instruments. Kornbluh's analysis, however, should be clearly distinguished from that of Poovey or Catherine Gallagher (*The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel*). Kornbluh cannily notes a certain antithesis which casts doubt on "historicist" (in truth, more or less New Historicist) approaches:

Moreover, the presence of the discourse of fictitious capital necessarily complicates our understanding of the economic facts the realist novel is said to report. In short, the realism of capitalism queries whether or in what sense capital is real; the Victorian pinnacle of literary realism coincides with a pervasive and powerful conception of capital as unreal — ethereal, virtual, imaginary. (12)

Against this, Kornbluh by her own admission takes a deconstructionist tack, an approach leading to interesting consequences indeed. It is this that marks the book in both its method and conclusions thereby derived — and it is this that engenders what is most insightful, impressive, and what is worthy finally of sustained debate.

Giving not just keen attention but priority to rhetorical figures and narrative structures, the book claims a greater access to the texts insofar as the method does not require reference to matters of finance or capital at the level of manifest content. Instead, it employs what it calls "financial formalism":

Financial formalism esteems figurative language as a mode of thinking about finance, tracking the labyrinth of aesthetic responses to intellectual pressures situated in history, but irreducible to it. Emphasizing what literature mints, financial formalism uncovers texts whose financial intelligence is discounted by historicism: texts whose plots do not depict financial crises or bank failures, whose pages do not feature financiers or stockbrokers. (15)

This formalism begins with the structure of fictitious capital itself. The simplest Marxian definition understands fictitious capital as paper claims on future value.

Hence, the standard sequencing of capital happens out of order: when such paper is exchanged at profit, the moment of realization in the market happens in advance of any underlying commodity's valorization by labor in the production process, M' seemingly preceding C even as the whole sequence shifts toward levels of abstraction and "the self-reflexivity of capital begetting capital" (78). The parts are out of place, wandering off, replaced by others, improperly exchanged. Kornbluh, mindful of contemporary commenters' own recourse to literary rhetorics, proposes thusly that finance has not just a linguistic but a literary arrangement: "[m]etaphoric substitutions, metonymic displacements, and ultimately the dynamic shuffling of one figure into another figure named by the metatrobe of metalepsis organize the whole financial industry" (25).

This then becomes an optic for examining the literary objects of choice, discovering in their own metaleptic operations the formal logic of finance captured in the very process of being transfigured into models of psychic economy. It will turn out to help that *Great Expectations*, *Middlemarch*, and *The Way We Live Now* make mention of capital, credit, and economy, buttressing the formal equivalences. The method allows for inventive readings of the novels, arguing for example that

Great Expectations finally portrays not a personal character, but an institution of the person — as Pip accords, "I felt like a bank of some sort, rather than a private individual." Here where the private individual dissolves into a bank, where the first person becomes the corporate person, where the psyche gilds as an economy, the irony of Pip's first-person tale realizes in the linguistic sense — performs, formalizes — the façades of personation countenanced by finance. (63-64)

The reading of Eliot is particularly nimble, throwing a new illumination on *Middlemarch*'s famous narratorial interruptions as a sort of metaleptic level-leaping, and offering an intensified assessment of the text's famous skepticism about metaphor itself. Regarding the book's well-known admonishment that we are inclined to "get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them" (qtd in Kornbluh 81), Kornbluh revisits the full passage to argue that "[m]etaphors in general may entangle us, but the particular archetype of such entangling, the ur-metaphor, is the conflation of financial interest and emotional affection. Psychic economy is the paradigmatic dangerous metaphor" (81).

Why so dangerous? Here we must return to the double reversal which orients the book. One sees swiftly the elegance of its account. Finance reorders the defile of value, placing cause after effect (here my inner Quintilian wants to mention *hysteron proteron*, the trope specific to that confusion). Just so, the Victorian era reverses the order of financialization's ascent with that of the concept of psychic economy. So while *literary* metalepsis provides both symptom and mediation within the book's

architecture, we have at the heart of the matter a *political-economic* metalepsis and a *historical* metalepsis. If finance's M-M' motion is the sequence in which "capital assumes its pure fetish form," as Marx has it, the corresponding historical metalepsis which Kornbluh limns operates similarly.¹ Psychic economy can no longer be seen as a metaphor brought into being by finance, but now becomes real cause for the topsy-turvy world of a financialized economy: a purported grounding for the peregrinations of the market and of capital *tout court*. Psychic economy is thus "*the paradigmatic dangerous metaphor*" because it functions to make critique impossible by fetishistically obscuring the real relations of history. No matter how monstrous its outcomes, the economy now appears as an unassailable totality comprising all its participants as incorporated individuals, in a newly psychologistic return of Smith's invisible hand: "[n]ot the structures of finance, but the structures of feeling economists claim precede them are enshrined as the ultimate ground of the economy" (156).

It is greatly to the book's credit that it dispels the historical fetish, as it were, so as to make the idea of psychic economy thinkable again, a metaphor again rather than a home truth — and in so doing, seeks to restore to thinkability finance and indeed capital itself. What then does the book think about these matters? It is here that space for debate opens. The confrontation with what the book takes to be the actual situation of capital happens in chapters 5 and 6, literary readings of Marx and Freud.

The reading of *Capital* is filled with pleasures, turning familiar critiques of Marx's literariness on their heads.

Capital may be, as one sneering biographer avers, "best understood as a Victorian novel," but in that case a different register of its meaning-making must open up from reading it that way; reading Marx's novel must enrich rather than impoverish our understanding of the Marxian edifice. (114)

Against banal positivisms holding that there is an external truth which a text endeavors to present, Kornbluh's financial formalism (here according personification pride of place along with metalepsis) shows that the literary tropes of Volume 1 serve not to undermine or obscure but to forward Marx's systematic critique of political economy, by enacting systemically sensuous actions. And so, for example, various moments of metalepsis perform the displacement of contradictions into larger spheres by which capital overcomes barriers to expansion, such that the real movement of the language makes the argument more apprehensible. There is a kinship here with Fredric Jameson's *Representing Capital*; Kornbluh is notably effective at presenting *Capital* as a text that conjoins both constructivist and expressivist aspects, and in so doing authorizes such readings (and writings) of other related texts. "It is, in other words, in the texture of the textual movement that we find a stunning engagement

with the text's subject," she writes, "a galvanized model of the metaleptic movement of capital itself" (129).

It is within this method of reading, however bravura, that certain risks arise. The proposition that language *as language* can make a political-economic argument does not compel the conclusion that capital is structured like a language. It does however invite such a possibility, and the book adopts it in what is for the most part a thoroughgoing fashion, even as it occasionally wrestles with such standard accounts of symbolic economy as Jean-Joseph Goux and the like.

This comes to a head during a sinuous late reading of Freud. Showing attentively how he wavered among ever-provisional formulations regarding psychic economy, the book takes this as a sign for the inadequacy of economy as a metaphor for the psyche, and in turn a sign of its inability to ground any understanding of political economy. That is, Freud's vacillations and emendations are seen to disclose the economy's groundlessness rather than being, say, a mark of his own hard-won uncertainty. This is, in the book's course, the last turn in what has already become an extended argument. In debunking the Victorian grounding of political economy in the psyche, the text relegates psychologism to the scrapheap, where it joins the substantialist value theory of Smith and Ricardo in being "a case of metaphysics" (in Dickens's repeatedly cited phrase).

One will no doubt recognize the critique of metaphysics and the unmaking of its ground. At its last, the book drafts Marx as an author of this critique, offering *Capital* as an argument that value is entirely ungrounded after the manner of language in the wake of Saussure and Lacan, subject to ceaseless metonymic slippage both logical and temporal.

And so indeed no sooner has labor been introduced as a figure for the "makeshift" grounding of exchange than it is supplanted by a metonymically linked notion: labor-time. Labor as such cannot ground value (ultimately there is no ground for the ungrounded); and so a related figure replaces it, "labor-time," the abstract, universal, putatively comparable unit of expenditure of labor. But even then, labor-time is itself supplanted by the figure of "social labor-time" (as opposed to "abstract labor time"), for it is only after labor-time has been subject to "quantitative determination" and after it has been sold that it can precipitate the value it is purported to ground. (134)

Kojin Karatani is directly marshaled toward this understanding, for whom value for all practical purposes does not exist until the moment of exchange:

A commodity cannot express its value — no matter how much labor time is expended to produce it — if it is not sold. Seen *ex post facto* the value of

a commodity could be considered as existing in social labor time, while in *ex ante facto*, there is no such guarantee. (qtd. in Kornbluh 134)

Here value exists only if expressed, and expression is always belated. At any given moment there is no value, just the ceaseless susurrations of commodities moving in relation to each other, occasionally switching places.

But one need not be persuaded by Karatani. The flight from failed positivisms might end elsewhere than the antipode of a purely negative, differential system; escaping the clutches of David Ricardo, we need not seek solace in the arms of Samuel Bailey. That would leave us far closer to marginal utility theory than to Marx's understanding (elsewhere Karatani claims rather more directly and disastrously that value comes from differentials between markets, and thus arises in exchange). "Dialectical" is a word that scarcely appears in the text; one might argue nonetheless that such an approach is precisely what mediates the polarity of grounded and groundless, Ricardo and Bailey. The dialectic, after all, provides precisely the possibility of system-as-ground, of apprehending relations rather than substances or subjects as a motive force. Grounding value in a social relation and a dynamic, mutually constitutive structure is not the same as having no ground at all.

It is this relation that is Marx's ground, and it is this that must be thinkable. In truth Marx does seem to think that a commodity bears value before that value is given a money name, reminding us that when a commodity makes its leap into gold, "if the leap falls short, it is not the commodity which is defrauded but its owner."² The very idea of a commodity selling below its value implies that value is grounded in advance of the moment of exchange. Moreover, the analysis that a commodity's price will eventually tend toward its value, a constant across all three volumes of *Capital*, equally affirms that value is grounded elsewhere, and that exchange is a series of approximations of this value. The commodity's value, to be crude, must stand in relation to the value of reproducing labor power plus the average profit rate, mediated by changes in total social productivity. If it's not grounded by these, capital cannot expand; capital not in expansion is not capital at all.

Why, finally, does this matter? Why take issue with the splendid synthesis of erudite scholarship and deft reading that Kornbluh has put on offer? It is largely a matter of time, or of history. Which is to say, a Bailey-Karatani model of groundless value might actually do quite a fine job of explaining how commodities exchange in a given moment; but it can tell us little about the wage-commodity system's dynamic over time. The confusions of cause and effect that the book rightly details do not gainsay the causality that is everywhere present in Marx: the set of determinations that push a system toward certain paths of development. And this — to restate at the last moment my own argument — is what ground must mean. It is Marx's dialectical ground which allows for an explanation of why commodities tend to bear increasingly less value over time, for example, and why this development will proceed in tandem

with production of surplus populations. It makes possible propositions about why our present world both does and does not resemble Victorian England. And perhaps more saliently in this case, it provides an account of why financial instruments, their prices wandering errantly, must eventually return to the ground of value via the annihilation of fictitious capital, whose “realization” now turns out to have been nothing of the sort, but was always a rearrangement of revenues lacking any new value at all. This is the moment of crisis, when gravity asserts itself — a force and a relation rather than a substance or subject — and the ground rises up to meet us.

Notes

1. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Harmondsworth, 1976) Chap. 24.
2. Marx, *Capital* 201.

Oded Nir. "In Search of Collectivity: Contemporary Israeli Leftist Critique." *Mediations* 28.1 (Fall 2014) 161-168.
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The Invention of the Land of Israel: From Holy Land to Homeland

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In Search of Collectivity: Contemporary Israeli Leftist Critique

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The work of the Israeli "New Historians" — Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, Avi Shlaim, and others — in the late 1980s marked a paradigm shift in Israeli critical thought. Enabled by access to formerly secret state archives, their reexamination of historical material pertaining to the establishment of the state of Israel and the critique of established national ideology which it entailed came under heavy fire, in both academic and non-academic circles. In hindsight, their critique can be said to have paved the way to the full articulation of what is usually called "post-Zionism" — the Israeli version of post-nationalism. The explosion of critical research in all disciplines that followed bears the marks of the shifts in Israeli political consciousness throughout the 1990s — from the heyday of liberal peacemaking during the Oslo so-called peace process years (during which the two-state solution seemed achievable to most), and the great disillusionment of many on the left following the failure of this process to lay to rest the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — a disillusionment expressed in Benjamin Netanyahu's notorious political slogan "there is no partner for peace." Even if the political agenda that the initial studies seem to have supported has dissolved in the post-Oslo years,

not to be replaced by any other unified political program on the Left, the two books under review here, Shlomo Sand's *The Invention of the Land of Israel: From Holy Land to Homeland* and Eyal Weizman's *The Least of All Possible Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza* (which we will read in light of Verso's republication of his 2007 book, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*) — should be viewed as part of the critical tradition inaugurated by the New Historians, which by now encompasses academic studies in a variety of fields and disciplines. The material uncovered by that tradition, and the effort of synthesizing the facts into more totalizing narratives, provide an indispensable resource for any critique of the Zionist project, particularly in providing insight into Zionist-planned deportation and mass killing of Palestinians, in the 1948 war and after. We will return to the historical forces underpinning the historical emergence of the New Historians later in this essay.

As Sand writes in his introduction, this new book can be seen as a sequel to his *The Invention of the Jewish People* (2009). Both books operate wholly in the mode of historical myth-busting — contrasting widely accepted ideological beliefs and narratives to historical truth, the latter conceived as a direct result of empirical study. (This approach is central to the New Historians themselves. See for instance Ilan Pappé's writing on the 1948 war.)¹ If Sand's former book attempts to dispel the belief in the existence of a unified Jewish ethnos, the current book sets itself to the task of deconstructing the process by which that ethnos came to imagine it can lay historical claim to a territory, the mythological "land of Israel," as its property (29). The controversy sparked by Sand's books revolves precisely around the claim to truth of Sand's alternative narrative.²

Thus, each chapter of Sand's new book attempts to reveal the constructed nature of a seemingly natural, ahistorical belief on which the myth depends. The first chapter traces historical transformations undergone by European conceptions of "homeland," showing them to be anything but eternal. Central to Sand's argument is the difference between "homeland" as a localized place of birth and familial belonging (as in the ancient Greek usage of the term), which does not imply any collective ownership over territory and the modern nationalist one — originating in the French Revolution and subsequent events according to Sand — in which "homeland" is imbued with a strong territorial imaginary to produce national identity as we know it today (53-57). It is at the end of the first chapter and its general discussion of the territorialization of the homeland that Sand's critical viewpoint reveals itself to be a secular, ethical critique of nationalism itself, deemed a way of "killing and being killed" employed as a useful myth to persuade the deluded masses to engage in violence (63-65).

Ethical stances, however, are just as susceptible to becoming ahistorical beliefs as any other ideological construction — thus taking the place of the myths that the ideology-buster has set out to fight in the first place. Even if the work of the New Historians can be seen, in its initial moment, to contain promising political potential, one has to consider whether this is still the case today, after its failure to produce a

revolutionary political project. The ethical rejection of violence in the name of the nation, of dying for a collective cause (which we might share with Sand on some basic level), quickly slips into a rejection of any libidinal investment in what Sand ahistorically terms “myth” or “theology,” contrasted with the empirical truth (63). This familiar equation of truth with vague anti-nationalist humanism — common among the Israeli New Historians of the late 1980s — can now help us begin to align Sand’s critique with the assault on the nation-state typical of post-nationalist ideology, which of course easily feeds into neoliberalism’s assault on the nation-state in the service of global capitalism. In that respect, it makes perfect sense that the emergence of the New Historians coincides with Israel’s joining the neoliberal “Washington Consensus,” with all its ideological and material implications.³

The post-national knee-jerk rejection of nationalism should not be confused, of course, with a Marxian dialectical critique of nationalism — that of Lenin and others — in which the state and its myths (or, in fact, any hegemonic ideology) are to be appropriated (rather than debunked theoretically) and mobilized in the service of the revolutionary cause in order to bring about the state’s “withering away.” While both approaches recognize the imaginary dimension of nationalism (which is the focus of most academic discussions of nationalism in the 1980s and 1990s, most notably Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and Eric Hobsbawm’s work), this imaginary dimension is taken by Sand — who is well-versed in the literature — to mean nothing but a useful lie or myth to be exorcized at will.⁴

A materialist insistence on the very real status of ideology, or following Althusser, seeing ideology as the way individuals imagine their relation to their real conditions of existence, can help us orient our reading of Sand’s book.⁵ This does not mean countering Sand’s anti-nationalism with a celebration of violence, or with justifying Israel’s violent oppression of Palestinians. Rather, we can read every “distortion” of the truth, every instance of myth-creation as a generative moment, a moment in which available imaginary forms and contents are creatively mobilized (not in the flat, positive meaning of “creative”) in their historical context to bring about social transformation. Read this way, Sand’s book becomes instructive for revolutionary social transformation once again, as it traces the different processes of ideological selections, inventions, and elisions through which Zionism related Jewish texts and customs to a nationalist imaginary. To be clear: learning from Zionism does not equal supporting Zionism; rather, it can help us evaluate what is still ideologically alive for the Jewish-Israeli public, or what ideological constructions we should engage or “infiltrate” in order to construct a revolutionary movement. Sand himself seems to be partly aware of the generative dimension of Zionism, when in the opening of the second chapter he recognizes the talent of Zionist thinkers who succeeded in reimagining the “land of Israel” in the form of a national territory (68). In what follows, Sand explores the challenges posed by the Bible and Jewish thought to the Zionist ideologues: the anti-autochthonous kernel of many of the Old Testament’s

stories (69-72); the scientific evidence pointing at the fabricated nature of the story of the conquest of Canaan by the Hebrews arriving from Egypt (a story which Zionist ideology paralleled to its own actions) (75-76); the non-territorial (but religious) imaginary of the Maccabee rebellion story, favored by the all-too-territorial Zionists (89-91); and the non-territorial meaning of “the holy land” or “the land of Israel” in the Mishna and Talmud, and in the writing of important Jewish thinkers such as Philo, the Rambam, and Yehuda Halevi.

The third and fourth chapters continue in the same vein: in the third, Sand claims that pilgrimage to the “holy land” was a rear phenomenon among Jews (as opposed to Christians), and that even when pilgrimage took place, it had nothing do to with mass immigration and settlement, or with the consecration of landscape associated with national territories (123-25, 130). Moreover, the first identification of a “chosen people” with a territorial unity, Sand claims, was not a Jewish invention at all: it only becomes an imaginative option after the emergence of proto-nationalism in Britain, based on the availability of mass printing and the Puritan revolution (143-47). It is in the Puritan imaginary and political stance that we first hear voices for the resettlement of Jews in the holy land. Sand thus shows how a convergence of historical circumstances — sympathetic British office holders, pogroms against Russian Jews, etc. — and new ideological possibilities serves as productive ground for the first Zionist appeals to the British Empire to support their colonial endeavor (161-75). In the fourth chapter, Sand repeats the same gesture, this time showing how despite almost unanimous rejection of Zionism by Judaism, Zionism’s ideological inventiveness combines with historical circumstances to move Eastern European and Russian Jews to immigrate to Palestine in order to settle it (177-96).

Neutralizing Sand’s ethical stance through the reversal described above means that we can read his book as something like an incomplete guidebook to revolutionary movement-building. Even if the movement built in this case — Zionism — has disastrously failed to produce a just society, we must admit that it has managed to produce a radically different social reality for European Jews, as Sand constantly reminds us. For, as Sand’s book reveals despite itself, Zionism’s successful negation-cum-appropriation of Judaism consisted in relating the new secular daily experience of Eastern European Jews (i.e., the rise of nationalism, the new technological mediation of identity, the pogroms, etc.) to an ideological world that could no longer reconcile the contradictions of that experience. It is precisely this process of constructing a new social narrative out of the available Israeli ideologies (including the Zionist ones!), a narrative that could bring about a new collective project rather than provide one that appeals only to the post-nationalist Left, which is arguably the Israeli Left’s most urgent task. Therefore, even if Sand provides us with important insight into the ideology of Zionism, and even if we broadly share his humanist rejection of violence, we must still consider what political project is supported by Sand’s own narrating of the material. This political project can clearly be seen today to be completely

compatible with global capital's attack on national sovereignty, which means that a Marxist appropriation of Sand's "truths" should not be immediate and uncritical.

The Israeli critiques of Sand's second book (echoing to a large degree those of his first book) engage Sand on his own terrain: claiming that he does not bring any new facts to light, and, more importantly for us, that the facts on which he relies do not plausibly support his alternative narrative.⁶ Any follower of the debate, which has been going on for several years now, must by now be convinced that it will never be settled. Thus, what the debate seems to tell us is that an empirical approach to historical narrative has its limits: "the facts" in themselves suddenly seem powerless to generate a narrative, as many controversial claims can never be fully supported or fully refuted. That does not mean, of course, that facts are unimportant. Rather, it tells us that historical truth always consists in something more than empirical fact-finding, something that makes it possible to transform isolated facts into a narrative. The powerlessness of facts "in themselves," or the failure to narrate the present historically, can therefore be seen as a symptom, marking an absence which is itself a historical development.⁷ For, as even Sand admits, nationalist historiography seems to have succeeded precisely where we fail: it managed to produce a social narrative, even if that narrative fails to fulfill its promises. We will return to the problem of narrating history later in this essay.

If Sand's main aim is dispelling popular Zionist beliefs, Eyal Weizman's *The Least of All Possible Evils* sidesteps the mythbuster's approach. It does that by limiting itself to the exploration of existing structures of power relations and modes of control and domination, active both in the Israeli colonial context and outside of it. Weizman's 2007 *Hollow Land* (republished in 2012) uses architecture both literally, designating physical built environments, and as a metaphor for the decentered and multi-layered structure of control employed by Israel in "managing" (read: controlling and oppressing) the Palestinian population.⁸ *The Least of All Possible Evils* can be seen as an extension of Weizman's overtly Foucauldian-Deleuzian approach developed in *Hollow Land* (to the degree that the diffuse system of multi-layered control still reigns supreme) (23). It can also be seen as a break from it, as his new book strongly re-centers that system around one dominant logic, that of the "lesser evil" (one could argue that *Hollow Land* performs the same re-centering, even if unconsciously, around the figure of "the occupation" itself).

The central claim of the short book is simple enough: the shocking thesis that the global North's military operations and humanitarian aid agencies have become almost indistinguishable. Both, according to Weizman, operate (and to a certain degree directly collaborate) through the same calculus of "lesser evil," or of minimizing civilian suffering in war or conflict. This logic stands in opposition to an older logic taken by humanitarian and human rights organizations, in which war and colonial violence were rejected in principle (3-6, 117). As Weizman stresses, the "lesser evil" argument has many consequences: creation of a calculus of proportionate violence; a

“pedagogical” warfare in which non-compliance on the side of the occupied justifies disproportionate retaliation; the loss of any conception of a redemptive or utopian goal to human activity, and others (19-20, 22). The global scope of Weizman’s claim about the complicity of well-intentioned NGOs in the logic of military operations and of so-called population management should be read alongside similar recent studies of the deleterious effects of NGO involvement in the global South, such as those by Mark Duffield and Lamia Karim.⁹ As in *Hollow Land*, Weizman borrows from a cross-disciplinary variety of sources: critical legal studies, philosophical and theoretical texts (from Augustine and Leibniz, who serve as the main coordinates for the development of thinking through the “lesser evil” argument in Western thought to Israeli critical theorists Adi Ophir and Ariella Azoulay), as well as primary sources such as interviews he conducted with the book’s “protagonists,” Hamas’s *Book of Destruction* (which is the source for the many pictures collected in the “Epilogue” chapter), and others (2, 7).

Even though Weizman traces many of the concrete implications of the coming into dominance of the “lesser evil” logic, his critique of it remains an ethical one. Weizman develops a strong parallel between his case studies. These are dealt with in Chapter 2, which describes the problematic involvement of humanitarian aid organizations in the Ethiopian famine of the mid-1980s, and in Chapter 3, focusing on the “humanitarian war” waged by Israel against the Palestinians. In each case, Weizman highlights the ethical dimension of intervention. Thus, the chief of *Médecins Sans Frontières* during the crisis in Ethiopia and the Palestinian lawyer tasked with contesting in court the proposed route of the Separation Wall are presented in the same light: both recognize their complicity in inflicting violence and suffering despite their political commitments. In the Ethiopian case, humanitarian aid is used as political tool in the crisis, while in Palestinian case, the Palestinian legal defense finds itself suggesting more humane alternatives to the Separation Wall’s route, thereby aiding in its construction. In both cases, then, Weizman develops an ethical aporia, one in which the protagonist cannot decide whether to succumb to the “lesser evil” logic of the system in trying to alleviate suffering or to refrain from intervention at all.

It is precisely this ethical aporia through which Weizman, again, betrays his Foucauldian prejudices, even if the latter would have rejected the specifics of Weizman’s ethical framing of the problem. For it is Foucault’s notion of power that always-already includes resistance in it, thus in danger of seeing any resistance as part of the latter’s operations (in a similar fashion to the dilemmas faced by Weizman’s protagonists).¹⁰ The same approach can be detected in Weizman’s *Hollow Land*. In particular, in its discussions of rebuilding Palestinian towns and refugee camps destroyed by the IDF, and in the book’s overarching claim that both separation and non-separation of Israeli space from Palestinian have become tools in Israel’s oppressive arsenal.¹¹ This undialectical conception of power, one that blocks any way out of the aporia, does not allow Weizman to suggest a political way out from the sterility of

the ethical dilemma. Indeed, all that Weizman allows himself to suggest is a weak ethical compromise between the two poles, namely, that of minimal humanitarian intervention — one that tries to minimize the political “footprint” of its activity, and somehow refuses the management of populations with which it has become indistinguishable (61-62). Even if Weizman’s account of the collusion is valuable in terms of bringing the unholy collusion of slaughter and humanitarianism to light, the compromise he suggests is far from satisfactory for revolutionary purposes.

The difficulty in coming up with a creative ethical solution to the logic of “lesser evil” is of course not Weizman’s fault. This becomes clear as soon as we recognize that the rejection of ethics that stands in the core of the “lesser evil” logic is paradoxically a result of ethics’ incorporation into it (18). If ethics is already incorporated into it, it should come as no surprise that we cannot fight this logic on its own ethical grounds. It is here that Weizman’s analysis could have gained from a Marxist account of late capitalism, with its emphasis, on one hand, on capitalism’s new global reach and, on the other, on its invasion of all realms of life, including subjectivity and culture.¹² For the quantification that ethics undergoes when it is incorporated into military logic (described in detail in the fourth chapter of Weizman’s book) can then be considered as ethics’ commodification and reification — an operation that makes ethics commensurable and exchangeable (even with what seems to be its opposite) in the market: just as Starbucks can sell us ethical coffee, so can the military sell us ethical slaughter.

In broad terms, the Marxist way out of the ethical dilemma is a sociopolitical one: only through a collective project can we de-reify ethics, or wrest it from its status as a commodity in which it is endowed with exchange-value seemingly independent of our own activity. As Jameson argues, such collective projects depend (or at least used to depend) on historicity, or an ability to imagine the present as a space of praxis that is part of a historical trajectory, which strongly depends on the way we narrate the present historically. It is in this sense that history’s sudden reappearance at the end of Weizman’s fourth chapter betrays a strong utopian impulse. The practice that Weizman calls “forensic architecture” — in which ruins are made to testify to the process of their own destruction with the help of experts (an increasingly popular approach in investigations conducted by human rights organizations) — is, in the context of rebuilding, “not simply tasked with past events and the way destruction has occurred, but with the means of evaluating future works” (108, 146). Forensic architecture thus comes to provide a figure for the return of historicity in Weizman’s book, as it manages to make its objects — the ruins — the raw material for a narration of the present through past events, and determinately opens future possibilities. To be sure, it is no more than a figure: the long sequence of pictures of destroyed buildings in Gaza that concludes the book, which is supposed to provide raw material for a new historicity, is bereft of narrative (an absence for which we cannot blame Weizman). Yet, the desire for a new socio-historical narrative is still very much alive

in Weizman's book, as it poses the interpretation of the images as a challenge for any new collective project on the left.

Notes

1. Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2007).
2. See, for example, historian Israel Bartal's discussion of Sand's first book in *Haaretz* newspaper, "The Invention of Invention" (27 May 2008).
3. For a detailed account of this economic and historical transformation, see Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler's *The Global Political Economy of Israel: From War Profits to Peace Dividends* (London: Pluto, 2002).
4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), and Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992).
5. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review, 1971) 162.
6. See, for example, Yoav Gelber's "The Invention of the Land of Israel: There Is a Country, So They Say" in *Ha'aretz* (27 September 2012).
7. Discussions of history and historical writing in the 1980s and 1990s focus precisely on this problem. See, for example, Hayden White's influential work on the subject in "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," *Clio* 3:3 (1974) 277-303. For a Marxist response to White's conception of modes of historical "emplotment," see Fredric Jameson's "Figural Relativism, or the Poetics of Historiography," *Diacritics* 6:1 (Spring 1976) 2-9.
8. Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2012) 6.
9. Mark Duffield, *Development, Security, and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), and Lamia Karim, *Microfinance and Its Discontents: Women in Debt in Bangladesh* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2011).
10. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon, 1978).
11. Weizman, *Hollow Land* 201-205.
12. See, for example, Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991); David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1982).

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GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History

Diane Coyle

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The Leading Indicators: A Short History of the Numbers that Rule Our World

Zachary Karabell

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Inventing Economies

Davis A. Smith-Brecheisen

Since its invention in the 1940s, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been both lightning rod and bellwether. Two recent books, *GDP: A Brief But Affectionate History* by Diane Coyle and *The Leading Indicators: A Short History of the Numbers that Rule Our World* by Zachary Karabell, trace the history of this ubiquitous economic indicator from its wartime inception to its waning efficacy in the twenty-first century. Each of these works traces different ways the institutionalization and evolution of economic indicators has distorted understandings of economic life and social relations. Invented to explain output and preparedness for war, GDP became the primary statistical representation of Western affluence during the 1940s. It served as the conceptual apparatus that underpinned the United Nations' goals to keep the peace and end poverty, effectively representing the ideological battleground that defined the Cold War. To put a finer point on it, GDP has become a sort of statistical embodiment of the ideological conflicts that have defined the postwar period, both political and economic. As the conceptual apparatus that has defined the second half of the twentieth century, the importance of GDP can scarcely be overestimated. The past few years, however, have not been kind to that holiest of economic indicators. In the wake of the economic collapse of 2008 and the subsequent jobless "recovery," GDP

has proven an increasingly troubled representation of economic health, unable to keep pace with a global economy defined in terms of innovation and creativity rather than productivity and output. The histories of GDP traced in the accounts offered by both Coyle and Karabell are perhaps best understood in two parts. The first part is the inception and rise to prominence of GDP first as a means of defining a crisis-prone and faltering brand of American capitalism before eventually becoming its greatest champion in the postwar period. The second part of the history traces the limitations of GDP following the financial and economic innovations that emerged from the ash heap of the global economy in the 1970s.

Importantly, both of the works reviewed here begin with the assumption that GDP is one of the twentieth century's most important "inventions." As Diane Coyle points out, it is "a made-up entity" that does not so much "measure market production" as it "defines" it (139). Created by the state to assess its ability to fight wars and "run its fiscal policy," GDP has come to shape contours of what is considered "the economy" (15). She contends, "there is no clear definition of 'the economy'" beyond the statistical representations of it (139). Zachary Karabell goes slightly further, arguing that GDP effectively invented "the economy." One of his more striking points is the extent to which the invention and institutionalization of GDP in the 1940s "transformed the way people everywhere understood the material ebbs and flows of society" by treating "the material affairs of a nation as a coherent and cohesive subject that could be defined, measured, and tracked over time" (88, 78). And as productivity and output became the terms framing the economy, other questions such as those of welfare and value receded from view. The result of a forty-year history of discussing the economy in terms of output and productivity has led many to believe that this economic abstraction is, as Coyle puts it, a "natural object" waiting to be measured (139). When, in fact, GDP is a concept — one that has shaped the contours of political and economic life since it was invented after World War II.

At the core of both of these works is an abiding skepticism toward the ways in which economic complexity has been rationalized into overly simplified economic indicators by policymakers, economists, and statisticians. And while both books do a perfectly fine job highlighting some of the ways in which the global obsession with economic indicators has created a distorted view of economies, neither work follows through with the entailments of these claims, leading to some glaring missed opportunities and outright omissions. Among these is the extent to which standardizing GDP and turning economic output into the benchmark for progress buttressed the rise of U.S. economic hegemony in the postwar era. And although both books rightly point to the fact that defining the economy in terms of output and productivity has massively overstated the value of commercial banking and debt financing, the problem they are most concerned with is the question of measurement, not the complexity of value itself. And this is the real missed opportunity in both of these works: they accept the logic of statistical representation of economic forces,

even as they critique them. Consequently, both Coyle and Karabell stumble over their object of analysis, reinforcing the importance of data and statistical analyses to formulate our understanding of political economy.

In her history of GDP, Coyle marks an important intellectual turning point at this time in debates about economic measurement beginning with Adam Smith, whose definition of “National Income” was the first to distinguish between productive and unproductive labor. Although since at least seventeenth-century Britain, states had developed some form of national accounting structure, the practice focused more on taking stock of assets and is not quite the same as defining output or productivity. By the eighteenth century, defining the economy in terms of productivity and growth had become increasingly important to the maintenance of empire. For Smith, Coyle notes, productive labor included “only those involved in the making of physical commodities, agriculture and industry. [...] The provision of more *services* was a cost to his employer, and did not create anything” (10). Neoclassical economists of the 1890s revised the definition of productive labor to include services and thus greatly expanded the definition of national income. Though the definition of “productive” has changed, Smith’s division between productive and unproductive labor remains central to economic debates over the health of economies globally (Coyle refers to this as the “productive boundary” [38]). Some services might now count as productive according to economists and the Bureau of Economic Affairs (BEA), which calculates GDP, but the question of what constitutes the productivity of “the economy” is obviously far from a settled matter.¹

Both Coyle’s and Karabell’s prehistories of GDP point to the ways in which states have long grappled with the best ways to define the economic life of a nation. The answer, ultimately, has been to do so rationally and statistically. As Karabell asserts, to do this, the state needed to invent and institutionalize the data. As he also points out, however, developing a statistical representation of the economy invented the very thing economists and statisticians claimed to measure, and this fundamentally reframed the ways in which political economy was understood. Dropping the “political” altogether, what had previously been understood as a branch of “history and philosophy” moved into the realms of “math and science” (53). In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, as the “scientific management of society” began in earnest, the definition of national economics became increasingly quantified. Karabell notes the extent to which, despite the limitations of the analysis as it was being undertaken, both financial markets and “politicians wanted a number, and they wanted it to be ‘the truth’” (24). Among other things, this obsession with the “truth” of data marks a qualitative shift in how national economies come to be understood and defined. By the 1930s these numbers were treated as though they presented “a perfect map of the world” (23). Whatever their intended ends, economic data actually came to define the contours of “the economy.” This is to reiterate the earlier point, that economic indicators do not so much measure the economy as produce it. And the vision they

produce is a hyper-rationalized one. Although Karabell points to the ways in which this distorts the lived experience of daily economic life, and Coyle argues that this in many ways misrepresents the way economic exchange actually works, we might put the point more strongly: representing “the economy” through hyper-rationalized and statistical methodologies means that complex and often contradictory economic forces were simplified into ostensibly easily digested statistics.

This process of rationalization, by distilling the economy into measures of productivity and “prosperity,” elides the antagonisms of capital and ignores social welfare altogether. And though neither Karabell nor Coyle want to argue this first point, both are deeply invested in the latter. Karabell traces the degree to which the economy is defined by output, not welfare, to the combination of the postwar economic boom and the heating up of the Cold War. He notes that almost immediately upon its invention in 1946, GDP became a way of talking about how “we” were succeeding as a nation. And how “we” were doing was represented purely in terms of output, producing a vision of economic life whereby welfare was yoked to output and consumption. As GDP became, as Karabell notes, one of the “abiding elements” of national life, it became a way of reassuring people that its economy was protecting the nation from the “unruly patterns of boom and bust” (76). However misguided or ultimately fallible GDP has proven as such a measure, it nonetheless meant for the first time people “thought of their nation [and] their society or their own lives in terms of the collective material production of their country” (77). When “the economy” emerged as a feature of national consciousness, output effectively came to dictate the ground of daily life by linking the material well-being of American citizens to the output of the nation rather than, say, inequality. How much could be produced became the benchmark against which progress was measured, even at the level of “consumer sentiment,” which attempted to measure the degree to which individual consumption choices and feelings could predict output.

The fact that GDP became a way of measuring affluence is unfortunate considering that the invention of key economic statistics was “part of an overall movement toward social and political reform” (Karabell 29). Economic statistics were born, Karabell argues, out of “impulse to control” the “unruly beast that was economic life” (70). In the late nineteenth century, labor unions were part and parcel of the social movement to quantify the “unnecessary” hardship of exploitation and unemployment. Karabell notes the extent to which in the early twentieth century, the progressive movement of the 1930s appealed to this same logic: “the drive for more data and new statistics was born...from a strong suspicion that inequality was widening, social justice was weakening, and the pace of industrialization was creating as much harm as good” (24). The statistical insights yielded by economic data were intended to pinpoint crises of capitalism, not to justify exploitation.

Yet this is precisely what they have come to do. Although Karabell wants to argue that these economic indicators have come to serve ends that were never intended,

this is not quite accurate. The labor movement has been predominantly interested in making capitalism work better — i.e., producing more affluence. And appealing to the available statistics to resolve the conflict between labor and capital meant that the progressive movement and labor unions adopted the very mechanisms that created inequality in the first place. As they did, the solutions to the contradictions of capital — unemployment and inequality — were framed in terms of productivity figures. Unemployment could be solved if we made more stuff and put more people to work. Likewise, wages could be improved if more money was coming in. The data proved as much. But this only intensified capitalism by further quantifying and thus justifying the drive to produce. Crucially, appeals to statistics could not solve the problem because the indicators themselves defined the terms of the conflict between labor and capital. And labor reform movements, by accepting these terms of exploitation, ultimately made capital more efficient. There were real gains for workers during this period, and that should not be overlooked. The point here, however, is to highlight the degree to which the appeals to statistical modes of representing the economy further entrench the logic of the exploitive structures they were intended to critique. From this standpoint, the transformation of output statistics from a measure of inequality to a measure of affluence seems almost tragically inevitable.

It was not inevitable of course, but it did happen. And both Coyle and Karabell attempt to explain why. Of the two, Coyle is the most interested in defending the reasons why, in the aftermath of World War II, GDP really was a good indicator for the overall economic welfare. Though she suggests that one of the “distasteful” consequences of disaster is “a boom in GDP” (43). Basically, the logic goes: if you destroy everything, you have to pay people to rebuild it. Following World War II, output, productivity, and welfare were closely linked because the war decimated most of the advanced economies in the world. Rebuilding meant vast improvements both in output and welfare. Coyle goes on to conclude that the GDP became the economic indicator par excellence because during the period that consumer-driven modern economies were formulated, it was just the best indicator of growth *and* welfare.

Karabell approaches the proliferation of economic indicators such as GDP slightly differently, suggesting that GDP was standardized and institutionalized largely out of international economic anxiety — policymakers and citizens wanted some assurance that the economy was not going to collapse immediately. He also argues that GDP’s importance was in part ideological. Though it was the intent of the earliest architects of national statistics in the 1930s to “replace endless ideological jousting with solid data” during the Great Depression, in effect, those same statistics became the instruments that would define the ideological jousting of the postwar era (Karabell 75). With World War II ending and domestic production ramping up, fears of inequality were supplanted by a newfound “need” to out-produce the Soviet Union. GDP became a distilled, simple figure to entrench the belief that United States had the better mousetrap. According to Karabell, in order to make this argument hold, the

United States had to convince the world that GDP was in fact the best measure of an economy (Coyle touches on this point as well). Essentially, the United States had to establish the rules of the game. And because it was in the position to do so, the United States began doing what it did best in those postwar years: standardize and export.

The United States, with the support of Britain, began standardizing national income accounts. They did this not just through international economic agreements such as Bretton Woods, but through organizations such as the United Nations as well, which under the aegis of promoting peace also began promoting liberal capitalism. So that it might achieve its astonishingly utopian goal of “banishing...destructive economic forces,” the United Nations began standardizing national income accounting and proliferating global economic data (Karabell 89). As Karabell notes, both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund also played a significant role in collecting and disseminating these statistics. It would be a vast understatement to say that there are far-reaching implications to the fact that supranational organizations, backed by the United States, effectively dictated what a sustainable economy ought to look like.

It is, however, interesting to note the degree to which Karabell’s work implies (even as it is not explicitly mentioned) that the standardization of economic indicators such as GDP has played a crucial role in securing U.S. economic hegemony. Essentially, exporting standard methods of national accounting allowed the United States via the UN, World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund to create a world in its own image by systematizing and defining what economies ought to look like. Rationalizing economies into bundled data sets made it more efficient for those organizations, with the blessing of the United States, to adjudicate the creditworthiness of less-developed economies. The “structural adjustments” that have historically been attached to the loans for those countries deemed creditworthy have created massive new markets for both goods and financial capital. And increased access to financial capital markets has been absolutely central to securing U.S. economic hegemony, which hinged on securing open access to markets for goods and capital. Of course, economic indicators, which U.S. and British economists invented, have often been the justification for these policies. And just as open capital markets have buttressed the U.S. economy, they have toppled others. The U.S. role in the Latin American debt crisis would be just one such example. More generally speaking, one might point to the vast amount of capital currently flowing back into the United States from less-developed economies and the structural adjustments imposed upon debtor nations by their lenders.²

To be sure, global capital markets cast a volatile pall over the entire history traced by both authors. If the first part of this narrative has been a history of the ways in which the rationalization and institutionalization of GDP has obscured questions of economic welfare while simultaneously securing U.S. capitalist hegemony, the second, related part is best understood in terms of the limitations and outright failures of these indicators to grapple with the increasingly prominent role played by debt financing and capital markets since the 1970s. The nagging problem of value

elided by data-driven representations of capital in the early twentieth century, in other words, has never really gone away. While the economic turmoil of the 1970s needs no rehearsal here, it is worth noting that because the makeup of Western economies shifted dramatically, finance became increasingly important in GDP calculations. Understanding the role of finance in GDP is far from a straightforward task, perhaps because it requires abstracting and quantifying “fictitious capital.” Yet, for thirty years, many praised the “contribution of financial services to the economy,” essentially arguing that it alone rescued the American economy in the 1970s and has been fueling growth ever since (Coyle 98). Without a doubt finance has played a key role in fueling capitalist expansion and securing U.S. economic hegemony over the past thirty years. “Nonetheless, given the devastation [financial services] have caused,” Coyle argues that “we have to ask how that devastation can be reconciled with the importance of finance in the GDP figures.” More importantly still, the crisis encourages a “reevaluation of...the economic theory on which policy has been based for the past generation.” Questioning just how much value the financial industry has added to the economy, Coyle wonders, “have we been aiming at the wrong target all these years” (98)? For readers here, the answer to this question will certainly be, “of course.” But the question Coyle is asking is not really concerned with whether or not capitalism is the most economically just system (for her the answer to this question is clearly, “yes”).

Her question is really more complicated than that. And it perhaps suggests a far more interesting problem than Coyle perhaps realizes. What she is questioning when she questions the “target,” at which policymakers have been aiming, is whether or not output statistics — or statistics more generally — are capable of measuring productive labor at all. To put a finer point on it, Coyle is really asking two related questions: What constitutes productivity? And, which activities generate value? And she begins her answer by assessing the value of the financial services industry in terms of “how it is counted in GDP” (99). To summarize: it is complicated, and not just because it is impossibly complex or opaque. Rather, because, according to the OECD, if financial services were calculated like most other services, financial output would be “very small, if not negative” (100). In order to turn finance into a sizeable percentage of GDP, according to Coyle, the UN introduced a measure which entails “that increased risk-taking is recorded as increased real growth in financial services.” In other words, risk is turned into a productive activity. Taking risks generates output even though banks could do so by leveraging equity rather than generating any “real” output. That is, debt essentially becomes and generates productivity. Coyle notes that the profits were imaginary, creating a “statistical mirage [that] affects all countries’ GDP.” Citing a study from 2011, she points out that the current method of calculating GDP “overestimates the service output of the commercial banking industry by 21 percent” (101). And this has wide-reaching political and economic consequences. Not least of which, it vastly overstates the importance of commercial banking to the

economic health of a particular country, turning an industry that may well actually have a negative effect on economic growth into the engine of the economy by virtue of statistical abstraction.

The inflation of the “output” of finance capital tells only one part of the current drive to quantify the increasingly abstract quality of value in service-based economies. In 2013, the BEA announced that it “shifted the way it measured national output. The result was a \$400 billion adjustment” (Karabell 3). “Shift” is putting it mildly. The BEA dramatically revised GDP to include “creative work undertaken on a systematic basis to increase the stock of knowledge, and use of this stock of knowledge for the purpose of discovering or developing new products” (4). Research and development at Apple or Pfizer and “work” undertaken by Richard Florida’s “creative class” is now included in GDP. Productivity, in other words, seems increasingly to be a feature of what would more commonly be understood as costs — research and development or debts and risk. Coyle defines what counts as productive and what does not as the “productive boundary” (38). And this, Coyle argues, is “arbitrary” because in reality the division is “simply a matter of convenience” — some things are just easier to quantify (105). It is a surprisingly cavalier way of thinking about the problem of what constitutes productivity — even if it is intended to be merely a description of the practice of defining GDP and not a value judgment. It stands out particularly because in the previous section on the “great crash” of 2008, Coyle explains the arbitrariness of what gets included in GDP and how this effectively dictates the political contours of economic policy.

Despite or perhaps because of this increasingly capacious definition of productivity, GDP is proving somewhat suspect. Both Karabell and Coyle suggest as much, even if neither author is willing to give up on it completely. Current revisions to GDP notwithstanding, recent actions by the BEA suggest that confidence in GDP is waning. On April 25, 2014, the BEA began releasing its “gross output” number quarterly rather than annually (and often a year late). The hope is to provide a more accurate “statistical tool” to understand what society actually makes. According to the *Wall Street Journal* this differs from GDP because rather than measuring the use economy, or the amount of final goods sold, gross output measures the “make” economy — gross output is intended to measure actual production: “[v]alued at more than \$30 trillion at the end of 2013,” gross output is “almost twice the size of gross domestic product, and far more volatile.”³ The point here is that depending on the lens through which one tries to order the economy, one gets a very different understanding, not of how it works, but of what comprises it in the first place. Some would hold that this is just what happens when you slice the same thing in different directions. But such claims assume that there is something to slice — a quantifiable entity that exists out in the world.

This brings us back to the point that opened the essay: these indicators do not measure “the economy” but shape it by determining which economic activities are included in productivity figures and thus adjudicating what activities add value. We

have already seen just how arbitrary this is. For example, creative labor counts but domestic labor does not, no matter how creatively undertaken. By noting the various ways economic indicators are still grappling with the problems of productivity and value in Adam Smith's work, each of these works points to the myriad ways economic indicators struggle to represent the production of value. In the process, each book inadvertently highlights the limitations and difficulties that inhere when attempting to quantify something as abstract as value. Unfortunately, both works take value for granted. They assume that goods and services enter the market with an inherent value that is simply measured and aggregated at the moment of exchange. The problem with economic indicators, in both Coyle's and Karabell's arguments, is the extent to which value is abstracted and aggregated. In reality, the abstraction begins long before the bureaucratic attempts to measure productivity. As Marx argued in *Capital*, value itself is abstract, defined only after exchange takes place. Value is not measured through exchange, but invented. The difference between Marx's view of value and the one assumed by Coyle and Karabell is crucially irreducible. If value is always already a representation that obscures the social relations embodied in exchange, revisions to the way data is aggregated and analyzed can scarcely address the problems of value and productivity as Smith and Marx each conceived them.

Rather than tarry with questions of value and the limitations of statistical modes of representation, Karabell and Coyle focus their criticisms of economic indicators on the extent to which these indicators largely ignore questions of social welfare. Coyle argues that although GDP has become a kind of abstract ideological tool, it was never intended as such. Rather, Simon Kuznets, who was instrumental in formulating the data for early attempts at national income accounting, "saw his task as working out how to measure national economic *welfare* rather than just *output*" (Coyle 13). Output, argued Kuznets, often measures "costs implicit in our economic civilization" and counts them as a net benefit (Coyle 14). Karabell cites Robert Kennedy who echoes this sentiment, arguing that output statistics measure "everything...except that which makes life worthwhile" (49). The efforts here to rethink the contours of the economy are admittedly closer to the original intent of economic indicators than the questions of output that have buttressed the economy since the middle of the twentieth century.

Yet, rather than really grapple with the ways in which qualitative questions about welfare and inequality might escape the grasp of big data, both of these books retreat further into the world of statistics, much in the same way each work treats value. And this is the real limitation of each of these histories. Coyle's work points to limitations of GDP to define market production, arguing it is losing its relevance in a global economy that is now, more than ever, primarily "an intangible entity" (131). And though she notes the fact that the "financial crisis has given extra urgency to the need to rethink the concept of economic value," she suggests the path to "radically" rethinking "the economy" is to entrench our commitment to the statistical modes of thinking. Which is to say, her solution to the current "statistical fog" is to do the thing

that produced the problem in the first place, but better.

Karabell's solution too retreats to the safety net of big data. His proposed solution is to form more refined and customizable statistical representations based on expanded amounts of data. He rightly notes, "the myth of national numbers that reflect national realities distorts how we attempt to solve [problems like unemployment] collectively and inhibits how we meet our challenges individually" (245). What we need, he claims, is a "dashboard" of "bespoke" indicators, "tailored" to the "particular questions" of governments and individuals. The rationale for a turn to bespoke and localized indicators is an attempt to move beyond the "blunt" instruments of macro-level indicators (249). And though his solution would not be quite as blunt, it is nonetheless a call for more widespread data, and in this regard it is essentially an attempt to more deeply (and specifically) quantify more aspects of daily life. It is essentially finding ways to aggregate the data the supporters of human capital have been arguing we should have had all along. Like Coyle, the future that Karabell wants is actually much closer to the history he has been critiquing than perhaps he would want to admit.

Both authors, in other words, are doubling down on big data. And it seems somewhat striking that those two histories, which begin with a healthy dose of skepticism toward statistical abstraction, should conclude by claiming we need more of it. My point here is not to criticize such histories, exactly. Both of these provide perfectly lucid overviews of their subject matter and raise plenty of interesting questions. Rather, I hope to point out that the modes of thinking championed in these books goes very little distance in solving the problem of value that preoccupied both Smith and Marx — a problem that remains central to the antagonisms at the heart of capitalist economies. Granted, economics as a discipline has become almost solely data-driven, but that does not mean it should be.⁴ It seems quantifying questions of output and value are essentially deepening the commitment to reifying and rationalizing social relations, which will in turn only further distort them. If data can, as Karabell argues, "alter our perception of reality," it seems at least plausible that the commitment to statistical representation is producing a vision of the world that veils, or at best elides, the contradictions and antagonisms that prompted these histories in the first place. (5). Which is to say, perhaps more than anything else, what these economic histories reveal is the limit to bourgeois economics as a framework for its own critique.

Notes

1. "What Is Industry Gross Output?" Bureau of Economic Affairs, Frequently Asked Questions, 10 March 2006 <http://www.bea.gov/faq/index.cfm?faq_id=1034>.
2. Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire* (London: Verso, 2013).
3. Mark Skousen, "At Last, A Better Economic Measure," *The Wall Street Journal* (22 April 2014) <<http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303532704579483870616640230>>.
4. Deirdre N. McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of Economics* (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1985).

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