

# Mediations

Journal of the Marxist Literary Group



Volume 32, Number 1, Spring 2018 • **Unevenness**

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## Editors' Note

Since at least 2016 we have witnessed globally a significant return to the rhetoric of the nation as the horizon of the political imagination. This is true on the Right, which has seen tremendous political gains in some of the world's largest economies: England, Germany, France, the United States, and Brazil. It is perhaps equally true for the Left where nationalism has become a key rallying point for workers — a turn that has, no doubt, helped the Right consolidate its power. Against this trend, this collection of essays encourages our readers to think about how inequality, exploitation, and structural violence has gone global.

The issue begins with an essay by Stephen Shapiro and Neil Lazarus, which couples the importance of linguistic theory and translation to Antonio Gramsci's Marxism to ongoing debates about the world-literary system. They are interested in particular in "the *general* conceptual affinity" between "combined and uneven development" and Gramsci's thinking about "the politicized convergence of heterogeneous social groups." In their view, translatability — or the "political activity that involved pirating, modularization, appropriation, refunctioning, etc." — rather than mere "translation" is better suited to the expansion of the conditions of possibility within Marxism. "What is required," they write, "is the translation, not of Balzac into Italian, nor even of Marx into Italian, but of the conditions that underpin French politics, German philosophy and British economics into Italian. Ultimately, then, the translatability of literary or political texts is, or should be, "a matter not of intellectual work, no matter how progressive, but of practical politics."

Bret Benjamin keeps us squarely in the realm of the political, taking up the 1974 UN Declaration for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) as "a chance to reconsider the 1970s as a decade of transition in which the sharpening developmental aspirations of G77 nations in the global south come into conflict with structural transformations in the accumulation of capital." Reading the NIEO as the "*last gasp*" of the Bandung era, Benjamin argues that the "developmentalist demands of the Bandung era run aground on the contemporaneous systemic crisis of capital." Benjamin then works through and expands the arguments of the *Werkritik* school to argue the "NIEO ultimately express the contradictions of a transitional moment" before concluding with a gesture towards the way the NIEO might, despite its historical losses, "offer a ready-made political program of South-South radicalism" retooled for a fully enclosed world economic system.

In Malcom Read's essay we move from the political intersections and interventions into more theoretical ones, "exploring theoretical concepts, namely the '*ideological unconscious*' and the '*political unconscious*,'" that were "developed along very different, even contrasting lines in, respectively, the work of Juan Carlos Rodríguez and that of Fredric Jameson." Drawing out the differences between how the two thinkers situate their work in relation to Althusser, Read invites us to take a deep dive into the world of structuralist Marxisms.

Finally, Sourayan Mookerjea proposes a "Post-Western Marxism," rooted in the insights of social reproduction and decolonization theory with the aim of thinking historically about exploitation as "the domination of inner and outer nature." As he suggests, "if we are to understand the implications of precarity, unemployment, informality, poverty, dispossession for class politics today," we need to see "the private appropriation of surplus value...as subalternization." Class politics, he argues, is never immediately available and is thus "mediated by the accumulated violence of proliferating oppressions."

Reviews by Sofia Cutler on cosmopolitanisms and Myka Tucker-Abramson on the financial imaginary round out the issue, asking what it means to think of class globally. As Tucker-Abramson suggests, the essays here put a fine point on how "adopting the position that 'dynamic global interconnection' and 'unevenness' are no longer useful categories of analysis," as some have done, amounts to an unapologetic refusal to think beyond the dynamics of the nation at a moment when the nation seems poised to become an increasingly counter-revolutionary force.

Davis Smith-Brecheisen, for the *Mediations* editors







## **Translatability, Combined Unevenness, and World Literature in Antonio Gramsci**

**Stephen Shapiro and Neil Lazarus**

*Our research is thus into the history of culture and not literary history; or rather it is into literary history as a part or an aspect of a broader history of culture.<sup>1</sup>*

### **Gramsci and Uneven Development**

This paper takes its point of departure from two contemporary research initiatives.<sup>2</sup> The first of these is the recent scholarship on the centrality of linguistic theory and the ideas of language and translation to Antonio Gramsci's Marxism;<sup>3</sup> the second is the emergent discussion of world literature under the sign of "combined and uneven development."<sup>4</sup> These initiatives are linked, certainly; but to the best of our knowledge they have not hitherto been brought together in any sustained fashion. We therefore take some steps to link these two initiatives here, believing that what Gramsci has to say about literature, translatability, cultural "interference," "Southernism," and so on, including in some of his lesser-known passages, has a great deal to contribute to today's debates about the world-literary system. Gramsci's ideas are significantly at odds, for example, with Apter's argument that increased translation of foreign language texts will in itself generate increased awareness of the various forms of social experience across the globe; it is significantly at odds with Damrosch's thesis that the movement of texts across borders creates value; and it is significantly at odds with Moretti's position that takes volume of publication as a reliable marker of the tastes of reading publics.

The theory of combined and uneven development originated in the work of Engels and Lenin, but it is associated above all with Trotsky, who — writing in the 1930s, on the basis of his analysis of conditions in Russia in 1905 and China in 1925-7 — attempted to account for the effects of the imposition of capitalism on cultures and societies hitherto un- or only sectorally capitalized. In these contexts, Trotsky proposed, the imposed capitalist forces of production and class relations tend not to supplant (or are not allowed to supplant) but to be conjoined forcibly with pre-existing

forces and relations. The outcome is a contradictory “amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms” — an urban proletariat working in technologically advanced industries existing side by side with a rural population engaged in subsistence farming; industrial plants built alongside “villages of wood and straw,” and peasants “thrown into the factory cauldron snatched directly from the plow.”<sup>5</sup>

The theory of “combined and uneven development” was therefore devised to describe a situation in which leading or “advanced” capitalist forms and relations exist alongside “archaic forms of economic life” and pre-existing social and class relations. It sought to explain how revolutionary transformation could be produced by rural and urban factions acting in concert (symbolised by the cross-hatched sickle and hammer), and was not reliant on industrialised urban groups leading the charge alone, as many nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century Marxists had believed. On this definition, the theory has obvious relevance to Gramsci’s work, which demonstrates an abiding interest in the developmental discrepancies and unevennesses of Italian society — a society whose unification as a nation-state lay only just beyond the horizon of living memory at the time of Gramsci’s own writing. Prior to the mid nineteenth-century, as Ives has noted, “the [Italian] peninsula was divided into different political regimes often under the control of foreign powers, most notably France and Austria. The Risorgimento, literally meaning revival or resurgence, was the cultural and social movement of the nineteenth century that led to political unification in 1861 and finally added Venetia and Rome by 1870.”<sup>6</sup> This particular history is decisive for Gramsci: “Shortly after political unification,” as Ives goes on to say,

Massimo d’Azeglio coined a phrase about Italian history that would become proverbial: ‘Italy is a fact, now we need to make Italians.’ This process of making ‘Italians’, including Italy’s political, economic, social, linguistic and cultural dimensions, constitutes much of the context of Gramsci’s political and cultural theory. It must also be noted that while Italy is more extreme than other countries, all nation-states have involved similar processes whereby citizens come to think of themselves, to a greater or lesser degree, as Italians, French, Chinese, Canadians or South Africans. In Italy, this process of unification, and the obstacles to it, gave rise to the Southern Question, which arose from the differences between the North and the South — political, economic, cultural and social differences.<sup>7</sup>

The formal relationship between Trotsky’s thought and Gramsci’s has been explored in some of the sociological literature.<sup>8</sup> But in this essay it is rather the *general* conceptual affinity between the idea of “combined and uneven development” and Gramsci’s thinking about the national-popular, the politicized convergence of heterogeneous

social groups, that interests us. Gramsci's understanding that the "backwardness" of some (chiefly southern) regions of Italy was not an autochthonous or intrinsic feature — a function of the delayed or retarded pattern of these regions' own internal growth — but precisely a consequence of their purposive under-development, was of course over-determined by his own biography and personal experience as a Sardinian. Personally and "geo-culturally," as well as theoretically and ideologically, he was always acutely conscious of what — to distinguish it from the specifically Trotskyist notion — we propose to call "combined unevenness." We use the term both to recall Trotsky's original discussion, and also to develop further the cultural registration of social experience, the composition and recomposition of class relations. We seek here to advance the claim that realms initially seen as outside of value-formation (the rural, the cultural, the domestic) are, in fact, intrinsic to the reproduction and transformation of social relations, within the expanded sphere of accumulation. Hence his writings on "Southernism," which sought to account for the social and political discrepancies between "north" and "south" in Italy after unification; and hence also his abiding interest in culture and 'the language question' in Italy.<sup>9</sup> Both of these speak to his grasp — "intuitive" and a matter of cultural "inheritance," but then also deeply reflected upon and consolidated in his mature thought — of combined unevenness, the politics of culture and the culture of politics.

### **Eugene Sue, *Romanziere Italiano*?**

In his prison notes on the concept of "National-Popular," Gramsci reflects on the well-known, but nonetheless counter-intuitive, circumstance that the mass Italian readership is known to eschew Italian writing (whether "popular" or "artistic") in favor of French serial novels of the nineteenth century: "if the Italian newspapers of the 1930s want to increase (or maintain) their circulation," he asks, "why must they publish serial novels of a hundred years ago...? Why is there no 'national' literature of this type in Italy, even though it must be profitable?"<sup>10</sup> Such reading preferences indicate — or so Gramsci speculates — that the Italian people are subject to "the moral and intellectual hegemony of foreign intellectuals, that they feel more closely related to foreign intellectuals than to 'domestic' ones, that there is no national intellectual and moral bloc, either hierarchical or, still less, egalitarian."<sup>11</sup>

One of the more interesting aspects of Gramsci's commentary on this exo-centrism of the mass reading public in Italy (a situation that he contrasts with that prevailing in France, Britain, Germany, and Russia) is that he does not construe it through any narrow, nationalist lens. If contemporary Italian readers are more disposed to nineteenth-century French than to twentieth-century Italian fiction, it must be because the former meets their "needs and requirements" where the latter evidently fails to do so. The problem is then not that the mass Italian readership is deficient in its "national" consciousness, but instead that the literature currently being produced in Italy (including that which self-consciously styles itself "Italian") lacks any affinity

with or connection to popular culture:

The entire “educated class,” with its intellectual activity, is detached from the people-nation, not because the latter has not shown and does not show itself to be interested in this activity at all levels, from the lowest (dreadful serial novels) to the highest — indeed it seeks out foreign books for this purpose — but because in relation to the people-nation the indigenous intellectual element is more foreign than the foreigners.<sup>12</sup>

Failing to recognize themselves in contemporary “Italian” fiction, whether conservative (“hierarchical”) or progressive (“egalitarian”), the Italian popular classes turn to writing that *does* meaningfully represent or crystallize their experience, even though this writing derives from another country and an earlier century. It is the “absence of a national-popular literature” that leaves “the literary ‘market’ [in Italy] open to the influence of intellectuals from other countries.”<sup>13</sup> (Italian readers therefore come to “know the popular figure of Henry IV better than that of Garibaldi, the Revolution of 1789 better than the Risorgimento and the invectives of Victor Hugo against Napoleon III better than the invectives of Italian patriots against Metternich. Culturally speaking, they are interested in a past that is more French than Italian. They use French metaphors and cultural references in their language and thought.”)<sup>14</sup>

Gramsci speaks of the “passionate interest” of the mass readership in twentieth-century Italy in “French monarchical and revolutionary traditions.”<sup>15</sup> This “interest” derives from the relative “backwardness” of the “political and intellectual situation” in Italy: he sees the “same problems” being raised in Italy in the 1930s as “were being raised... in the France of 1848”; moreover, the Italian groups and class fractions for whom these particular problems are being raised are “socially very similar to their French counterparts of that time: bohemians, petty intellectuals of provincial origin, etc.”<sup>16</sup> The developmentalist concept of “backwardness” is mobilized here, to be sure, but it becomes clear that Gramsci is not thinking in terms of either a stagist or an evolutionary theory of history. There is no sequential periodization — no narrative of an unfolding sequence of events — of the kind that Benjamin, writing only a few years later in his remarkable notes on the concept of history, would criticize as “historicist”;<sup>17</sup> nor is there much emphasis placed on a diffusionist understanding of literary history, of the kind that Moretti — following Even-Zohar — moots in some of his writing on the world literary system: “While studying the market for novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth century,” Moretti writes (and we can easily imagine him to be speaking also of the literary sphere in the Italy of Gramsci’s time)

I reached very similar conclusions to Even-Zohar’s. Here, the crucial mechanism was that of diffusion: books from the core were incessantly exported into the semi-periphery and the periphery, where they were

read, admired, imitated, turned into models — thus drawing those literatures into the orbit of core ones, and indeed “interfering” with their autonomous development. And then, diffusion imposed a stunning sameness to the literary system: wave after wave of epistolary fiction, or historical novels, or *mystères*, took off from London and Paris and dominated the scene everywhere — often, like American action films today, even more thoroughly in the smaller peripheral markets than in the French or British core.<sup>18</sup>

It is clear, of course, that diffusionist theories of cultural transfer cannot simply be set aside. As Sassoon observes in his monumental study, *The Culture of the Europeans*, “All of the genres popular in France and Britain were also popular in Italy.”<sup>19</sup> Italian critics themselves were acutely aware of the hegemony of British and (especially) French culture, and often linked it to a more wide ranging *esterofilia* — “the love of all that is foreign” — a “characteristic of Italian cultural consumption to the present day.”<sup>20</sup> Sassoon also explains that the popularity of French romantic fiction among the mass Italian readership caused some consternation among the Italian cultural elites, whose understanding of what great literature should be did not allow for an easy accommodation of Balzac, let alone Dumas, Sue or Verne:

Italian readers in the nineteenth century were weaned on novels by Dumas, Sue and Verne and their local imitators, as they had been by Scott and his local imitators. And when they went to the theatre they enjoyed French melodramas by Scribe and farces by Labiche. A play based on Balzac’s *Père Goriot* was performed seventy times between 1838 and 1850. Contemporary sources mention how “everyone” was reading Balzac either in the original or in one of the many competing translations. Italian critics, while recognising Balzac’s ability to involve the reader in a way no one in Italy was able to do, had a high-minded view of what a great author should be. He should be someone like Manzoni, and the opposite of Balzac: he should be someone with “values,” a certain air of other-worldliness, committed to the educationally uplifting, having a suitable lifestyle, and not overtly concerned with monetary matters. Balzac was regarded as too popular, too entertaining, and hence a corrupting model for Italian writers. The result was that many Italians read Balzac for pleasure, and Manzoni out of duty.<sup>21</sup>

However, Gramsci’s prison writings tend not to travel this diffusionist road. Where Marx, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, had memorably framed the reiteration of historical “facts” in terms of belatedness and inauthenticity — “the first time as tragedy, the second as farce” — Gramsci instead locates analogical identities or strict parallels

between different cultural “expressions” (discourses, paradigms, texts, languages, etc.) without privileging the earlier iterations over the later.<sup>22</sup> However strange it may sound, his suggestion is that twentieth-century Italian readers turned to the fictions of Dumas and Balzac and Sue because these works spoke to (and of) the conditions and social relations prevailing in *their own lives*. They turned to these works, in other words, not because of “cultural cringe” — not, that is to say, because the Italian literary market was dominated by the French market or because Italian culture felt itself somehow “inferior” to French culture, although both of these situations obtained — but because *Les Mystères de Paris* and *Les Trois Mousquetaires* gave them what they needed as a reading public — concepts, socio-symbolic representations, an experience-system — thereby distinguishing themselves from the contemporary writing in Italy, which served mainly, according to Gramsci (and for socio-historically determinate reasons that he went to great lengths to elucidate and explain) to mystify and obscure the actual social conditions and relations.

### **Against Autonomy**

As Hegel was to Marx, so Croce is to Gramsci, who refers his conviction that literary history is never solely a matter of hermetically-sealed “literary” lineages to his famous idealist compatriot. “Poetry does not generate poetry,” Croce had written: “there is no parthenogenesis. There must be an intervention of the male element, that which is real, passionate, practical and moral.”<sup>23</sup> The useable insight here — Gramsci suggests that Croce’s “observation can be appropriated by historical materialism” — is that where the poets of today attempt to produce new work merely by studying, internalizing and, as it were, extending the work of their forebears, the results are almost always disappointing.<sup>24</sup> True poetic innovation requires on the contrary a renewal of “spirit,” a “remaking” of the human landscape: “The greatest critics of poetry warn one not to resort to literary prescriptions,” Croce had said, “but... to ‘remake man.’ Once man is remade, the spirit renewed and a new life of affections has emerged, from this will arise, if at all, a new poetry.” Distancing himself from Croce’s androcentric vocabulary through his use of scare-quotes, Gramsci nevertheless proposes a materialist adaptation of Croce’s idea. “Literature does not generate literature, and so on,” he writes: “that is ideologies do not create ideologies, superstructures do not generate superstructures other than as an inheritance of inertia and passivity. They are not generated through ‘parthenogenesis’ but through the intervention of the ‘male’ element, history, and the revolutionary activity which creates the ‘new man,’ that is new social relations.”<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere, he writes that “in language too there is no parthenogenesis, language producing other language. Innovations occur through the interference of different cultures, and this happens in very different ways.”<sup>26</sup>

The idea of “interference” is brought to bear here in a way that exceeds the terms of its typical deployment in comparative literary studies, in which, as Even-Zohar has pointed out, the tendency has been to work only “with the vague notion of



‘influence’ and [to confine oneself]... to uncritical comparisons of isolated cases.”<sup>27</sup> Gramsci uses “interference” to account for change (or “innovation,” as he tends to call it) in the spheres of culture and language.<sup>28</sup> “Innovations occur through the interference of different cultures,” he writes.<sup>29</sup> But this is not always or necessarily a matter of “domination” and/or “subordination” at the level of nations or whole social formations. Gramsci’s understanding of “interference” is culturally neutral: in this he anticipates Even-Zohar, who defines the term formally as follows: “Interference can be defined as a relation(ship) between literatures, whereby a certain literature A (a source literature) may become a source of direct or indirect loans for another literature B (a target literature).”<sup>30</sup>

Gramsci’s focus is directed less to the *politics* of “interference” than to its various modalities: it “happens in very different ways,” he observes, distinguishing between “mass” and “molecular” interference — the phenomenon’s two extreme forms of appearance, presumably: “as a ‘mass’ [*massa*], Latin altered the Celtic language of the Gauls, while it influenced the German language ‘molecularly’ [*molecolarmente*], by lending it individual words and forms.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, “there can be interference and a ‘molecular’ influence within a single nation, between various strata, etc.; a new ruling class brings about alterations as a ‘mass,’ but the jargons of various professions, of specific societies, innovate in a molecular way.”<sup>32</sup> The transformation of culture in a given social formation can occur as a result of the importation or imposition of foreign materials, obviously; but it can occur also when a particular social group or class fraction comes to feel that the cultural touchstones it has hitherto received as “naturally” or “spontaneously” (or parthenogenetically) encoded in its own (e.g., national) tradition or lineage, no longer suffice to register its distinctive social experience.<sup>33</sup> As Even-Zohar puts it, “interference occurs when a system is in need of items unavailable within itself”:

A “need” may arise when a new generation feels that the norms governing the system are no longer effective and therefore must be replaced. If the domestic repertoire does not offer any options in this direction, while an accessibly adjacent system seems to possess them, interference will very likely take place.<sup>34</sup>

When a literary genre, form, or device — think of the gothic, for instance; or lyric; or free indirect discourse — breaks (or is torn) away from its original, received or institutionalized modality, it is because emergent social developments require and animate new modes: not only are new forms of practice always coming into existence and pressing their claims upon the established order, but dominant forms are always being put under pressure, while residual or obsolete ones are always either being swept away or else refunctioned and given new purchase.<sup>35</sup> Gramsci insists, though, that if culture clearly registers transformations in social relations (of production), it

also “precognises” or anticipates social developments. Cultural expression precedes political expression; the latter, in fact, is in part a production of the former:

Every new civilization, as such (even when held back, attacked and fettered in every possible way), has always expressed itself in literary form before expressing itself in the life of the state. Indeed its literary expression has been the means with which it has created the intellectual and moral conditions for its expression in the legislature and the state.<sup>36</sup>

Gramsci places special emphasis on the volatility — or even provisionality — of social relations.

These are never static, but always in process, being forged, negotiated, contested, etc. They are structured partly through hegemony, or consensus formation, and not solely through coercion and violence. What is involved here is never only top-down containment, since “a given socio-historical moment is never homogeneous; on the contrary it is rich in contradictions. It acquires a ‘personality’ and is a ‘moment’ of development in that a certain fundamental activity of life prevails over others and represents a historical ‘peak’; but this presupposes a hierarchy, a contrast, a struggle.”<sup>37</sup> Moreover, it is in cultural practice that the building-blocks of consensus are initially envisaged and put into place:

In history, in social life, nothing is fixed, rigid, or definitive. And nothing ever will be. New truths increase the inheritance of knowledge. New and ever superior needs are created by new living conditions. New moral and intellectual curiosities goad the spirit and compel it to renew itself, to improve itself, to change the linguistic forms of expression by taking them from foreign languages, by reviving dead forms and by changing meanings and grammatical functions.<sup>38</sup>

The formal dimensions of literary works are analytically important, in these terms, because they index the complex social logistics of their moment; they are the means through which resolution of tensions, conflicts or contradictions is mooted.

### **Pirandello and Pirandellism**

In opposition to his celebrated contemporary, Pirandello, who, in deploring the lack of “a conception of life and man” in Italian culture, had argued for the actuality of an Italian national consciousness and called for its registration in literature, Gramsci suggests that the “value” of Italian literary works must be assessed in the light of their ability to stage the contradictions of their time. Where the illusion of social or national homogeneity is projected, the existence of social, regional, religious, etc., division is



disguised or euphemized.<sup>39</sup> Gramsci has no use for the notions of *Weltanschauung* or *Zeitgeist* because they seem to him to presume the harmonized uniformity of a given “age” or “society.” As he puts it in a rebuttal of the social philosopher, Baratonno, “the life and taste of an age,” far from being ‘something monolithic’, are ‘rather full of contradictions.’<sup>40</sup>

Gramsci’s commentary on Pirandello in his prison notes is particularly rich. He had already written extensively on Pirandello’s theatre for the Piedmont edition of the Socialist Party organ, *Avanti!* during his years in Turin in the latter half of the 1910s. He returns to the Sicilian writer in his prison writings, distinguishing there between Pirandello’s great “intellectual and moral, i.e. cultural” significance and his (aesthetic or “artistic”) significance as a *writer*.<sup>41</sup> The two aspects face in different directions, Gramsci believes. The former is a function of Pirandello’s cosmopolitan intellectualism: “In Pirandello we have... the critical awareness of being simultaneously ‘Sicilian,’ ‘Italian’ and ‘European.’”<sup>42</sup> Gramsci concedes that Pirandello “has done much more than the Futurists towards ‘deprovincializing’ the ‘Italian man’ and arousing a modern ‘critical’ attitude in opposition to the traditional, nineteenth-century ‘melodramatic’ attitude.”<sup>43</sup> The problem then is that whenever this self-consciously held “critico-historical” sensibility — a sensibility that, following Tilgher’s influential 1920s study of Pirandello, came to be known in Italian literary circles as “Pirandellism” — is imported into his writing, Pirandello’s plays and novels creak under the weight of their “abstract intellectualism.” It is, by contrast, in his plays “conceived in dialect where a rural ‘dialectal’ life is depicted,” that Pirandello seems to Gramsci to emerge as a great *writer*, rather than as the representative of a politico-intellectual standpoint (however progressive and culturally important): “where is [Pirandello]... really a poet, where has his critical attitude become artistic content-form and not just an ‘intellectual polemic’...” he asks — and then goes on directly to answer his own question: “To me it seems that Pirandello is an artist precisely when he is a dialect writer and I feel that *Liola* is his masterpiece....”<sup>44</sup>

Pirandello’s dramatic work in this mode is that of

a Sicilian “villager” who has acquired certain national and European traits, but who feels these three elements of civilization to be juxtaposed and contradictory within himself. From this experience has come his attitude of observing the contradictions on other people’s personalities and then of actually seeing the drama of life as the drama of these contradictions.<sup>45</sup>

The suggestion here is that in Pirandello’s “dialectal” dramas, the historically discrete and discontinuous aspects of the social identity of his characters — Sicilian/Italian/European; villager/cosmopolitan; provincial/national; country/city — are not forced to resolution, or subordinated into a progressive, tendentially universalizing narrative, but are allowed to appear as they actually exist in social life, in all their

combined unevenness, partiality and contradictoriness:

It is nothing other than a reflection of the fact that a national-cultural unity of the Italian people does not yet exist, that “provincialism” and particularism are still deeply rooted in their customs and in the way they think and act. What is more, there is no “mechanism” for raising life collectively from the provincial level to the national and European level. Hence the “sorties,” the individual raids made towards this end, assume low, “theatrical,” absurd and caricatural forms.<sup>46</sup>

By the same token, Gramsci is critical of the idea, popular in intellectual and artistic circuits in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that there is a new “poetic aura” abroad in Italy, a spirit-of-the-age that is bringing a “new art” into being. To speak in these terms is, for him, merely tautological: “one cannot talk about a new ‘poetic aura’ being formed.... ‘Poetic aura’ is only a metaphor to express the ensemble of those artists who have already formed and emerged, or at least the process of formation and emergence which has begun and is already consolidated.”<sup>47</sup> Essentially a ritual of consecration, the notion of a “spirit-of-the-age” (we might think of such slogans as “the roaring twenties,” for instance, or “the slacker generation”) can contribute nothing to the analysis of cultural history or indeed to an explanation of the qualities of any of the literary works implicated by it, because it mistakes effect for cause.

Similarly, literary consecration functions like a political election or referendum: it comes after social opinion has already been formed or manufactured. “Even the proliferation of ‘literary prizes,’” Gramsci writes, “is nothing but a relatively well organized collective ‘recommendation’ (with varying degrees of fraud by militant literary critics.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the importance of literary works in the shaping and forming of cultural sensibility has little to do with literary critics, who come belatedly to the scene. “We might say that literature is a social function but that literary men, taken individually, are not necessary for this.”<sup>49</sup> Just as Marx had argued that finance capitalists are unproductive, insofar as they only insert themselves into and hive off profits from pre-existing capital flows, so Gramsci sees the hurly-burly created by the activities of “literary men” as a distraction from the more consequential matter of the social processes through which audiences seek out cultural works capable of communicating their experiences: “intellectuals conceive of literature as a ‘profession’ unto itself that should ‘pay’ even when nothing is immediately produced and that should give them the right to a pension. Who, though, is to decide that such and such a writer is really a ‘literary figure’ and that society can support him while waiting for his ‘masterpiece?’”<sup>50</sup>

Where literary history is concerned, it is, in these terms, the *formal* aspects of works that are decisive. Works achieve significance when they become collectively or communally available, not when they are consecrated by critics or when they achieve

a high volume of sales as commodities under an individual's proprietary signature in the literary marketplace. In popular writing, "the writer's name and personality do not matter, but the personality of the protagonist does. When they have entered into the intellectual life of the people, the heroes of popular literature are separated from their 'literary' origin and acquire the validity of historical figures."<sup>51</sup> Such figures acquire a "particular fabulous concreteness in popular intellectual life": the critical concern is then shifted, methodologically, from *authors* to *types* and *figures*, from authorial intentions to the visible (social) figurations represented in literary works.<sup>52</sup> Gramsci insists, for instance, that Renaissance humanism did not emerge on the back of an intellectual paradigm shift from the divine to the human. "Man was not 'discovered,'" he writes, "rather a new form of culture was initiated, a new effort to create a new type of man in the dominant classes."<sup>53</sup>

This suggestion that the iconic figures of generic fiction — Frankenstein's creature, say, or Heathcliff, or Sherlock Holmes — are more culturally significant than the commodity-texts in which they appear is obviously not to be understood as an argument for the "autonomy" of the literary work, whose true "value" then comes to be realized in the price-setting literary marketplace. Gramsci holds that such popular literary figures are significant because — for whatever determinate reasons, which it is the task of the literary critic to discover and lay bare — they successfully condense and mediate social tensions for a wide range of readers. It is interesting to contrast him here with Moretti, who also argues, both that it is "readers, not professors, [who] make canons," and that literary history should address itself to the matter of form rather than consecration or literary capital. Concerning canonicity, Moretti writes that "academic decisions are mere echoes of a process that unfolds fundamentally outside the school: reluctant rubber-stamping, not much more. Conan Doyle is a perfect case in point: *socially* supercanonical right away, but *academically* canonical only a hundred years later. And the same happened to Cervantes, Defoe, Austen, Balzac, Tolstoy..."<sup>54</sup> And concerning literary history, he urges us to think socio-formally, to focus on "the forces behind... literary history." "Not texts," he insists: "Texts are real objects — but not objects of *knowledge*. If we want to explain the laws of literary history, we must move to a formal plane that lies beyond them: below or above; the device, or the genre."<sup>55</sup>

Moretti uses the example of Conan Doyle to shed light on certain key characteristics of literary evolution. In his Sherlock Holmes stories, he argues, Conan Doyle unwittingly stumbled on the device of the "clue." The accident proved a lucky one: the (bourgeois) reading public liked Conan Doyle's use of this device and rewarded him with its acclaim. "As more readers select[ed] Conan Doyle over L.T. Meade and Grant Allen, more readers [were]... likely to select Conan Doyle again in the future, until he end[ed]... up occupying 80, 90, 99.9 percent of the market for nineteenth-century detective fiction."<sup>56</sup> Through his use of the literary device of the "clue," Conan Doyle fundamentally changed the form of detective fiction.<sup>57</sup>

This argument as Moretti presents it is compelling up to a point.<sup>58</sup> But it is striking that he does not attempt to pursue the further question as to why the specific device of the clue should have magnetized bourgeois readers in the first place. What cultural energies and conflicts found articulation in this device? What specific cultural work did the “clue” perform for readers at this precise moment in time, which is, notably, that of the inauguration of imperial or monopoly capital? It is questions of this latter type that most interest Gramsci: he is not content to ask himself what a particular cultural figure, device, or genre *means* or how it operates *in its own restricted economy*, but wants always to look beyond it, to the social tensions that are being addressed through it. The analogy to be drawn is with Marx’s method in *Capital*: where Marx unravels the “riddle” of the commodity-form by way of elucidating the larger circuits of value in capitalist society, Gramsci’s cultural theory unravels the narrative device or form (Pirandello’s dialectal drama, for example) to elucidate the conflictually constellated social forces of Italy in his time. For instance, Sassoon argues that the clue mattered because it was the first historical instance in which readers were invited to participate as active interpreters, rather than passive receivers, of the narrative. In other words, it allowed readers to imagine that they might make better companions to Holmes than Watson. Hence, the clue became a formal device with which readers could cement and enact a new, more active, subjectivity.<sup>59</sup>

Gramsci proposes that the cultural experiences captured for twentieth-century Italian readers in nineteenth-century French serial fiction also find registration in popular Italian opera — “the one cultural form in which Italy held a dominant position in nineteenth-century Europe,” as Sassoon reminds us, and “the one which it exported massively” — and in the Italian cultural elite’s fascination with Nietzsche.<sup>60</sup> “Seldom has a cultural genre been so closely associated with a single country,” Sassoon writes about Italian opera, which became overwhelmingly the dominant operatic model and the dominant language of opera throughout the world.<sup>61</sup> Yet it is not simply Italian opera’s pre-eminence in the world that magnetized Italians, as a form of national pride, but that as a cultural form and institution, opera was the medium within which Italians could make the capitalist world-system intelligible. “It would be wrong to reduce Italian success to the excellence of its composers and performers,” Sassoon contends, since the real cause of Italian operatic success must be found in the contrasting environments facing French and Italian composers. The French were composing for a narrow élite, a national market entirely centered on Paris, and were entirely dependent on it. The Italians, even if they had no other ambition than to triumph in Italy alone, were composing for several great operatic centers — Venice, Florence, Naples, Milan and Rome — and a multitude of minor ones. A ferocious selection process was at work, weeding out the less innovative and dazzling, the provincial and the boring. The winners could roam throughout Europe enjoying the enormous ‘brand’ advantage of ‘made in Italy’ created by their predecessors. French composers looked only to Paris. The Italians — at least where opera was concerned

— thought in ‘global’ terms.<sup>62</sup>

For the local elites, Nietzsche became the hallmark of their unwillingness to “think” internationally. “Petty bourgeois” and “petty intellectual” readers of French serial fiction are embarrassed and “ashamed of mentally justifying their notions with the novels of Dumas and Balzac,” Gramsci writes. “So they justify them with Nietzsche and admire Balzac as an artistic writer rather than as a creator of serial-novel type figures. But culturally the real nexus seems incontrovertible.”<sup>63</sup> . It is the last sentence here that is crucial. Literary/cultural forms are to be understood as mediated expressions of social forces that are not themselves “literary” or “cultural.” The logic of determination here is radial; but it is not isomorphic. Each medium or form or genre has its own particular and irreducible structuration (its own particular “set” — economy and means of distribution), such that its way of “expressing” social forces will be unique to it. Thus Gramsci notes that in Italian popular culture, “music has to some extent substituted that artistic expression which in other countries is provided by the popular novel.”<sup>64</sup> There is therefore a “relationship between... Italian opera and Anglo-French popular literature” — not at the level of virtuosity or artistic talent (Sue is not Verdi), but at that of cultural function: “Verdi occupies the same place in the history of music as Sue in the history of literature” — the same *place*, that is to say, but not the same *status*.<sup>65</sup> Gramsci locates a significant correspondence in the encoding — the social function — of the work associated with Verdi and the French authors of *romans feuilletons*. It is not that *La Dame aux Camélias* is “the same” as *La traviata*, obviously. Rather, the suggestion is that in their formal structuration — as socially legible works — both works “speak” of and to the same “real nexus” of social forces and relations. Thus Sassoon points out that in the Italian nineteenth century, it was opera rather than — as pretty much everywhere else in Europe — literature that became the *national* genre, that is, the bearer of Italian cultural nationalism:

Verdi’s initial rise to fame occurred in a period of exceptionally intense musical competition. Rossini, and later Bellini and Donizetti, had created a situation in which operatic music had become the dominant form of Italian cultural production. No major native theatre had been built on the heritage of the *Commedia dell’arte*. There was no important contemporary popular literature, in spite of Manzoni’s efforts: Italy’s cultural élites read foreign novels, harked back to Italian classics (Dante and Petrarca), and were hostile to innovation. Opera became, almost unavoidably, the national genre. Verdi’s early works appeared in the shadows of Donizetti, who died in 1848, allowing Verdi to become his natural successor. From then on, Verdi’s star never stopped rising... He came to be regarded as the cultural representative of Italian nationalism. A biography printed in 1913 called him the ‘maestro’ of the Italian revolution. Elsewhere in Europe the ‘national poet’ revered by nationalists was usually a writer. Italy,



though, had Verdi. There were few real alternatives: the actual period of the Risorgimento (1848-61) had produced no major Italian poets, no major novelists (Manzoni was still alive but his best works were behind him), and no playwright of note.<sup>66</sup>

For historically specific reasons, analogous responses to particular social determinants find their way into particular cultural forms — into those forms, but not, interestingly, into others. These forms differ from context to context. The question as to why certain cultural forms make themselves available to social representation in moments of crisis or epochal transformation while others do not do so — or cannot — is an important one for cultural theory.

### **Combined Unevenness**

Gramsci argues that significant literary renewal is never a purely “literary” matter. One does not change the existing literary landscape by resisting or repudiating the currently dominant works or schools or tendencies. One changes it, instead, by breathing the air of the new, of the world as it really is and as it really is becoming. “The most common prejudice is this,” he writes: “that the new literature has to identify itself with an artistic school of origins, as was the case with Futurism.” But literature and culture do not evolve through parthenogenesis:

the premise of the new literature cannot but be historical, political and popular. It must aim at elaborating that which already is, whether polemically or in some other way does not matter. What does matter, though, is that it sink its roots into the humus of popular culture as it is, with its tastes and tendencies and with its moral and intellectual world, even if it is backward and conventional.<sup>67</sup>

We have already seen that, as Gramsci understands it, literature is constantly developing as new social experiences create the conditions for the emergence and development of new forms, devices, and genres. This quite often takes place on the basis of the resurrection, revival, and refunctioning of older or foreign conventions since, as we have also seen, these latter sometimes approximate or stage social conflicts better than new or avant-gardist figurations arising from the socially aloof terrains of what the cultural elites call “literature.” But we need to dwell for a moment on Gramsci’s emphasis on the “popular” in all of this. How are we to imagine a “new literature as the expression of moral and intellectual renewal?” His answer is that it is “only from the readers of serial literature” that one “can... select a sufficient and necessary public for creating the cultural base of the new literature.”<sup>68</sup> A “new literature” will arise or emerge when its conditions of possibility — transformed or transforming social relations, as experienced by men and women in the mass, in the

routine course of their lives — have become sufficiently sedimented in social life to be given symbolic representation. We think, for instance, of the novels of Dickens — or, at least, of Dickens as Williams positions him: “The most important thing to say about Dickens... is not that he is writing in a new way, but that he is experiencing in a new way, and that this is the substance of his language.”<sup>69</sup> And, elsewhere:

Dickens’s ultimate vision of London is then not to be illustrated by topography or local instance. It lies in the form of his novels: in their kind of narrative, in their method of characterization, in their genius for typification. It does not matter which way we put it: the experience of the city is the fictional method; or the fictional method is the experience of the city. What matters is that the vision — no single vision either, but a continual dramatization — is the form of the writing.<sup>70</sup>

Of course, Williams is presenting Dickens here as the registrar of a world-historical development that happens in London *first*, before anywhere else. It is then Dickens’s “luck” as much as his “genius” to discover or forge a new form of writing adequate to the epochally changed and still changing social landscape of his time. But Gramsci is grappling, by contrast, with the effects and consequences of Italy’s relative backwardness. How is the question of literary form to be phrased in socio-historical contexts in which, far from their being an overlap between popular (or “mass”) experience and the structures of feeling that animate “new” literature — as is the case with Dickens — there is a vast and seemingly unbridgeable distance between the emergent cultural forms and “the national content.” “Since every national complex is an often heterogeneous combination of elements,” Gramsci writes

it may happen that its intellectuals, because of their cosmopolitanism, do not coincide with the national content, but with a content borrowed from other national complexes or even with a content that is abstract and cosmopolitan. Thus Leopardi can be described as the poet of the despair created in certain minds by eighteenth-century sensationalism, which in Italy had no corresponding development of material and political forces and struggles as it did in the countries where it was an organic cultural form.<sup>71</sup>

Addressing himself to the dispute between “contentists” (*contenutisti*) and “calligraphists” (*calligrafi*) that played itself out in Italian letters in the early 1930s, Gramsci argues that on neither side of this dispute is there an adequate recognition of the fact that in order to consolidate itself, a “new literature” requires a correspondingly new “moral and intellectual world” in which to take root.<sup>72</sup> This “world” cannot be parachuted in from above; unless there is an organic connection between popular

consciousness and the forms being mooted, confirmed, or refunctioned in the contemporary production of literature, what is produced will never be able to catch history on the wing, as it were — that is to say, to make its mark as something not merely new, but also socially consequential. In a remarkable passage — rich, but complex and requiring patient elucidation — Gramsci writes that

When, in a backward country, the civil forces corresponding to the cultural form assert themselves and expand, not only are they certain not to create a new and original literature but there will — naturally enough — emerge a “calligraphism,” a generic and widespread form of scepticism about any serious and profound passionate content. “Calligraphism” will thus be the organic literature of those national complexes which, like Lao-tse, are born eighty years old, without fresh and spontaneous feelings, without “romanticisms,” but also without “classicisms,” or else with a mannered romanticism in which the initial crudeness of the passions is that of an artificially rejuvenated old man trying to relive his youth rather than a stormy virility or masculinity, while their classicism will be likewise mannered, in other words merely a “calligraphism,” a mere form like the livery of a majordomo.<sup>73</sup>

What Gramsci calls “calligraphism” (*calligrafismo*) in this passage we understand as a formalist response to the “contentist” proposal that Italian literature should “modernize” itself by mimicking, replicating, or appropriating literary styles and themes appearing elsewhere, in the more “advanced” social formations. Confronted with the “contentist” injunction to write like Hugo (or Dickens) but in Rome or Milan — an injunction whose *abstraction* is starkly apparent to them as a problem, even if its *elitism* isn’t — the “calligraphists” respond by calling for a return to traditional or archaic forms of expression, in and through whose recrudescence they hope to locate and confirm an authentic national culture. Gramsci is acutely sensitive to literary works in which temporal unevenness — uneven time — is formally encoded or disclosed. But calligraphism promotes the restoration of or return to older, “classical,” genres and modes conceived as somehow timeless and uncontaminated in their crystalline purity;<sup>74</sup> and the idea that the present might be renewed through a mannered restoration of the past strikes Gramsci as ridiculous. He has no time either for the calligraphist exhumations of an idyllic Italian past or for the delirious contentist gyrations with the newest styles and themes, imported from elsewhere and conscientiously aped and imitated. The dispute overall he judges to be of little lasting importance: “It is more a controversy between petty and mediocre journalists than the ‘birth pangs’ of a new literary civilization.”<sup>75</sup> These formal concerns are linked with similar ones on the nature of language.



### From Prestige to Hegemony

Beginning his career as a student of philology at the University of Turin in the years just prior to World War I, Gramsci followed the fierce dispute between neo-grammarians and neo-linguistic schools of thought with great interest. The neo-grammarians conceded the historicity of languages as conventional systems. But since their focus fell on phonetic change, which they understood to be governed by invariant laws, the “comparative philology” that they called for typically took the form not of an empirical examination of languages changing in actual use but rather of a (proto-) structuralist analysis in which the impersonality or “collectivity” of the language system — its essential externality to intentionality and conscious will — was identified as a fundamental feature. (Although not himself directly aligned with the neo-grammarians, Saussure’s distinction between *langue* and *parole* in the *Cours de linguistique générale*, and especially his privileging of the former over the latter in analysis, led him to a similar general conception.)<sup>76</sup>

In opposition to this position, the neo-linguists insisted that language was essentially expressive: it was an aesthetic practice, intentional, a matter of consciousness and self-consciousness, and subject to political will. In an article published in 1947, the neo-linguist case against the neo-grammarians was forcefully restated by Bonfante, who had himself been active in the polemics of the 1920s and 1930s before leaving Italy (for Switzerland and then the United States) after the fascist seizure of power. “Although the neogrammarian school claims to be ‘historical,’” Bonfante wrote

in reality it has ignored history altogether. French, for the neogrammarians, is merely an unorganized complex of phonetic laws showing how Latin words were transformed (*testa* > *tête*) — nothing else. They see no connection whatsoever between the development of the French language and the history of the French people, their struggles, their religion, their literature, their beliefs, their life. The same phonetic laws could have taken place just as well in Siberia or in Patagonia as in France. Nothing binds them to the French people, the French history, the French mentality. Neogrammatical linguistics is thus linguistics in abstracto, in vacuo. The neolinguists, though stressing the esthetic nature of language, know that language, like every human phenomenon, is produced under certain special historical conditions, and that therefore the history of the French language cannot be written without taking into account the whole history of France — Christianity, the Germanic invasions, Feudalism, the Italian influence, the Court, the Academy, the French Revolution, Romanticism, and so on — nay, that the French language is an expression, an essential part of French culture and French spirit.<sup>77</sup>

Gramsci's general allegiance in this dispute lay of course with the neo-linguists. Like them, he insisted that language is the "expression of lived experiences (*esperienze vissute*)."<sup>78</sup> But most of the neo-linguists worked with a rather uni-directional conception of language in relation to the field of power. For them, linguistic change was seen to derive more or less directly from changes in the heteronomous domain of politics, and to proceed from top to bottom, from the apices of power to the dusty plains of the great unwashed. "The innovation of a king has a better chance than the innovation of a peasant," as Bonfante succinctly put it.<sup>79</sup> Here, Gramsci followed the somewhat exceptional (and dissenting) lead of Bartoli, his own teacher at Turin, in arguing that languages are diffused not through top-down imposition, but from the bottom-up: "Linguistic pressures," he wrote in a 1918 essay on Esperanto, "are exerted only from the bottom upwards."

As Lo Piparo has observed, Bartoli and his associates sought "to explain the diffusion of a language [*lingua*] beyond its original geographic and social confines by recourse to *geographic centers and social groups capable of irradiating cultural prestige*."<sup>80</sup> How does it come about that those imbued with cultural prestige are able to influence others beyond the pale of their own social praxis, to persuade these others (without formally "convincing" them) of the relative superiority of their own language and linguistic practices? Such questions pose themselves with luminous intensity in Italy, where the history of the emergence of "Italian" as the national language is especially complex. As Sassoon has written,

some of the numerous Italian dialects, such as Sicilian and Venetian, produced a written literature. But it was Tuscan that towered above all the others, thanks to outstanding writers of the calibre of Dante, Francesco Petrarca, and Giovanni Boccaccio, revered throughout Europe. This helped Tuscan to become the literary language of educated Italians, and eventually the language of all Italians after the country became an independent state in 1861. At that time Italian was habitually spoken by only 400,000 people in Tuscany, 70,000 in Rome, and perhaps 160,000 people in the rest of the country, almost all members of the educated classes — in all, 630,000 out of twenty million.<sup>81</sup>

For Bartoli and his associates, Lo Piparo writes, "a language is diffused neither by the force of armies nor by state coercion — this is the sociocultural thesis of the Italian neo-linguistics and of [the] French sociological school — but because the ones who speak a different language spontaneously consent to the speech of the groups with cultural prestige."<sup>82</sup> What is at issue here clearly goes beyond politics in the narrow sense — that is, concerning the ability of empowered agents or groups (state, army, king, etc.) to dictate terms and enforce compliance — to implicate in addition the whole territory of social reproduction and the forging of common sense. In grappling

with these issues himself, Gramsci moved from his initial focus (shared with Bartoli) on prestige to a concern with what he called hegemony, directing his attention to the question of how specifically empowered agents were able to link different social groups under their leadership. We might note two immediate differences between a prestige-based explanatory schema and one based on the idea of hegemony.

First, prestige bespeaks a group seeking pre-eminence in its field through exclusion, while hegemony indicates an attempt to expand a social alliance through inclusive expression. Cultures of prestige may concentrate power, but their narrowness and restrictedness are also sources of potential vulnerability. Cultures of hegemony, by contrast, are often diffuse, but they are more durable because they are able to accommodate widespread interests simultaneously. Think, for example, of the very different implications of a prestige model of “RP” English (“Received Pronunciation”), on the one hand, and of a hegemonic model of dialectal Englishes, on the other, in the cultures of contemporary British radio and television.<sup>83</sup> A focus on prestige disposes one to identify given cultural forms or generic narratives as something like the “property” or “inheritance” of the particular groups or constituencies who express themselves through them: their modes of actualization of these forms must be emulated or idealized in order for their symbolic or ideological potentials to be tapped. A focus on hegemony, by contrast, leads one to emphasize the “bundling” of relatively disparate, multiple interests, brought together under a singular rubric — movement, discourse, standpoint — and “represented” in and by it, but finding in it a diversity of positions, emphases, and even arguments. The work of hegemony invites and organizes mass acceptance or mass consent in multiple modes.

Second, where prestige bespeaks hierarchy — socio-cultural relations that are vertically organized and that gather authority partly through the fabrication of time as “tradition” — hegemony is both more opportunistic and more pragmatic: its vector is horizontal rather than vertical, addressed to the politics of the possible. The drama of Gramsci’s own refunctioning of the term “hegemony” (*egemonia*) itself testifies to this “flexibility.” Originally a Greek word denoting the political and military domination of one city-state by another, the concept took on critical mass in European political consciousness in the turbulence of the mid-nineteenth century, before being consolidated in Marxist political theory in the first two decades of the twentieth. In these latter usages, it continued to refer to political domination, although now more generally of one class over another than of one state over another. Thus in a 1924 essay in *Ordine Nuovo*, Gramsci cited Lenin’s usage of the concept to refer to the domination or leadership of the political party of the working-class in the transformation to communism (the so-called “dictatorship of the proletariat”). But Gramsci himself was interested in elaborating an expanded concept, one no longer “limited to matters of direct political control” — Williams’ words — “but seek[ing] to describe a more general predominance which includes, as one of its key features, a particular way of seeing the world and human nature and relationships.”<sup>84</sup> He deployed the term

“hegemony” in the elaboration of this expanded concept: as Rosiello puts it, “the term ‘hegemony’... offers to Gramsci the possibility [of using]... a wider and more comprehensive concept [than that] used by Soviet militant Marxism... At some point, Gramsci inserts the concept of ‘prestige’ into the ‘theoretico-practical principle of hegemony,’ partly modifying its concept, thus making the sphere of its applicability larger.”<sup>85</sup>

The move from prestige to hegemony allows Gramsci to emphasize the plasticity of cultural forms — languages, discourses, generic narratives, formal devices, etc. — both in their mediation between the general and the particular and in their migration across time and space. His prison writings demonstrate an extraordinary sensitivity to the contingency, relative autonomy and irreducibility of cultural forms and developments; but this attention to particularity never causes him to abandon his fidelity to a deterministic and properly materialist explanatory schema. The commentary on language in the prison notebooks succeeds, as Rosiello has noted, in establishing “an explicative relationship between the history of language and the history of the organization of... Italian culture.”<sup>86</sup> Thus the following passage, for instance (quoted by Rosiello), in which the complex and intersecting relations between language, culture and society are very suggestively elaborated:

The growth of the communes propelled the development of the vernaculars, and the intellectual hegemony of Florence consolidated it; that is, it created an illustrious vernacular. But what is this illustrious vernacular? It is the Florentine [dialect] developed by the intellectuals of the old tradition: the vocabulary as well as the phonetics are Florentine, but the syntax is Latin. The victory of the vernacular over the Latin was not easy, however: with the exception of poets and artists in general, learned Italians wrote for Christian Europe not for Italy; they were a compact group of cosmopolitan and not national intellectuals. The fall of the communes and the advent of the principality, the creation of a governing caste detached from the people, crystallized this vernacular in the same way literary Latin had been crystallized. Italian became, once again, a written and not a spoken language, belonging to the learned, not to the nation.<sup>87</sup>

### Translation and Translatability

In all these considerations, Gramsci is concerned with tracking cultural forms as they move across time and place. However, this is a concern less with *translation* than with *translatability*, for he is interested less in the conversion or rendering of words, texts, concepts, etc. from one language to another, than in the evaluation of how paradigms generated within one particular semio-ideological system might be

transferred to another. In explaining the difference between “translation” (*traduzione*) and “translatability” (*traducibilità*), Boothman tells us that Carl Marzani, the first translator of a selection from Gramsci’s prison writings into English, “went so far as to deny that Gramsci’s use of the term ‘translate’ had a great deal to do with what translators do in practice.” Boothman quotes Marzani as suggesting that Gramsci’s notion of “translation” is closer to “transposition,” to the finding of “correspondence or differentiations among the ‘idioms’ of various countries” — “idioms” for Marzani being “the cultural ensemble, the ways of thinking and acting in a country at a given time”.<sup>88</sup> Boothman refers us in this context to a moment in the prison writings in which Gramsci recalls Lenin’s frustration at the fact that it was proving so difficult to repeat the Bolshevik revolutionary experience in other European contexts. “Vilich [Lenin], in dealing with organizational questions, wrote and said (more or less) this,” Gramsci observes: “we have not been able to ‘translate’ our language into those of Europe.” Boothman adds that “Lenin went on to say, in a comment not recalled by Gramsci, ‘We have not learnt how to present our Russian experience to foreigners.’”<sup>89</sup> In Gramsci’s formulation, “translate” is clearly not being used to refer to “the act of re-expressing concepts in another natural language.” The term is deployed rather “in a broad and metaphorical sense;” moreover, “the word ‘language’ itself is used to indicate the culture of a given country.”<sup>90</sup>

Consider two other occasions in which Gramsci uses the concept of “translation” to specify an activity quite different from what is conventionally meant by this term in literary studies. The first of these is perhaps the simpler. At one point in his commentary on the Risorgimento in the prison notebooks, Gramsci reflects on the relative failure of the progressive nineteenth-century intellectual, Ferrari, to make his mark on Italian politics after his return to Italy in 1859, after more than twenty years in exile in France. Gramsci sees Ferrari’s failure to make himself integral to the contemporary politics of transformism as a failure of translation. “Ferrari was to a great extent outside the concrete reality of Italy,” he writes:

he had become too Gallicized. Often his judgements appear more acute than they really are, since he applied to Italy French schemas, which represented conditions considerably more advanced than those to be found in Italy... The politician... must be an effective man of action, working on the present. Ferrari did not see that an intermediary link was missing between the Italian and French situations, and that it was precisely this link which had to be welded fast for it to be possible to pass on to the next. Ferrari was incapable of “translating” what was French into something Italian, and hence his very “acuteness” became an element of confusion, stimulated new sects and little schools, but did not impinge on the real movement.<sup>91</sup>

The suggestion here is that after his long years in exile, Ferrari was unable to put his finger on the pulse of Italian social life when he returned to Italy: the Italian “cultural ensemble” continued to elude him, despite his best efforts to locate it.<sup>92</sup> Rather than being unable to translate his French experience to Italians (which would be to apply Lenin’s formulation directly), it was rather a case of his being unable to make his Italian compatriots see that what he had learned and witnessed in France bore concrete implications for their situation also.

The second occasion introduces a much more complex, but also much more consequential, conception of “translation.” Discussing what he calls “the translatability of scientific languages” (*Traducibilità dei linguaggi scientifici*), Gramsci makes clear that what he is centrally concerned with are

the relationships between speculative philosophies and the philosophy of praxis and their reduction to this latter as a political moment that the philosophy of praxis explains “politically.” Reduction of all speculative philosophies to politics’, to a moment of historico-political life; the philosophy of praxis conceives the reality of human relationships of knowledge as an element of political “hegemony.”<sup>93</sup>

In a related comment, he notes that

The philosophy of praxis “absorbs” the subjective conception of reality (idealism) into the theory of the superstructures; it absorbs and explains it historically, that is to say it “goes beyond” it reducing it to one of its own “moments.” The theory of the superstructures is the translation in terms of realist historicism of the subjective conception of reality.”<sup>94</sup>

Here “translation” entails not so much the transfer of meaning or semantic expression from one language to another as the transubstantiation of paradigmatic discourse from one form (speculative philosophy, to take the example that Gramsci uses) to another (politics, or historico-political life). “The radical form of translation,” as Frosini observes, “that is, the one that makes possible all other translations, is the translation of philosophy into politics.”<sup>95</sup>

This helps to explain what Gramsci would have had in mind in drawing our attention to the fact that both Kant and Croce believed that there needed to be “agreement” between their philosophies and common sense — in other words, that their philosophies ought to represent *translations* of common sense — and that Marx asserted in *The Holy Family* that “the political formulae of the French Revolution can be reduced to the principles of classical German philosophy.”<sup>96</sup> Gramsci also quoted the concluding lines of Engels’ *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*: “The German working-class movement is the inheritor of German classical



philosophy,” proceeding then to the following speculation: “How is the statement that the German proletariat is the heir of classical German philosophy to be understood? Surely what Marx [sic] wanted to indicate was the historical function of his philosophy when it became the theory of a class which was in turn to become a State?”<sup>97</sup>

Between “the ‘spontaneous’ feelings of the masses” and Marxist theory there can be no opposition, Gramsci believed, because these “spontaneous feelings” and “theory” are both expressions of the same thing, both representations of the same underlying reality, and are to be understood, hence, as reciprocal translations of each other.<sup>98</sup> “Between the two there is a ‘quantitative’ difference of degree, not one of quality. A reciprocal ‘reduction’ so to speak, a passage from one to the other and vice versa, must be possible.”<sup>99</sup> Gramsci’s focus thus devolves to a consideration of the social conditions of possibility of translation — a consideration of what makes it possible for one paradigmatic discourse to become translatable into another — it being recognized that “translatability” is not an abstract given, but rather an historically determined and historically specific possibility. Gramsci considered language — and translation also — to be as much a constitutive element of hegemony as any other cultural instance. We are reminded to a certain extent of Benedict Anderson’s suggestion that “nation-ness” is a cultural artefact that becomes translatable — or, as he puts it, available for pirating — only at a particular historical moment: “My point of departure,” he writes in *Imagined Communities*

Is that nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word’s multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. to understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy. I will be trying to argue that the creation of these artefacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex “crossing” of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they became “modular,” capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to mere and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations.<sup>100</sup>

So too with Gramsci. Starting with the idea that what matters in translation is not merely a question of “translating terms and concepts belonging to the same subject matter, but... of... recognizing that two different subjects, [for instance] political theory and economics, can have fundamentally equivalent postulates, can be mutually comparable and in consequence can be reciprocally translatable,” he turns his attention to the structural conditions that engender this “equivalence” (and hence its reciprocal translation). His explanation is phrased in terms of the concepts of

universal and particular, base and superstructure, in their specifically Marxist formulation:

Translatability presupposes that a given stage of civilization has a 'basically' identical cultural expression, even if its language is historically different, being determined by the particular tradition of each national culture and each philosophical system, by the prevalence of an intellectual or practical activity etc. Thus it is to be seen whether one can translate between expressions of different stages of civilization, in so far as each of these stages is a moment of the development of another, one thus mutually integrating the other, or whether a given expression may be translated using the terms of a previous stage of the same civilization, a previous stage which however is more comprehensible than the given language....<sup>101</sup>

“What follows from this,” as Frosini correctly points out, is the relativisation of diverse languages [*linguaggi*] and (given the unity of theory and practice) a clarification of their uniquely political character.”<sup>102</sup> But it is Maas’ gloss that seems most important for the argument we are trying to make in this article:

Gramsci always says that language belongs together with the life-form *organically*, that every language [*linguaggio*] “contains the elements of a conception of the world and a culture.” With that, however, language represents at the same time a *limitation* of praxis, which is to be overcome through educational work in the perspective of its universalization. Universal in this sense, however, does not mean *formally* the same for all. The development of a national language is the development and sublation of particularism even if in national form: this remains related to the family of dialects that “dwell” under its roof; the local limitations will be overcome, without however losing the ground of the lived experiences. Culture is for Gramsci in this sense linked to linguistic translatability, which for him, to a certain extent, by definition only occurs between national languages, related to the universal contents that are articulated in culturally specific forms. For the dialects, as symbolic expression of particular cultural praxes, that is excluded.<sup>103</sup>

We return here to the idea of combined and uneven development. What makes one particular paradigmatic discourse translatable into another is their mutual (but differentiated) location in a (world) system marked by imbalance, competition, violence, and the struggle for hegemony. The idea of “combined unevenness” then allows us to interpret the entwining of different locations, following the cartography of capital, in terms of patterns of “interference.”<sup>104</sup>



### Translation and Uneven Development

Gramsci did not linger long on the standard idea of translation as the encoding of meaning into a new language. Translatability was what interested him, and it was a political activity that involved pirating, modularization, appropriation, refunctioning, etc. Everyone interested in translatability must consider what it is that makes a text able to function for different audiences. This is the search for experiential, more than merely linguistic, equivalents. “From a practical point of view, the advancement of culture is much better served by the type of contributor...who knows how to translate a cultural world into the discourse [*linguaggio*] of another cultural world; someone who can discover similarities even when none are apparent and can find differences even where everything appears to be similar, etc.”<sup>105</sup> Gramsci’s emphasis is on the utility of the message, not the prestige of the journal or the skill of the translator himself or herself.<sup>106</sup> Works have translatability only when different groups have “a ‘basically’ identical cultural expression, even if its language is historically different.”<sup>107</sup> If prestige is sometimes a necessary element in the formation of social movements, it is never a sufficient one — as Gramsci shows in his discussion of the failure of Renaissance Humanism to translate itself into the “language” of the national-popular in Italy.

The concept of “translatability” downplays the emphases on aesthetic genius and the uniqueness and incommensurability of literary language, which have been — and remain — central to the prevailing forms of comparativism in literary scholarship in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It also obviates anxiety that the transportation of cultural forms or paradigmatic discourses from one language to another either devalues the source language or appears as a degraded copy in the target language. What the concept of translatability seeks to highlight are the conditions that have to be in place for effective translation to take place. Just because cultural works are translated from one language to another does not mean they will have any actual impact, regardless of the prestige of their original creator or environment. For instance, the translation of Dumas into Italian does not make Dumas automatically powerful. Dumas’ writing achieves significance because his concerns have translatability, in that they help explain and represent the experiences of Italian readers. These readers are not necessarily “colonized” by a sense of cultural inferiority, even while they are allowing themselves to be “led” by the prior century’s French writers. Unless a work has translatability, resonates with the experience of a readership, it will have little impact, or find little acclaim. As Creswell poignantly observes, in a discussion of the barriers surrounding the translation from Arabic into English, “I suggest that a central task of translators from the Arabic is to assert the bare translatability of the language into English. By translatability, I mean its interpretability, its potential for making sense — including, of course, aesthetic sense.”<sup>108</sup>

No matter how well meaning the call by liberal translation studies scholars for more

works to be translated, the mere existence of more translations will not necessarily have any substantive effect. For orthodox translation studies rests on a fetishism of language, a semiotic essentialism, that imagines that language or word-forms matter intrinsically, when, in fact, these are merely means through which social experiences are carried: it is as social experiences that they are received, promoted, stifled, or countered by the dominant social institutions — media, schools and universities, publishers, etc. Rosiello cites Gramsci's critique of Bertoni, who had collaborated with Gramsci's teacher, Bartoli, in writing the *Breviario di Linguistica* in 1925. Bertoni, Gramsci says, "reduces linguistics to an aesthetics of words, assuming language [*lingua*] and its innovations as spiritually and individually created facts;" Bartoli, by contrast, "sets out heuristic methods and criteria that postulate and study language in its objectively definable historical and geographical organization."<sup>109</sup> There is, consequently, no such thing as "the translation zone," *even though there is very clearly a social cartography of translatability*.<sup>110</sup> The geography of translatability is the cultural topography of the capitalist world-system, its geoculture. The rationale for Gramsci's analysis lay in his understanding that events in Lenin's Russia — no matter how significant was their prestige for Marxist theory — could neither parthogenetically create revolution in Italy, nor be taken as a fixed template. The ratios of the interaction between countryside and city in the two nations might have been comparable, but they were different, not least insofar as Italy had a much broader industrialized North and greater fraction of the entire country than was the case with Russia.

A turn from translation studies, cemented by philological concerns, to translatability studies, grounded in the history of social relations, would provide a new perspective on literary history and the role played by narrative, device, genre, etc. Think, for example, of the "translatability" of the slogans "*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*" or "We, the people" — the translatability of nationalism or of Marxism itself, for that matter. "The fundamental question here," as Renault writes in a commentary on Fanon and Tran Du Thao

is that of the modalities of what Gramsci, in his *Prison Notebooks*, calls the "translatability of scientific and philosophical languages." Gramsci takes a double view: on the one hand, Marxism is a universal metalanguage which allows for the mutual translation of particular non- or pre-Marxian languages — as demonstrated by Marx's own translations of German (Hegelian) philosophy, French socialism and English political economy; on the other hand, Marxism is itself a body of thought and practice that ought to be translated from language to language, from nation to nation, in the West and beyond it.<sup>111</sup>

Our choice of texts to study, our selective tradition, ought in these terms to be governed not by survival in the marketplace — since that is ultimately a study of the

marketplace's supply and demand in search of price equilibrium — but by the ways in which a genre or device seems to allow for the fusion of compound, multiple interests. The latter is a search for the values in contention. Moretti's focus on readership, sales and Darwinian logics of survival seems to us to risk capitulation to the philosophy of prices, rather than values, a granting of social truths according to the spheres of consumption rather than production and social reproduction of class relations. "If it is true that every language contains the elements of a conception of the world and of a culture," as Gramsci himself puts it:

it could also be true that from anyone's language one can assess the greater or lesser complexity of his conception of the world. Someone who only speaks dialect, or understands the standard language incompletely, necessarily has an intuition of the world which is more or less limited and provincial, which is fossilized and anachronistic in relation to the other major currents of thought which dominate world history. His interests will be limited, more or less corporate or economic, not universal. While it is not always possible to learn a number of foreign languages in order to put oneself in contact with other cultural lives, it is at the least necessary to learn the national language properly. A great culture can be translated into the language of another great culture, that is to say a great national language with historic richness and complexity, and it can translate any other great culture and can be a world-wide means of expression. But a dialect cannot do this.<sup>112</sup>

What is required, we might then say, is the translation, not of Balzac into Italian, nor even of Marx into Italian, but of the conditions that underpin French politics, German philosophy and British economics into Italian. And this is a matter not of intellectual work, no matter how progressive, but of practical politics.

### Notes

1. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, eds. Edavid Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, trans. William Boelhower (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985) 205.
2. We would like to thank our two anonymous reviewers at *Mediations* for their exceptionally thoughtful comments. We've tried to incorporate their suggestions where we thought we could, without making an already lengthy essay longer still.
3. We say "recent," but Lo Piparo's *Lingua, Intelletuali e Egemonia in Gramsci* [Language, Intellectuals and Hegemony in Gramsci] was published as early as 1979. As Ives and Lacorte point out in their editors' Introduction to *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*, eds. Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), Lo Piparo's work made it "incontrovertible that [Gramsci's]... linguistic studies were central to his well known conception of hegemony and his entire approach to political language." But they also note that "while Lo Piparo's book became the work cited on Gramsci and language no part of it has ever been translated." See the essays in the Ives and Lacorte volume by Lo Piparo himself, Rosiello, De Mauro, Maas, Boothman, Frosini, and Lacorte; and also Alessandro Carlucci, *Gramsci and Languages: Unification, Diversity, Hegemony* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2013); Peter Ives, *Gramsci's Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), "The Mammoth Task of Translating Gramsci," *Rethinking Marxism* 18.1 (2006) 15-22, and *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci* (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2004); Peter Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2009); Fabiana Woodfin, "Lost in Translation: The Distortion of *Egemonia*" in *Marxism and Cultural Studies*, eds. Lee Artz, Steve Macek, and Dana L. Cloud (New York: Peter Lang, 2006) 133-156. Perry Anderson's *The H-Word: The Peripeteia of Hegemony* (London: Verso, 2017) and *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Verso, 2017) appeared too late for us to be able to do more than gesture to them in this essay.
4. Our own contributions to this emergent discussion appear in WReC (Warwick Research Collective), *Combined and Uneven Development: Toward a New Theory of World-Literature*. See also, *inter alia*, Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 2005); Joe Cleary, "Realism after Modernism and the Literary World-System," *Modern Language Quarterly* 73.3 (2012) 255-68; Jed Esty, "Global Lukács," *Novel* 42.3 (2009) 366-72; Fredric Jameson, "Antinomies of the Realism-Modernism Debate," *Modern Language Quarterly* 73.3 (2012) 475-85; Ruth Jennison, *The Zukofsky Era: Modernity, Margins, and the Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); Michael Löwy, "The Current of Critical Irrealism: 'A moonlit enchanted night'" in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) 193-206; Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 1996), "Conjectures on World Literature" in *Debating World Literature*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (London and New York: Verso, 2004) 148-62, 'More Conjectures,' *New Left Review* 20 (2003) 73-81, and *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London and New York: Verso, 2005); Michael Niblett, "World-Economy, World-Ecology, World Literature," *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* 16 (2012) 15-30; Stephen Shapiro and Philip Barnard, *Pentecostal Modernism: Lovecraft, Los Angeles and World-Systems Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

5. Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* [1932-33], Vol. 1, trans. Max Eastman (London: Sphere Books, 1967) 432. Among the recent commentaries on “combined and uneven development” that we have found most useful are Jamie C. Allinson and Alexander Anievas, “The Uses and Misuses of Uneven and Combined Development: An Anatomy of a Concept,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22.1 (2009) 47-67; S. Ashman, “Capitalism, Uneven and Combined Development and the Transhistoric,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22.1 (2009) 29-46; Colin Barker, “Beyond Trotsky: Extending Combined and Uneven Development” in *100 Years of Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects*, eds. Bill Dunn and Hugo Radice (London: Pluto, 2006) 78-87; Neil Davidson, “Uneven and Combined Development: Modernity, Modernism, Revolution,” *rs21*; Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2010); Justin Rosenberg, “Globalization Theory: A Post-Mortem,” *International Politics* 42.1 (2005) 2-74 and “International Relations: the ‘Higher Bullshit’: A Reply to the Globalisation Theory Debate,” *International Politics* 44.4 (2007) 450-482; Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).
6. Ives, *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci* 35.
7. *Language And Hegemony in Gramsci* 35.
8. The standard reference here is Frank Rosengarten, “The Gramsci-Trotsky Question (1922-1932),” *Social Text* 11 (1985) 65-95. Emanuele Saccarelli’s *Gramsci and Trotsky in the Shadow of Stalinism: The Political Theory and Practice of Opposition* (London: Routledge, 2008) is tendentious and unreliable. Its myriad inaccuracies and misrepresentations are deftly (and wittily) skewered by Ian G. McKay, “Our Awkward Ancestors: Trotsky, Gramsci and the Challenge of Reconnaissance,” *Capital and Class* 34.3 (2010) 509-530. See also Allinson and Anievas, “The Uneven and Combined Development of the Meiji Restoration: A Passive Revolutionary Road to Capitalist Modernity,” *Capital & Class* 34.3 (2010) 469-490, which combines Trotsky’s and Gramsci’s ideas in an informed and suggestive reading of the material conditions of possibility of the Japanese “take-off” in the latter half of the nineteenth century.
9. See Timothy Brennan, “Antonio Gramsci and Postcolonial Theory: ‘Southernism,’” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 10.2 (2001) 143-187 for an interesting discussion of “Southernism.” Concerning “the language question,” Ives writes as follows: “Together with the Southern Question one of the significant problems facing the newly unified Italy in 1861 was its practical lack of a ‘standard’ language. It is estimated that in 1861, only somewhere between two and a half and twelve per cent of the new Italian population spoke anything that could be called ‘standard’ Italian. In other words, the very existence of Italian as a spoken language of daily life was questionable. Literary Italian was primarily a written language of the elite. It was not used by large numbers of people. The spoken languages of ‘Italian’ were more like a family of Latin dialects with greater and lesser influences from other languages such as the pre-Roman Etruscan, French, Spanish, and German. Sardinian was particularly distant from literary Italian. Added to this lack of a ‘standard Italian’ was the very high illiteracy rate of about 75 per cent throughout Italy. The *questione della lingua*, or the ‘Language Question’ is connected to the Southern Question, as exhibited by the fact that in Sardinia the illiteracy rate was 90 per cent.” *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci* 36.
10. Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings* 208.

11. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 209.
12. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 210.
13. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 215.
14. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 215-216.
15. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 215.
16. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 346.
17. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," trans. Harry Zohn in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4: 1938-1940, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006) 389-411.
18. Moretti, "World-Systems Analysis, Evolutionary Theory, *Weltliteratur*" in *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, Culture*, eds. David Palumbo-Liu, Bruce Robbins, and Nirvana Tanoukhi (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 70-71.
19. Donald Sassoon, *The Culture of the Europeans: From 1800 to the Present*. (London: HarperCollins, 2006) 483.
20. Sassoon, *The Culture of the Europeans* 484.
21. *The Culture of the Europeans* 483.
22. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1984) 15.
23. Quoted in *Selections from Cultural Writings* 107.
24. Boothman suggests that what is involved here is best thought of not as "appropriation" but as "translation": Gramsci "sees the possibility of translating [Croce's speculative philosophy]... into the terms of [the philosophy of praxis]..." he argues — "and an important part of the polemic with Croce is in fact Gramsci's critique and then *translation* of Crocean concepts, purged of their idealist content, into his own philosophically realist and materialist paradigm." Derek Boothman, "Translation and Translatability: Renewal of the Marxist Paradigm" in *Gramsci, Language, and Translation* 109. We will return to the questions of "translation" and "translatability" below.
25. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 107. In the Italian original: "esse sono generate, no per 'partenogenesi' ma per l'intervento dell'elemento 'maschile' — la storia — l'attività rivoluzionaria che crea il 'nuovo uomo,' cioè nuovi rapport sociali," *Quaderni* 6 §64 733.
26. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 178.
27. Itamar Even-Zohar, "Laws of Literary Interference," *Poetics Today* 11.1 (1990) 53.
28. The interest in "innovation" is long-standing in Gramsci — dating back, as De Mauro tells us, to his "glottological studies at the school of Matteo Bartoli" in Turin from 1911 onwards: "Bartoli made Gramsci study the processes of innovation and consolidation of linguistic innovations, the linguistic repercussions of innovative centers' socioeconomic, cultural and political prestige, and traditional German, French and, in Italy, Ascoli's historical linguistics." Tullio De Mauro, "Language from Nature to History: More on Gramsci the Linguist," trans. Rocco Lacorte with assistance by Peter Ives in *Gramsci, Language, and Translation* 53.
29. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 178.
30. Even-Zohar, "Laws of Literary Interference" 54.
31. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 178.
32. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 178.



33. One of the clearest general examples of cultural “interference” by imposition is provided by modern European colonialism. Hence Fanon’s famous description of the cataclysmic effects of colonial conquest and domination: “Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him.” Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 110.
34. “Laws of Literary Interence” 69.
35. Williams is particularly sensitive to this emphasis in Gramsci’s work: see his commentary on the categories of “dominant, residual, and emergent” in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977) 121-127. “In authentic historical analysis,” he writes, “it is necessary at every point to recognize the complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance. It is necessary to examine how these relate to the whole cultural process rather than only to the selected and abstracted dominant system” (121); see also Stephen Shapiro, “Zombie Health Care” in *The Year’s Work at the Zombie Research Center*, eds. Edward P. Comentale and Aaron Jaffe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014) 193-226.
36. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 117.
37. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 93.
38. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 31.
39. Pirandello quoted in *Selections from Cultural Writings* 146.
40. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 99. Compare Jameson, who writes that “One of the concerns frequently aroused by periodizing hypotheses is that these tend to obliterate difference, and to project an idea of the historical period as a massive homogeneity (bounded on either side by inexplicable “chronological” metamorphoses and punctuation marks.” Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) 3-4.
41. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 138.
42. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 142.
43. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 139.
44. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 142, 141. Gramsci bids us to contrast the plays “conceived in dialect” with “those conceived in literary language where a supradialectal life of national and even cosmopolitan bourgeois intellectuals is depicted.” And he continues: “Now, it seems that in the dialect plays Pirandellism is justified by ways of thinking which are ‘historically’ popular and folkish, dialectal. We do not, in other words, seem to have ‘intellectuals’ disguised as common people, common people who think like intellectuals, but a historically and regionally real Sicilian people who think and act the way they do precisely because they are common people and Sicilians... Just because they cannot be familiar with the subjectivist philosophy of modern idealism does not mean that there can be no ‘dialectical’ and immanentist currents in the popular tradition. If this were demonstrated, the whole castle of Pirandellism, the abstract intellectualism of Pirandello’s plays, would collapse, as it appears it must” *Selections from Cultural Writings* 141.
45. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 145.
46. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 145.

47. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 98.
48. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 113-114.
49. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 275.
50. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 274.
51. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 350.
52. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 350.
53. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 217.
54. Franco Moretti, "The Slaughterhouse of Literature," *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (2000) 209.
55. Moretti, "The Slaughterhouse of Literature" 217. See also Williams's proposition that works of art be thought about not as *objects* but as *notations*: "These notations have then to be interpreted in an active way, according to the particular conventions... The relationship between the making of a work of art and its reception is always active, and subject to conventions, which in themselves are forms of (changing) social organization and relationship... We have to break from the common procedure of isolating the object and then discovering its components. On the contrary, we have to discover the nature of a practice and then its conditions." Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" in *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980) 47.
56. "The Slaughterhouse of Literature" 211.
57. See also Williams, again: "To see individuation as a social process is to set limits to the isolation but also perhaps to the autonomy of the individual author. To see form as formative has a similar effect. The familiar question in literary history, 'what did this author do to this form?' is often reversed, becoming 'what did this form do to this author?'" Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 192.
58. See the suggestive critical readings put forward by Maurizio Ascari, "The Dangers of Distant Reading: Reassessing Moretti's Approach to Literary Genres," *Genre* 47.1 (2014) 1-19; Elif Batuman, "Adventures of a Man of Science: Moretti in California," *N+1* 3 (2005); and Christopher Prendergast, "Evolution and Literary History: A Response to Franco Moretti," *New Left Review* 34 (2005) 40-62. among others. Ascari's conclusion is worth quoting here: "The idea that a single 'device' — clues — may be identified as the factor that ensured the immediate success and the subsequent survival of late nineteenth-century detective stories is outdated. Only four of the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes stories present visible clues simply because this was not the defining feature of the Holmes formula. Moretti has accepted as objective a view of detective fiction that crystallized in the first half of the twentieth century as the result of precise cultural conditions and that has since then been increasingly called into question by specialists." "The Dangers of Distant Reading" 15.
59. *The Culture of the Europeans* 432.
60. *The Culture of the Europeans* 484.
61. *The Culture of the Europeans* 258.
62. *The Culture of the Europeans* 258, 259.
63. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 356.
64. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 378.
65. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 379.
66. *The Culture of the Europeans* 558-559.
67. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 102.



68. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 102.
69. Williams, “Notes on English Prose 1780-1950” in *Writing in Society* (London and New York: Verso, 1991) 91.
70. Williams, *The Country and the City* 154.
71. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 118.
72. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 117. In their editorial notes to the *Selections from Cultural Writings*, Forgacs and Nowell-Smith explain that “the ‘contentists’ argued that the new period should be expressed with a new subject matter,” while “the ‘calligraphists’ (in effect formalists) retorted that form was also content so that they too were producing a historically new content by working on form. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 90. Forgacs and Nowell-Smith go on to say that for Gramsci, “the debate was little more than a gang war between two literary coteries bent on defending their respective territories. It reflected the cultural immobility of two kinds of traditional literary intellectual. The ‘contentists’ rallied a more militant type who wanted to see the ‘new mentality’ and ‘revolutionary’ thrust of fascism expressed in literature. The ‘calligraphists’ exemplified an attitude of aloofness from politics and a defense of ‘pure’ literary values and the national tradition.” *Selections from Cultural Writings* 90-91.
73. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 118.
74. It is worthwhile to reflect for a moment on the cultural specificity of the “contentist”/“calligraphist” dispute, whose historical context is that of the emergence of fascism in the relatively backward and significantly unevenly developed social landscape — the semi-peripherality — of Italy in the early 1930s. In the Anglophone literary sphere, by contrast, T.S. Eliot’s socially reactionary diagnosis of a “dissociation of sensibility” leads him not to a calligraphist solution — a retreat into the seventeenth-century forms that he so admired and whose moral and intellectual world he so celebrated — but, on the contrary, to a radical modernist formal experimentalism. For Eliot, Pound, Lewis and others of their intellectual formation, the idea of “making it new” was not associated, as it was for their conservative Italian counterparts, with the threat of a geo-politically mandated over-determination of the local (or “national”) culture from without.
75. *Selections from Cultural Writings* 119.
76. Saussure’s differences from the neo-grammarians are discussed by Paul J. Thibault, *Re-reading Saussure: The Dynamics of Signs in Social Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997). See especially 80ff.
77. Giuliano Bonfante, “The Neolinguistic Position (A Reply to Hall’s Criticism of Neolinguistics)” *Language* 23.4 (1947) 347-348.
78. Utz Maas, “Gramsci the Linguist,” trans. Peter Thomas in *Gramsci, Language, and Translation* 86. Maas quotes from an article by Gramsci that appeared in *Avanti!* in 1918. English translation in *Selections from Cultural Writings* 30 (it is misattributed as 29 in Maas).
79. Bonfante, “The Neolinguistic Position” 347.
80. Lo Piparo, “The Linguistic Roots” 25.
81. *The Culture of the Europeans* 22. Sassoon himself makes clear that the “nationalization” of Tuscan was anything but an organic process. See also Maas, who points out that, both because “linguistic relations in Italy are distinguished by the extreme dialectal oppositions between north and south’

and because of the social (specifically class-related) implications of the historical predominance of Dante's Florentine dialect — which meant among other things that, from Dante's own time in the fourteenth century until Italian unification in the nineteenth, an overwhelming majority of Italians did not speak "Italian" — Tuscan served as much to block the development of national consciousness in Italy as it did to promote it. "In the wake of Dante and completely detached from the development of linguistic relations," Maas notes, "the prestige-charged Tuscan literary dialect... functions as an additional factor hindering a national development, because reference to it explicitly excluded the real social centers of Rome and the north Italian industrial zones from the high cultural horizon. This confused cultural situation correlated with one of the highest rates of illiteracy in Europe." "Gramsci the Linguist" 84-85.

82. "The Linguistic Roots" 25.
83. See the report on a 2004 poll, commissioned by the BBC to canvass the views of the British public on accents and languages: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/yourvoice/poll\\_results.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/yourvoice/poll_results.shtml). Accessed 28th March 2016.
84. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) 118. See also Anderson's recent *The H-Word*.
85. Luigi Rosiello, "Linguistics and Marxism in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci," trans. Rocco Lacorte with assistance by Peter Ives in *Gramsci, Language, and Translation* 38.
86. Rosiello, "Linguistics and Marxism" 42.
87. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Vol. II, ed. and trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 73-74.
88. Boothman, "Translation and Translatability" 108.
89. "Translation and Translatability" 109. The citation from Gramsci is from *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Derek Boothman (London: Elecbook, 1999) 450-451.
90. "Translation and Translatability" 109.
91. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, eds. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, trans. William Boelhower (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985) 65.
92. In their editorial notes to *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Hoare and Nowell Smith explain that Ferrari remained "active in parliamentary politics until his death [in 1876]," but "as a more or less isolated radical figure who stood outside the process of transformism which characterized Italian parliamentary life in those years" 65n23.
93. Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks* 450.
94. *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks* 450.
95. Fabio Frosini, "On 'Translatability' in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*," trans. Rocco Lacorte with assistance by Peter Ives in *Gramsci, Language, and Translation* 171.
96. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* 199.
97. Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976) 60.
98. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* 381. Concerning "spontaneity" here, Gramsci wrote that the "feelings of the masses" are "spontaneous" in the sense that they are not the result of any systematic educational activity on the part of an already conscious leading group, but have been formed through

everyday experience illuminated by ‘common sense,’ i.e., by the traditional popular conception of the world.” *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* 198-199.

99. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* 199.
100. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London and New York: Verso, 1991) 4.
101. Boothman, “Translation and Translatability” 112; Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks* 451.
102. Frosini, “On ‘Translatability’ in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*” 175.
103. Maas, “Gramsci the Linguist” 88.
104. See Michael Denning’s *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (London: Verso 2015), which charts the emergence of musical forms in semi-peripheral ports around the world, to which people from the peripheral hinterlands were drawn through the new infrastructures of fixed capital which largely serviced the commodity chains of extractive industries.
105. Quoted in Frosini, “On ‘Translatability’ in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*” 177.
106. “On ‘Translatability’ in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*” 178.
107. *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks* 307.
108. Robyn Creswell, “Is Arabic Untranslatable?” *Public Culture* 28.3 (2016) 452-453.
109. Quoted in Rosiello, “Linguistics and Marxism in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci” 35.
110. Our reference here is to Emily Apter’s *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).
111. Matthieu Renault, “Fanon and Tran Du Thao: The Making of French Anticolonialism,” *Nottingham French Studies* 54.1 (2015) 118.
112. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* 325.



Bret Benjamin. "Developmental Aspiration at the End of Accumulation: The New International Economic Order and the Antinomies of the Bandung Era." *Mediations* 32.1 (Fall 2018) 37-70. [www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/developmental-aspiration](http://www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/developmental-aspiration)

## **Developmental Aspiration at the End of Accumulation: The New International Economic Order and the Antinomies of the Bandung Era**

**Bret Benjamin**

In a brief but illuminating passage from the first volume of *Capital vol. 1*, Marx lays the groundwork for a critical method that accounts for the movements of history, including the historical present. Marx here introduces the premise that the commodity-form undergoes a metamorphosis once its circulation becomes entirely mediated by money, a sea-change in the historical development of capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Monumental though this shift may be, however, Marx insists that the universalization of money does not abolish or change the central contradictions internal to the commodity-form itself. Rather, he writes, it "provides the form within which they have room to move. This is, in general, the way in which real contradictions are resolved."<sup>2</sup> As he does often throughout *Capital*, Marx here highlights the commodity and its internal contradictions as the "elemental form" through which any analysis of capital must proceed.<sup>3</sup> However, his turn in the second sentence to the "general" signals that from this passage's central metaphor we can draw out some larger principles of historical method. To this end Marx prompts us, on the one hand, to consider the movement of history, its inherent transience, and the manner in which contradiction and negation set history in motion. On the other hand, Marx asserts the pertinacity of form, insisting that our attention not solely be drawn to movement, but also that we hold focus on the room in which historical movement takes place, the deep structural determinations of any age. The relation between movement and room conditions the historical events of any epoch (minimally, since the rise of capitalism). However, in periods of historical transition, or in contexts where local antagonisms clash visibly with the systemic dynamics of a world market, such a relation can be drawn into heightened critical relief.

This essay takes up the 1974 UN Declaration for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) as just such an opportunity: a chance to reconsider the 1970s as a decade of transition in which the sharpening developmental aspirations of G77 nations in the

global south come into conflict with structural transformations in the accumulation of capital. The NIEO, which emerged out of the Raul Prebisch and Hans Singer period with UNCTAD, garnered support from the most prominent G77 political leaders of its day. Julius Nyerere believed that with its aggressive program of wealth redistribution and promises of socialism between G77 states, the NIEO could function as a “Trade Union of the Poor,” affording Third World states the ability to collectively negotiate economic terms and conditions for development, and to strike when negotiation proved inadequate.<sup>4</sup> Speaking of the “dialectic of domination and plundering on the one hand, and the dialectic of emancipation and recovery on the other,” Algerian president Houari Boumediene, one of the NIEO’s chief proponents, warned of an “uncontrollable conflagration” if the north refused to allow the Third World to control and profit from its natural resources.<sup>5</sup> More recently Vijay Prashad has dubbed the NIEO “the highest point in the Third World Project.”<sup>6</sup> It is easy, then, to understand the allure of recuperative efforts that return to the NIEO project in search of radical embers — starved of oxygen by the neoliberal turn, the debt crisis, and the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s — that might be rekindled today.<sup>7</sup>

Contra this claim, however, I will advance two arguments that correspond to the two main sections of the essay below. First, I argue that despite its important currents of ambition and innovation, the NIEO is best understood as the final expression — one is tempted to say *last gasp* — of “the Bandung era.”<sup>8</sup> Such a periodization — roughly 1955 to 1974 — enables us to consider the dynamic relationship between the state and capital in an era characterized both by decolonization and expanding capital accumulation. Secondly, I argue that the developmentalist demands of the Bandung era run aground on the contemporaneous systemic crisis of capital. For the NIEO articulates its aspiration to build what amounts to an international welfare state for decolonizing nations at precisely the moment that capital tips into an extended, and perhaps terminal, crisis of accumulation. To make this case I will draw upon the persuasive analysis offered by theorists within the critical-theoretical school known largely in German-speaking Marxist circles as *Wertkritik* (often translated as “value-critique” or “value-form-critique”, and typically associated with the journals *Exit! And Krisis*). This essay, more specifically, will consider the work of Robert Kurz, and Ernst Lohoff.<sup>9</sup> In alignment with the *Wertkritik* theorists, I read the 1970s as the decade in which the contradictions immanent to capital’s value-form — particularly a rising organic composition that displaces more value-productive labor than it can absorb — become visible and ultimately disabling for Third World aspiration.<sup>10</sup> From this vantage I contend that the interventions of NIEO ultimately express the contradictions of a transitional moment, forcefully demanding a place for the Third World in a political-economic order, even as the structural preconditions of that order have inexorably begun to unravel.

In elaborating these primary arguments, I endeavor to work within the historical method I glean from Marx’s account of the commodity-form’s historical development:



a relational account of both *movement*, and the *room to move*. At times I foreground local differences and antagonisms in an effort to untangle the contradictory forces at work in the two decades between the Bandung conference and the NIEO Declaration. In these moments I try to identify the real internal fissures that cleave apart what appears to be a unified Third-Worldist bloc and a set of sovereign, self-determining nation-states. At other points I assert that the framework in which such differences must be situated is the unified world market, the structural determinations of which condition the choices and actions of its participants even as the latter forcefully assert their independence. From here the argument pivots to analyze the contradictions of the value-form as such, the room in which the historical actors of the Bandung era moved. I turn to both Marx and the *Wertkritik* thinkers Kurz and Lohoff to consider an objective crisis of capital accumulation — the systemic inability to valorize value — a process that begins concurrently with the NIEO Declaration, and has lasting implications for our historical present.

### **Bookend to Bandung**

My first claim is that the NIEO is the extension, indeed the culmination of a twenty-year political project outlined at the 1955 Asian-African Conference at Bandung.<sup>11</sup> Comparing the 1974 NIEO Declaration passed by the UN General Assembly with the 1955 “Final Communiqué” from the Bandung Conference (the culminating resolution of agreed-upon principles and policy proposals from the twenty-nine participating nations), one finds significant continuities both in specific policy proposals, and in underlying principles.<sup>12</sup>

The span of time that separates the two documents witnessed the formal decolonization of dozens of new nation-states (celebrated in the prelude to the NIEO Declaration as the “greatest and most significant achievement during the last decades”), and both documents share as a foundational principle the condemnation of colonialism in its many forms and the assertion of the right to self-determination, state sovereignty, and national independence as the *sine qua non* of international development.<sup>13</sup> Decrying “colonialism in all of its manifestations” as an “evil which should be speedily brought to an end,” the Bandung Communiqué affirmed the “rights of peoples and nations to self-determination.”<sup>14</sup> The NIEO Declaration likewise claimed as a founding principle the “sovereign equality of States, self-determination of all peoples, inadmissibility of the acquisition of territories by force, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States.”<sup>15</sup> It denounced “neocolonialism in all its forms,” and took the further step, more defiant than the Bandung agreement, to assert the “full and permanent sovereignty of every State over its natural resources and all economic activities,” including the “right to nationalization or transfer of ownership to its nationals.”<sup>16</sup> From this principle of state sovereignty issued a host of policy-oriented proposals that constitute the shared platform of both Bandung and NIEO. These include a range of developmentalist protections and stimuli

around trade, the international monetary system, price controls, technology transfer, raw material export, manufacture and industrialization, oil production and the role of producers' associations, among others.

There is, then, considerable overlap between the documents of Bandung and NIEO, both in the remedies proposed and, more importantly, in the shared premise that decolonizing and recently decolonized nations have an inalienable right to the full set of capacities that inhere to state sovereignty and self-determination. However, despite the forcefulness with which self-determination is asserted as an unassailable truth, the ideal of "independence" — whether as a political or economic actor — remained maddeningly elusive for those nations who had recently or who soon hoped to declare formal independence from their colonial rulers. The slogans of "independence" and "liberation," among the most powerful social ideals of the twentieth century, are gradually emptied of substance during the Bandung era, even as the Third World champions of national self-determination rallied huge popular movements under those banners. The imbalanced international system of states, and the myriad difficulties in establishing politically coherent regionalist or Third-Worldist blocs served to perpetuate and extend the enormous power differential between stronger and weaker states. More important, as the NIEO's allusion to neocolonialism implies, the uneven geographical development between global north and south meant that patterns of capital accumulation and international class relations continued to structure the economic prospects of newly independent states, much as had been the case under direct political rule. Independence remained a politically potent ideal, but the Bandung era puts paid to any straightforward conception of self-determination.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, reconsidering the Bandung era allows us to see some of the contradictions at work that were surely visible to its participants, but that appear resolved in the unified political front asserted in official proclamations. This avowed unity forged, its participants declared, by the shared historical legacy of colonialism, enabled Bandung states to speak collectively of "common interest and concern."<sup>18</sup> The conference has largely occupied this ideal in historical memory, becoming almost synonymous with the emergence of the Third World or the Non-Aligned Movement as a coherent social and political bloc. However, even a cursory review of the historical record reveals that this coherence is illusory from the start. Broad schisms were already apparent in 1955. A mere eight years after partition, the subcontinental rift between India and Pakistan remained acute. Stark geopolitical divisions within the conference arose between those nations whose leaders advocated for non-alignment (India and Ceylon most notably) and those who had joined the South East Asian Defense Treaty Organization (SEATO) (Pakistan, Turkey, the Philippines, Thailand and Japan). The contentious presence of China's Zhou-En-Lai stoked cold-war concerns such as those voiced in a Manila newspaper, which fulminated that the Bandung meeting would "furnish a convenient point of departure for the propaganda of the puppet Peiping Communist

Regime.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed the wavering SEATO nations agree to attend the conference only after receiving explicit sanction from Washington, which encouraged them to counter communist arguments and advance concrete proposals in line with a US economic development model.

These divisions between and among Bandung nations only became more acute in the years following the conference. The two-decade period between Bandung and NIEO witnessed an extraordinary (and, in the mid-1970s, still ongoing) wave of decolonization giving rise to a heterogeneous array of new nation-state formations across the Third World.<sup>20</sup> However, military conflicts between India and China in 1962, India and Pakistan (1956, 1965, 1971), Pakistan and East Pakistan/Bangladesh (1972), among others, further undermined any pretense of South Asian unity in the years immediately following Bandung’s declaration of Asian-African solidarity. Likewise, despite the fervent hopes of pan-Africanists, the decade and a half of African decolonization following Bandung produced no unified continent-wide or federalist (let alone Afro-diasporic) political bloc. Vietnam’s history occupies an important symbolic status in this era: site of both the iconic anticolonial victory of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, and the rather darker “liberation” of Saigon in 1975 after two decades of continuous warfare and untold human suffering. These decades proved particularly damaging for the Third World Left. Consider the consequences of Soviet guidance urging communist parties and working class struggles throughout the Third World to form political alliances with nationalist bourgeois regimes, which led ultimately to the containment and eradication of socialist parties in Nasserite Egypt, Nehruvian India, and perhaps most disastrously to the massacre of between a half-million and a million PKI members following the 1965 coup in Indonesia.<sup>21</sup> While both Bandung and NIEO undoubtedly afford historical examples of a Third-Worldist collective articulating matters of shared and common interest, the unity expressed remained aspirational rather than real, and in fact papered over glaring internal divisions.

An analogous dynamic is evident within the institutional form of the state itself. That is, the apparent unity of nation-state actors at Bandung in fact masks the internal class antagonisms within those states. The critique of class antagonism within the bourgeois state goes back to Lenin, of course.<sup>22</sup> Developing Lenin’s foundational insights, Alex Callinicos and Fred Block offer the concept of a “state manager” to discuss the contradictions of executive state leadership. Their notion, I think, usefully clarifies the distinct but structurally intertwined interests of those political figures who manage the state and those capitalists whose primary motive is private capital accumulation, most particularly as a way of thinking about the twentieth-century experience of relatively isolated Left or Left-leaning states operating within a capitalist world market. Callinicos posits that the interests and actions of state managers and capitalists typically, though not invariably, align. This alliance stems not from the conspiratorial plotting of the capitalist class to control state policy through direct coercion or cooptation (though surely there are many instances where such

collusion does take place); rather, capitalists gain *de facto* political sway because of their disproportionately large role in the state economy, meaning that state managers are inclined to adopt policies that favor capitalists out of a desire to reproduce the social order as a whole. State managers can, of course, emerge from the capitalist class and more or less directly represent that class' interests (setting aside for now the internal divisions within the capitalist class itself). Likewise popular pressure from workers or from those who are dispossessed or discriminated against can at times reorient policies of state managers towards the interests of working class majorities against elites. By and large, however, without exerting direct political control and simply through the independent pursuit of private accumulation, the capitalist class tends to impersonally sway the policies of state managers in their favor simply by dint of their perceived indispensability to the collective well-being of the society as a whole.<sup>23</sup>

This framework, I believe, helps clarify the contradictory positions of Nehru, Sukarno, Chou En-Lai, Nasser, and the other leaders of newly independent states, who in their Bandung speeches make repeated reference to the revolutionary yearnings of the 1.4 billion people — *nearly two thirds of the world's population*, they stress again and again — who live in Asia and Africa. Those figures, on the one hand, are marshaled to assert a political leverage in relations with the First World, a collective authority that Sukarno memorably, if enigmatically, terms “the *Moral Violence of Nations*.”<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the unrest hinted at by those population figures poses perhaps an even greater problem for the new leaders themselves, scrambling to make good on the promise of independence movements and address the surging popular demand for jobs, food, education, health care — in short, the new needs and wants created by capitalist “modernity.” Even those state managers who represent Left political movements and whose individual histories of revolutionary struggle would suggest opposition towards the interests of capital become snared in the dilemma of the state manager sketched above: the structural interdependence between the state and capital means that even revolutionary independence leaders find themselves dependent on capital to address the economic demands of newly liberated peoples. Irrespective of the individual political leanings of Bandung state-managers, newly independent nation-states, one after the next, sought access to money capital, industrial capital, and commodity capital and its promise of development, hoping to remedy decades of enforced dependency.<sup>25</sup>

From one perspective, then, the contradictory forces at play in the Bandung construct an apparent unity that masks internal antagonisms: a unified Third World bloc better conceived as competing national interests; the unified state better understood as competing class interests. As Marx's historical method insists, however, we must situate these very real antinomies within a larger unity. From the perspective of social totality, the heterogeneous constellation of states and classes all remain subject to the determinations of a unified capitalist world market, in particular

capital's immanent requirement to ensure the valorization of value. Understood thusly, national liberation becomes possible politically in part because it removes fetters to capital accumulation. *National liberation*, then, contains the same double sense that Marx ascribes to all forms of freedom under capital: the freedom to act as legal/political subjects (here sovereign states as well as individuals) is predicated upon freeing populations from their means of subsistence. Post-war decolonization subsumes vast new populations into a world market as commodity-subjects and monetary-subjects, even if not always as waged proletarians, thickening the capital relation throughout an ever wider sphere.

Of particular importance here is the changing dynamic of value-productive wage labor that marks the Bandung era. John Smith's valuable study *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century*, cites helpful data on this point. In 1950, approximately seventy million industrial workers, about thirty-four percent of the world's total, lived in "less developed regions"; by 1974, the year of the NIEO resolution, that figure had more than doubled to approximately 180 million industrial workers. The NIEO is launched at the same moment that the global south becomes for the first time home to the majority of the world's industrial workers. If waged manufacturing work is included in these calculations (in addition to industry) the amount of value-productive in the south becomes even greater still. This trend has only accelerated in the intervening years. Indeed one of the defining features of the period immediately following the Bandung era is that the overwhelming majority of the world's proletariat comes to be located outside the historic cradle of industrial capitalism; Smith estimates that by 2010, 79 percent of the industrial workers, and 83 percent of manufacturing workers lived in the global south.<sup>26</sup> I will consider some implications of these quite staggering shifts in more detail below.

The broader point is that the "room to move" within the dialectic I have been sketching above presupposes the Bandung era's ultimate transience — presupposes that the era will be superseded by another at the moment when its internal structures pose a sufficient impediment to the accumulation of capital. When viewed from the hindsight of the present moment, we see that the Bandung era ripened, "as in a hothouse," the contradictions of value production and realization in a then-still-expanding world market.<sup>27</sup> It witnessed the integration of vast new territories and populations into the capital relation, on the one hand creating new branches of capital with new access to raw materials and markets, and on the other hand freeing a latent surplus population of proletarians for value-productive wage work and subsuming them as commodity-subjects.<sup>28</sup> In the process it created an enormous (and still growing) "reserve army" of surplus labor located most notably in surging urban populations in the south, populations often unable to hold regular employment as wage laborers and whose presence serves (among other things) to depress the wages of those who can find employment.<sup>29</sup> In many cases, the process creating this "reserve army" takes a form quite similar to the sorts of original accumulation that Marx



describes in Part Eight of *Capital*, where largely agrarian populations are freed from their land and means of subsistence and forced into wage work (for those “lucky” enough to find it), while once-privately-held land and resources are consolidated by large capitals. But (especially in the post-1970s period) it also takes the form of displaced wage laborers — civil servants, those who had worked in state-subsidized industries, those whose plants are moved to more profitable greenfield sites, those who are displaced by automation or increasing technical requirements — workers who are likewise forced out of their employment to join the ranks of the reserve army. Paradoxically, this rapid, vast process of labor subsumption (vast both in terms of geography and population) took place under the stewardship of state managers from the Bandung nations, many of whom were considered stalwarts of the anti-colonial Left. Ultimately, then, I contend that the NIEO marks the close of the Bandung era not because of any policy choices pursued or not pursued by the state managers of the decolonizing world, but rather because by the time the NIEO Declaration is passed in 1974, capitalism has entered into a phase of crisis (from which it has not yet exited) that structurally precludes the redistributionist aspirations imagined throughout the twenty-year Bandung era. It is to the implications of this crisis of valorization that I now turn.

### **Development without Accumulation**

There is now something approaching broad agreement within contemporary Marxist scholarship (!) that following a two-decade post-war boom (1945-1965), capitalism entered an extended phase of stagnation and crisis beginning sometime during the late 1960s or early 1970s.<sup>30</sup> Since this time much of the world has seen real wages remaining flat or declining, profit rates dipping, unemployment rising, inequality rates within nations surging (including within China, which is often the notable exception to the above trends), and consumption levels maintained through finance and credit bubbles, which in turn introduce new instabilities into the system.<sup>31</sup> Against this backdrop, the four-plus decades since 1970 have witnessed the near universal rollback or outright demise of the Keynesian or social-democratic welfare state policies in the capitalist First World, state-planned economies in the Second World, and developmental state projects in the Third World.

Rather than surveying the rich debates within Marxism regarding this post-1970 era — debates that now have a substantial body of secondary literature — I will focus my attention several critical-theorists within the *Wertkritik* school whose work offers distinctive theses about what they consider an epoch defined by crisis. Although this work has only recently been translated into English, the *Wertkritik* theorists (including Robert Kurz, Ernst Lohoff, Norbert Trenkle, Roswitha Scholz, Claus Peter Ortlieb, and Karl-Heinz Lewed) have since the mid-1980s developed a coherent and provocative critique of fundamental contradictions within the value-form under capital. My thinking about this corpus of work and its implications for reconsidering



the NIEO remains preliminary, if for no other reason than the translated dossier of writings published as a special issue of *Mediations* and in book form as *Marxism and the Critique of Value* represents only a small fraction of the *Wertkritik* corpus. Nevertheless, these thinkers have challenged and deepened my own thinking about the post-1970s era in particular and Marxism more broadly, so I turn now to a pair of provocative essays by Kurz and Lohoff in order to develop an argument about the crisis of accumulation that becomes evident at the moment that the NIEO redistributionist program is launched.<sup>32</sup>

Kurz's and Lohoff's analysis of the post-1970 crisis is simultaneously more and less orthodox in its reading of Marx than the accounts offered by other Marxists who analyze this period. It departs from Marx — or at least it appears to — in its uncompromising dismissal of proletarian class standpoint and struggle (on this, more below). However, it remains exceedingly faithful to Marx, particularly the Marx of *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, in developing its central arguments, which arise directly from Marx's concepts of value, relative surplus value, commodity fetishism, and the tendency towards a rising organic composition of capital. Kurz, in a foundational essay from 1986, emphasizes the central contradiction within capital's chase of relative surplus value: productive efficiencies gained by increasing levels of science and technology that are perfectly rational, indeed compulsory, for any individual capital inexorably undermine accumulation at the scale of total social capital by eliminating the sole source and substance of value creation under capital — labor-power.

That is, compelled by the coercive laws of competition, individual capitals constantly seek new scientific and technological means by which to increase the rate of exploitation through gains in productive efficiency over the social average. These technological advances tend to displace labor as production becomes increasing efficient, shifting the organic composition of capital towards more constant, and less variable capital. As the ratio of constant to variable capital rises, less value is objectified in each individual commodity, which forces individual capitals to grow in scale, producing a greater mass of commodities in order to increase the mass of value (understood by the capitalist as increases in profit). The greater productivity of increasingly mechanized production at larger scales reduces the price of commodities and by extension the value of labor-power as a commodity to be purchased on the market (understood by capitalists as the cost of wages). Such expansion likewise requires more raw materials as well as expanded consumption in order to realize the value (ideally) objectified within the growing mass of commodities. An increased rate of exploitation coupled with an increased mass of commodities produced as capital becomes more concentrated and centralized generates for the individual capitalist a temporary increase in profitability. Indeed, any individual capital must constantly innovate technologically lest it be swallowed by its competitors. From the perspective of capital as a totality, however, the tendency to displace living labor from

production removes the basis for new value creation, undermining the foundation of accumulation. That which is both rational and necessary from the perspective of the individual capital reveals itself to be suicidal from the perspective of capital as a whole.

This tendency towards a rising organic composition of capital can be accommodated so long as new branches of capital are created in which those workers who are displaced from existing branches can find employment, or so long as new populations of commodity-subjects can be subsumed into the capital relation. Indeed, this expansionary requirement is the basis for classical Marxist theories of imperialism (e.g., Luxemburg, Lenin, Bukharin).<sup>33</sup> However — and this warrants emphasis — in the example of the NIEO and the Bandung era, the complete subsumption of the planet is achieved, paradoxically, through *decolonization* rather than (or in addition to) imperialism. The post-war incorporation of the decolonizing nations into the world market facilitated the rapid subsumption of new wage-workers (freed from their land and means of subsistence and increasingly migrating to cities as free, would-be wage-laborers). Further, it establishes new markets (including the creation of new needs and wants among a widening group of monetary-subjects annexed into the commodity relation), new branches of capital, new opportunities for financial investments where money capital could be lent to facilitate productive capital, and an emerging “national bourgeoisie” that worked both in concert and in competition with existing capitals — in short, the expansion, acceleration, and intensification of many tendencies of capitalist imperialism, under the transformed historical circumstances of the 1950s and 1960s.

Kurz, however, asserts that at a certain pivotal moment the absolute limit for such systemic expansion is reached and capital as a whole begins to expel more value-productive laborers than it can absorb. This saturation point, according to Kurz, was reached in the late 1960s or 1970s. The revolutions in micro-electronics and the scientific management of labor provide the final acceleration that pushes the system beyond its tipping point to realize the tendency, always latent in capital’s relentless search for relative surplus value, that value creation itself will slowly recede, marking the end of systemic accumulation. Kurz writes

from now on, it is inexorable that more labour is eliminated than can be absorbed. All technological innovations that are to be expected will also tend only in the direction of the further elimination of living labour, all new branches of production will from the outset come to life with less and less direct human productive labour.<sup>34</sup>

Here the distinction between Kurz and, for instance, Robert Brenner becomes clear. Brenner’s argument reads the post-1970 period as an expression of two contradictory tendencies within capitalism identified by Marx: the tendency of the rate of profit

to fall, and the tendency towards overproduction or under-consumption. Both tendencies, of course, are related to the value-form crisis that Kurz explicates. Kurz, however, would posit a distinction between phenomenal appearance and deep structure. That is, the tendencies of a falling rate of profit or overproduction find expression in the realm of circulation and in the language of price and profit. They can be visible to bourgeois economists and Marxist theorists alike (though in decidedly different ways) through empirical economic data on profitability and productivity. Such crises have erupted periodically throughout the history of capitalism and have been resolved or deferred through a variety of measures, including the expansion to new markets, the creation of new demand, the opening of new branches of capital to absorb displaced labor, the “moral depreciation” of assets, temporal deferral through financial investment, among many others.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, the value-form crisis that Kurz theorizes finds merely its representation in empirical economic data on profitability and the like.<sup>36</sup> The force of his critique, following Marx, is to read crisis in relation to a social abstraction — the aggregate mass of value produced by the total social capital — from which, in turn, issue the determining forms and relations of capital.

For Kurz, following Marx, value is objective under the social relations of capital, but never identical either to the commodities in which value is objectified or to the price through which value is ideally realized. Value only ever finds a representation in the price-form, hence price may mirror value exactly or diverge considerably from its original referent. Indeed this capacity for elasticity is among the key functions of money for Marx.<sup>37</sup> Kurz would consider Brenner’s data on profitability symptomatic of the underlying crisis rather than the source of the crisis itself. Moreover, Kurz contends that the value-form crisis is final and irreversible; it can be deferred (most notably through acrobatic financial and credit instruments that have helped capital stave off a terminal crisis since 1970) but, unlike crises of profitability or overproduction, this value-form crisis cannot be resolved or reversed by capital. Once real accumulation as such has ceased, the objective and subjective correctives to capitalist crisis no longer apply. Kurz writes

There has already existed since the beginning of the seventies... a foreseeable trend according to which the world-market’s room for maneuver begins inexorably to shrink, a new (and, I assert on the basis of the above derivation: final) stage of the “struggle over the markets” has come to pass, which can be negotiated neither by economic nor by political and military means.<sup>38</sup>

This foundational claim of terminal crisis, shared broadly by the theorists associated with the *Wertkritik* tendency, refocuses our attention on the objective “room to move” within capital’s value-form. Accepting Kurz’s premises holds a number of implications

for a historical reading of the NIEO project and the post-1970 period, several of which I will provisionally spell out below. Before returning to the NIEO, however, I want to consider a second line of argument about the state, gestured to by Kurz in the passage above but most clearly articulated by Lohoff, that complicates and extends what I have argued above regarding the contradictory role of state managers in the Bandung era and NIEO project.

Lohoff contends that the political form of the modern state arises not in the wake of capital's ascendance, but rather as the necessary precondition for society's full subsumption into the capital relation. The following passage warrants quoting in full:

In order to be able to act as commodity-subjects people must find already in place certain general infrastructural preconditions without which their mode of existence is impossible. There can be no individual movement from one place to another without usable roads for these individuals' private vehicles. No labor-power can enter the labor market without first passing through educational institutions and being fitted to the universal cultural standards that are deemed necessary. In order that the very preconditions for existence as a commodity-subject should become universally accessible to all potential commodity-subjects, these preconditions may not themselves assume commodity form. The further the development of productivity moves forward the more profoundly and differentially scaled and the more extensive this system of non-commodity infrastructural outlays becomes — and so much so that its maintenance is a concern only the state as abstract universality is in any position to take upon itself. The asocial character of commodity-society imposes on the latter, as still another of its essential aspects, the formation of a second, derivative form of wealth. Were it not for the emergence of a wide-ranging sector of state-organized wealth-production, the victorious onslaught of the primary, commodity form of wealth could never have taken place.<sup>39</sup>

The argument here, in brief, is that the full development of a commodity-society requires for its very existence an established physical and social infrastructure, which by definition cannot take the form of commodities that confront free purchasers in the marketplace itself. Only the state can assume such a role at the scale necessary to produce and reproduce both commodity-subjects and the dense networks of commodity production and circulation needed to establish the social division of labor under capital. The social wealth of the state, which must be meted out to a population with some attention to broad and equitable inclusion, if not universality — in contrast to the market logic of competition and profit — makes possible the “victorious onslaught” of the commodity form of wealth, defined by its “asocial

sociality” (*ungesellschaftliche Vergesellschaftung*), the apt phrase Lohoff uses to express the contradictions of fetishized social relations under the commodity form.<sup>40</sup>

What implications do these arguments from Kurz and Lohoff hold for a reading of the NIEO project and its legacies? First, the claim I make above about the structural impossibility of the NIEO agenda holds true, I think, whether or not one finds the broader claims of Kurz and Lohoff persuasive. That is, from within any of the Marxist perspectives cited above the period following 1970 will be understood as an era of intense and sustained economic crisis and contraction, radically curtailing both the political will and the economic means to implement a redistributionist agenda along the lines expected and demanded by the newly independent nations of the Bandung era. This crisis (singular) is, in fact, partially visible to the drafters of the 1974 NIEO resolution as a series of crises (plural): oil shocks, rising inflation with rising unemployment (so-called “stagflation”), rising US current account deficits and the fragility of the US dollar, the collapse of the Bretton Woods currency regime, as well as (from the inverse perspective) the sharp spike in nationalizing expropriations, labor struggles and wildcat strikes, and other forms of organized social opposition.<sup>41</sup> The resolution itself makes explicit reference to this context of systemic instability: “since 1970 the world economy has experienced a series of grave crises which have had severe repercussions, especially on the developing countries because of their generally greater vulnerability to external economic impulses.”<sup>42</sup> Although specific crises were visible, the NIEO drafters appeared to share a Keynesian faith that the demand generated by a planetary welfare state and the developmentalist aspirations of bringing huge new markets and labor reserves into the orbit of capital had the capacity to reverse what they hoped was a short-lived stagnation. With the benefit of hindsight, however, we can say rather definitively that the post-1970 crisis of capital essentially foreclosed the political possibility of such a redistributionist, demand-oriented, international welfare state solution.

The example of Japan affords us one window into why a south-centric, demand-oriented, Keynesian solution proved unable to generate systemic growth. A participating nation at Bandung, Japan can nominally stand in unison with the other decolonizing Asian-African nations in 1955 (rather disingenuously it must be said, given its own imperial history).<sup>43</sup> However by 1974, Japan was full-fledged economic power and a primary competitor to the US. Marxist economic historians have read Japan’s ascent with somewhat different emphases. Brenner, for instance, situates Japan’s emergence as a dominant economic power within capitalism’s tendency towards a falling rate of profitability and the inevitable coercive, intra-class and inter-state competition that can allow a later-developing bloc such as Japan to exploit new regions or seize technological advantages and hence undermine an existing hegemon such as the US.<sup>44</sup> Presumably the NIEO drafters hoped to see analogous cases throughout the Third World in which late development afforded Bandung nations with competitive advantages on the world market. Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin,



by contrast, believe that Japan's ascent was facilitated by a form of US economic hegemony unique in its efforts to foster system-wide economic growth rather than pursue narrow national self-interest.<sup>45</sup>

Kurz the *Wertkritik* theorists shed a different light on the case of Japan. Their arguments about the end of system-wide accumulation provide a framework for reading both uneven geographical development between core and periphery, as well as those localized pockets of growth that have occurred post-1970. These pockets include not only the profitability generated by Japanese capital in the years immediately leading up to 1970, but also, for example, the emergence of subsequent high-growth nations or regions such as the "Asian Tigers," the "BRIC" nations (China most particularly), and indeed even those developmentalist states within the Third World whose economies were able to prosper for a period through dirigiste policies during the immediate post-independence period.<sup>46</sup> Kurz and Lohoff posit systemic subtraction through individual addition. For instance, Japan's economic growth between 1950-1970 was achieved through increases in productivity within key sectors (relying heavily on the automation of production and the scientific management of labor processes, perhaps most famously with flexible, on-demand production). After a point, however, this growth does not supplement existing global production in, for example, the automobile industry. It comes at the expense of existing auto-makers in the UK, US, and elsewhere, leading to job losses and the push to reduce labor costs and increase automation from the former industrial leaders. But those gains in Japan also precipitate a further rise in the organic composition of capital as a whole. Capital's drive to realize additional relative surplus displaces value-productive laborers in both the established and emerging countries.<sup>47</sup>

Critics will quite reasonably point out that there has been vast proletarianization throughout the global south during this period, most notably in China. This is certainly true, as attested by Smith's figures quoted above. New value-creating living labor has undoubtedly been subsumed into capital (in both real and formal terms), and new markets for increased production have been created in the process. However, several trends temper any straightforward assertion that such value-creation evidences a resurgence of systemic accumulation.

In a contemporary world market with a single division of labor, any car (or a shirt, cell phone, etc.) whether produced in the US, Korea, Mexico, China or elsewhere, must contain roughly the same value. That is, the different capitals producing cars both compete against one another and collectively contribute to establish the average socially necessary labor time that constitutes a car's value. This global competition explains one of the forces that both drives production to the south, and drives productive capital within the south to increasingly mechanize in the search for relative surplus value gains within a single world market. Lower wages in the south (the geographically differentiated value of labor-power or what Smith refers to as "labor arbitrage") do not increase the value of the commodities produced there; they



only increase the ratio of surplus to necessary value (and hence capital's hunt for low wage workers functions as a form of relative surplus value). Cheaper labor as such is not always in the capitalist's interest. A smaller number of workers under conditions of high technical productivity may produce more value (and be more profitable) than a larger number of low-wage workers under less productive conditions. Moving production to lower-wage countries, therefore, only occurs when the cost of labor-power understood in relation to levels of productivity tip into a profitable balance for capitalists. Further, the move to lower-wage countries only provides capitalists with a *temporary* boost in relative surplus, akin to productivity gains achieved through mechanization. Any temporary gains in the proportion of surplus gradually disappear over time as other capitals follow suit in relocating facilities to regions with low-wage workers. Once competitive advantages have been equalized, capital searches anew for relative surplus gains, most typically through intensified productivity via mechanization, which in turn displaces more labor.

But what of those industries in the global south that continue to resist mechanization? Those industries where the low value of labor-power makes it advantageous to maintain organic compositions with high variable and low constant capital, either because there are few competitors working at higher levels of productivity or because something about the concrete nature of the work makes it difficult to automate and mechanize (e.g., with certain kinds of garment work, assembly processes, and agricultural tasks)? Though Kurz and Lohoff do not address this question directly in the essays at hand, their broader framework of value-form critique suggests at least two theoretical responses that posit countervailing tendencies. First, commodities produced under such conditions tend to be low-value goods, and goods produced largely or exclusively under conditions of relatively low productivity (i.e., low-wage, low productivity labor in one region is not competing against high-wage, high-productivity labor elsewhere). Even if such industries are absorbing displaced or latent populations of surplus labor — drawing new wage-workers into value-productive activity under conditions of lower organic composition, and hence producing individual commodities that objectify more value than they would if produced under more mechanized conditions — *the total value of all such commodities remains relatively low.*<sup>48</sup> At the level of any individual branch of industry it appears, and in fact may be, that large numbers of workers are being absorbed into value-productive activity, off-setting the displacement of productive labor in the north. However, when considered from the perspective of the total social capital and the total mass of value being produced, even a large number of workers producing low-value goods cannot produce a sufficient quantity of value to reverse the systemic tendency towards diminishing accumulation. This, ultimately, is why the US can in Panitch and Gindin's schema, remain committed to enhancing system-wide growth by focusing almost exclusively on Europe, Japan and China, while benignly disregarding "the rest of the world."<sup>49</sup>

Second, what appears as low-wage, non-mechanized production becomes integrated to ever-greater degrees into intensive, carefully managed circuits of capital during the post-1970 period. When considered in sum, these circuits reveal themselves to be of a higher organic composition than might initially appear to be the case. Consider such prototypical examples as the low-waged, repetitive, life-threatening work performed by the world's poorest laborers, the majority of whom are women: mining Coltan for iPhones, stitching Nike shoes, assembling Samsung TVs, harvesting coffee beans sold to Nestle, and similar forms of toil. All of these concrete activities continue to require the strong backs, sharp minds, and skilled experience of living labor, and hence resist the uniform tendency towards automation and mechanization. Some of this production — garment work is the classic example — relies on “hybrid,” “flexible,” or “distributed” sites of production, such as home-work, piece-work, subcontracting, sweatshops and small-scale manufacturing. Although such work may appear similar (and in fact is similar as concrete labor) to pre- or early-capitalist manufacturing networks, value-form critique prompts us to consider the subcontracted piece-work of today as qualitatively distinct from the piece-work of earlier centuries. Today this distributed labor is integrated into a sophisticated system of production and circulation with tightly coordinated and managed labor practices, linked directly to centralized capital (located largely, though by no means exclusively in the north). These networks increasingly depend upon the saturation of science, and technologically-enabled forms of management in order to raise the rate of exploitation throughout the circuit. Robotics, automation, and micro-electronics may provide the most celebrated examples of productivity gains through scientific application; however the system-wide application of science to enhance productivity takes many other forms as well. In the cases above the management of supply chains, transport, warehousing, logistics, and a host of efficiencies of scale are made possible by the introduction of science and technology largely within the sphere of exchange.

Furthermore, even the “hybrid” or “distributed” forms of production that characterize certain branches of contemporary capital still contribute to the ever-increasing incorporation of all populations into commodity-society. The poorest and most marginalized of workers are increasingly constituted (by now, almost universally constituted) as monetary-subjects and commodity-subjects, even if they themselves have regular access to neither money nor commodities, let alone value-productive waged employment.<sup>50</sup> We must likewise reckon with the horrific truth that the floor of socially necessary subsistence has greater elasticity than we would like to imagine, and the requirements of basic subsistence continue to be pushed ever-downward — the ultimate race to the bottom (a partial response to Smith's claim that systemic super-exploitation is the source of contemporary profit). Neither the process of pauperization, nor the surplus humanity it produces, are external to capital. Rather they are precise expressions of its defining character: asocial sociality. This is all to say that even the vast proletarianization of workers in the south under

conditions of low organic composition is not in itself sufficient to invalidate the Kurz's claim that the post-1970 era marks the end of accumulation and valorization at the level of the total social capital. It is not the sheer mass of wage-workers that matters; it is their relation to the systemic requirements of, and capacity for, valorization and accumulation.

In analytically developing Marx's dialectic between the systemic displacement of labor and the absorption of new labor under increasingly technologically intensive conditions, the value-form theorists prompt us to consider the sphere of circulation and exchange as well as that of production. This means, for instance, that labor-intensive manufacturing in China (or Mexico, Bangladesh, Vietnam, etc.) may appear to offer sites of capital accumulation that counterbalance losses in the global north. In order for that apparent value to be realized in circulation, however, the purchasers of value-bearing commodities must offer equivalent value in exchange, typically in the universal equivalent money-form, mediated by national currencies. Value-laden commodities produced in China, for example, should be purchased by consumers in the US who exchange an equal value in money (dollars) or commodities in return. Kurz, Lohoff, and other *Wertkritik* theorists question whether this exchange has become increasingly imbalanced, indeed whether it is sustainable only via the elasticities of the money form, and most particularly through forms of fictitious capital, which rest on the ever-receding promise of future value production. As real accumulation slackens, the "purchasing power" of US (productive and unproductive) consumption is based less and less on reserves of objective value, and increasingly on the unstable foundation of credit and finance. If Kurz is correct in his claims about the end of accumulation, Marxists will need to continue to develop more sophisticated analyses of the elaborate architecture of fictitious capital that has been able to keep the system afloat during forty-plus years of decline.<sup>51</sup>

One noteworthy part of that history which relates to the NIEO is the emergence of Euro-dollars as the US current account deficit rose in the 1970s, along with the flood of petro-dollars from oil producing states. This systemic excess liquidity in dollar currency led to notably expanded development lending from northern banks in the 1970s. It is a dark irony, in the context of the NIEO, that much of the borrowing undertaken by Third World states occurs because of cash shortages stemming from OPEC's sharp increases in oil prices. In other words, the very model of Third World resource-based monopoly cartels upon which the NIEO based many of its claims of global leverage was itself partly responsible for the flurry of southern borrowing that levied such devastating effects on those states. Third World debt skyrocketed between 1968 and 1980, growing by a factor of twelve times over that period from \$4.75 billion to \$580 billion. The Volker Shock's strategy to halt US inflation by raising interest rates from 6 or 7 percent to 20 percent sparked the subsequent debt crisis of the 1980s, beginning with Mexico and spreading to states across Latin America and Africa. In the bailout agreements that followed, Citibank, Chase Manhattan,

Bank of America and other northern banks were held largely harmless for their risky lending. By contrast, the World Bank and IMF structural adjustment policies, negotiated bilaterally to prevent the potential leverage of collective default from a Bandung bloc, used debt as a mechanism to pry open modestly-protected dirigiste economies, exposing them to the savageries of neoliberalism. Among the financial instruments devised to ensure repayment was the creation of “debt for equity” swaps that allowed investors to take ownership of companies or resources as a form of repayment for debts owed. Repayment quickly gave way to gross usury. The Third World states entered the crisis owing \$580 billion in 1980. By 2002 they had made \$4.6 trillion in payments, roughly eight times what they originally owed. Given the compounding of interest, however, they still found themselves \$2.4 trillion in the red — four times the debt they owed in 1980. Well worth far more careful study, this history of debt and finance in the aftermath of the NIEO illustrates both the structural relations that make necessary fictitious capital, as well as the manner in which debt can be used to centralize capital by transferring wealth, in this case with devastating effects on Third World states.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, Lohoff’s analysis in particular offers us a way to conceive of the state’s relation to capital that significantly extends the Callinicos/Block conception of the state manager outlined above. While the latter provides an explanation for the tendency of states to align themselves with the interests of capital, Lohoff demonstrates how capital itself relies upon the presence of a parallel, derivative form of non-commodified social wealth, provisioned through the state. The universal subsumption of populations into capital as commodity-subjects requires the universally accessible physical and social infrastructure of the state. This schema provides a structural analysis of the relation between capital and the state onto which the theory of state managers can be nicely grafted. On the one hand, the tendency for state managers to work in the interests of capital is understandably strong as outlined above. On the other hand, many of the newly independent nation states had little or no meaningful state infrastructure or non-commodified social wealth to make accessible to their populations. State managers in the decolonizing world (again, both those who saw state policy as a lever for capital accumulation, and those who saw state policy as a buffer against capitalist exploitation) faced the contradiction of trying to build state capacity and non-commodified social wealth during a period of value-contraction.

In their turn to the World Bank and international development funding, the state managers of the Bandung nations sought to secure capacities that would enable southern states to equitably provision non-commodified social wealth to their mobilized and expectant populations. However, to knock at the door of the World Bank with applications for development aid earmarked for industrialization was to enter partnership with capital and the international financial and credit systems. This contradiction is not absolute, and the strategic choice of southern nations to seek development funds is certainly understandable, even defensible. As Lohoff

argues, the social wealth of the state is the *precondition* for capital accumulation; the latter requires the former. A collaboration between capital and the state makes is part of what John Maynard Keynes, Harry White and the other architects of Bretton Woods had in mind in 1944 when they charged the fledgling World Bank “to promote private foreign investment by means of guarantees or participations in loans and other investments made by private investors; and when private capital is not available on reasonable terms, to supplement private investment by providing... finance for productive purposes...”<sup>53</sup> The notion that a portion of capital’s total surplus value, mediated through a supranational financial institution such as the World Bank, might be distributed to create state capacity that would in turn create the conditions for expanded capital accumulation is not impossible as such. Indeed it appears analogous in some regards to the way Marx characterizes an equalization of the rate of profit across both productive industries and non-productive yet essential industries including merchants and finance capital.<sup>54</sup> Such systemic revenue sharing among the capitalist class, however, and the expansion of capital accumulation upon which it was projected, had become impossible by 1974 if Kurz’s periodization is correct. Development funding coupled with dirigiste regimes in the Bandung states was indeed able to create both social wealth and capital infrastructure in the south for a brief period during the Bandung era; yet it was unable to systemically produce conditions for sufficiently expanded valorization and accumulation.

Paradoxically, development funding’s most successful method of generating profit (though not valorizing value) may have come through the creation of debt — a redistribution of existing wealth, or at best a form of “accumulation without valorization,” to adopt Trenkle’s provocative, if not entirely satisfying, formulation.<sup>55</sup> The creation of perpetual indebtedness and the deepening entanglement of the south into the networks of financial capital points to another contradiction. The crisis of accumulation’s manifestation as debt crisis proved the lever for the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and 1990s and precipitated what is surely among the most rapid and thoroughgoing dismantling of state social wealth ever witnessed. Felt most acutely in the south, this cannibalization of public goods — now frequently termed *neoliberalism* — spread to the north as well. Lohoff allows us to reconceive neoliberalism as the suicidal expression of capital’s need for accumulation, necessitating that capital consume the very forms of social wealth as provisioned by the state on which it depends.

### **Class-Struggle, Value-Struggle, and the Fluid History of the Present**

As I hope my analysis has demonstrated, Kurz, Lohoff, and the other *Wertkritik* theorists, far more rigorously than most, expose the objective determinations of commodity-subjects and value-relations under capital, most notably in the period of crisis following 1970. They offer an exacting critique of the asocial sociality of lives lived amidst the brutalizing structures of capital’s value-form. The rigorous



dialectical method that characterizes their work, however, appears to run aground upon the historical finality of “terminal crisis.” In their disavowal of a working class or proletarian standpoint of immanent critique for the overcoming of capital’s value-form, their dialectic seems to come to an abrupt, ahistorical, and hence decidedly undialectical conclusion. Space does not permit a full analysis of this problem here. Indeed, an adequate treatment would require, minimally, an essay or a book of its own. As will become clear in my remarks below, I have found no fully satisfactory response to what I nevertheless see as a glaring hole in value-form critical theory, a body of thought that I find enormously penetrating in nearly every other way. A few words on this matter, however, are necessary in order to situate *Wertkritik* in relation to the political conjunctures both of the NIEO and of today.

The disavowal of class standpoint can be found throughout the essays in the *Mediations* dossier on *Wertkritik*, but the case is made most explicitly in Norbert Trenkle’s 2006 essay, “Struggle Without Classes.” Trenkle polemicizes against what he calls, following Moishe Postone, “traditional Marxism,” wherein the class struggle between labor and capital is elevated to the primary contradiction of capitalism. While such may once have been the case (though, perhaps, even this is in doubt), Trenkle contends that Post-Fordist changes in the nature of work, the saturation of science and technology throughout the production process, and the universality of the commodity- and value-forms have inexorably undermined the necessary preconditions for a proletarian collective identity and consciousness. Either the moment of its collective consciousness has passed without that class having fulfilled its potential to negate and supplant capitalist social relations, or the very category of proletarian class consciousness has been revealed by history as a metaphysical ideal. Either way, he unequivocally asserts that the proletariat is today incapable of assuming the role of a “generalized social mega-subject” assigned it by “traditional Marxism.”<sup>56</sup> To support his claim Trenkle cites a range of atomizing forces that have contributed to displace, stratify, and splinter the proletariat and proletarian class consciousness: the rising organic composition of capital which perpetually makes labor surplus; the distribution of managerial functions that are assumed increasingly by segments of self-disciplining workers; the transience of jobs (workers changing jobs voluntarily or jobs that are moved to find cheaper labor elsewhere); the steep social differentials that exist between workers including differentials exacerbated by geographical distance, employment type, and social hierarchy; and the increasing pauperization and neglect of populations that have been permanently displaced by capital from wage-labor.<sup>57</sup> If the proletariat is to be defined as value-productive laborers, Trenkle maintains, that pool represents an ever-shrinking and geographically fragmented subsection of humanity. If the proletariat is defined as all people who need to work in order to live — whether actually working or not<sup>58</sup> — then it “becomes a non-concept, for it no longer has the power to discriminate at all. It is then just another word for the general mode of existence in capitalist society.”<sup>59</sup> Either a shrinking minority whose capacity for



systemic disruption is waning, or a baggy, metaphysical universal, the contemporary proletariat in Trenkle's account is unable to assume that role of singular historical subject/object, gravedigger to the capitalist mode of production.

What then might take the proletariat's place? What would "emancipatory struggle without classes" look like?<sup>60</sup> Here, unfortunately, Trenkle is not very precise and his answers not terribly satisfying. He concludes his essay with some affirmative gestures towards a non-hierarchical, anti-identitarian, coalitional politics (holding up the Left-standard examples of the Zapatistas or the *piqueteros* as hopeful if contradictory experiments). He writes

This [coalitional politics] will only succeed if different struggles and conflicts can be linked together across all borders without false proclamations of unity or hierarchies. This linking, however, cannot be derived from presupposed objective or subjective determinations (class standpoint or class struggle). It can only emerge from the conscious cooperation of such social movements that aspire to the abolition of domination in all its facets, and not only as an abstract, distant goal, but also within their own structures and relationships.<sup>61</sup>

Unequivocally rejecting the objective/subjective determinations of class standpoint and urging instead the abolition of totality or of "domination in all its facets," Trenkle here appears to offer little more than a politics of affiliations that assails, without clear distinction, both the structures of the capital relation and its myriad, often contradictory effects or symptoms.<sup>62</sup> As Neil Larsen puts it in his sympathetic but conceptually exacting critique of the political limits of value-form theory, "[t]aken no further than this, do not Trenkle and Postone remain adrift in the political equivalent of an emancipatory 'night in which all cats are grey,' unable to distinguish, except by voluntarist political identifications, between, say, Al Qaeda and the *piqueteros*?"<sup>63</sup> The force of Trenkle's polemic against the presumed certainty of a unified subject/object consciousness characteristic of "traditional Marxism" leaves him with little room from which to assert a genuinely historical mediating subject. Larsen astutely contends that value-form theory has yet to adequately identify a standpoint of immanent critique from which to sustain its dialectical insistence that all historical epochs contain within them the forces that will supersede the existing order: "The mere abstract assertion of the plural, 'non-totalizing form' of the social content (or contents) implied in such an immanent critical standpoint... falls short of an answer here if one keeps to the standards of the Marxian thinking upheld by Postone or Trenkle themselves."<sup>64</sup>

Where does that leave us? Larsen's own answer is suggestive, if preliminary. Larsen contends that if the defining feature of the value-form is the "pure *abstraction* of asocial sociality," then perhaps it "must ultimately be society itself, the very *possibility* of the social in the face of the catastrophe of capitalism, that takes up the role of

historical ‘subject/object.’” As Larsen readily admits, the “still intractable problem of how such a radically *social* Subject — one more radically and concretely totalized than its *class* variant — breaks free of reified into dialectical consciousness remains.”<sup>65</sup> A fundamental — perhaps *the fundamental* — task facing contemporary Marxist thinkers, then, is to both theorize and organize the concrete forms through which the struggle over *the social as such* might emerge as a response to the catastrophic barbarism of capitalist social relations in order to usher in a radically different mode of sociality.

Within the realm of contemporary Marxist scholarship, one place to look in this regard is the recent re-emergence of Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), with its readings of broad-based struggles over sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression as ultimately determined by the capital relation and its need for social reproduction both inside and outside the wage-relation.<sup>66</sup> Especially if paired with value-form feminist critiques such as those by Roswitha Scholz or the Endnotes collective, (connections I have not yet seen but which surely will be forthcoming if they do not already exist) SRT would appear to offer valuable theoretical/political insights into the question of how *the social as such* might emerge as a subject/object position of immanent critique.<sup>67</sup> In a different register, David Harvey’s category of “accumulation by dispossession,” alongside David McNally’s writings on building Left resistance in the wake of what he calls the “Global Slump” offer attempts to understand dispossessed, marginalized, surplus populations as a necessary consequence of the brutalities of the capital relation.<sup>68</sup> In these accounts capital’s surplus populations are seen as the necessary obverse of a wage-laboring proletariat, collectively exploited and dispossessed by capital’s imperatives to accumulate, and hence unified in their structural relation to capital. I am enormously sympathetic to the political impulses of these projects and hope to see them advanced. It must be said, however, that both SRT’s appeals to “feminism for the 99%” or Harvey’s “accumulation by dispossession” leave themselves open to Trenkle’s critique of the proletariat as a baggy, “non-concept,” so broadly inclusive that they risk becoming incapable of seeing, let alone bridging, the real divisions, rifts, and fragmentations that prevent such a radically majoritarian class formation from recognizing itself and acting as such.<sup>69</sup> Whatever their limitations — and space considerations prevent me from giving these ideas the full consideration they surely deserve — such theoretical concepts can be conceived as attempts to affirm the various struggles against racism, sexism, dispossession — “domination in all its facets”? — as *class struggles* immanent to capital. Perhaps the most apt formulation has been proposed by Beverly Best, who has captured the underlying unity between apparently fragmented interests in her category of *value struggles*, struggles that emerge out of and in opposition to the asocial sociality of the value-form.<sup>70</sup>

“As a rule,” Marx tells us, “the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete development, where one thing appears common

to many, to all.”<sup>71</sup> If asocial sociality is the abstract universality of life within the capital-relation, then the rich concreteness of the apparently fragmented struggles of the present ought to be conceived as the “concentration of many determinations, and hence the unity of the diverse.”<sup>72</sup> Value struggles take many concrete forms. Certainly there remains a vast pool of value-productive proletarians, the majority of whom now reside in the global south, the inheritors of Bandung’s Third World legacy. Likewise there are huge populations of unproductive wage laborers, whose individual experiences of exploitation remain almost indistinguishable from those laborers who create surplus value, but whose wages are shared from the total social surplus, to which they only contribute indirectly.<sup>73</sup> Finally, I think it is correct to see the surplus population whose existence is defined by its experience of oppression, discrimination, migration, displacement, dispossession, value-dissociation, and pauperization, as the direct expression of the capital relation rather than external to it — subjects without wages whose lives are nonetheless structured by, and in turn help reproduce, the need to secure commodities and money. Xenophobia, racism, sexism, and a range of other modes of discrimination arise in complex, geographically- and historically-specific forms, but invariably remain structured by the value-form and the capital-relation. Best is surely right, then, to argue that the life and death struggles waged by these populations are, indeed, value struggles. But the question of whether a common opposition to capital’s value-form can be conceived of and acted upon *in common* remains, to my mind, the great aporia of Left thought. Concrete examples of struggle rich in their value-form determinations abound. However, we find precious few historical examples that allow us to envisage a future sociality beyond capital or a historical process in motion with the potential to move us toward that end. To shift into an even more fully Hegelian idiom, it is surely possible, theoretically, to conceive of an abstract value-struggling class “in itself,” but much more difficult to recognize in the present those conditions under which such an abstract totality might attain the consciousness that allows it to act “for itself.” Can there emerge a subject/object capable not only of recognizing itself as the expression of capital’s asocial sociality, but also of acting for itself to overcome the catastrophe of capital?

In wrestling with this dilemma I return to Marx’s rejoinder, with which I began this essay, that the antinomies of history do not resolve contradictions, but rather provide “the form within which they have room to move.” An important corollary to this can be found in the Postface to the Second edition of *Capital Vol. 1*, where Marx clarifies that any fully dialectical account of an existing historical formation, “simultaneously includes recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion.”<sup>74</sup> The *Wertkritik* claims of Trenkle, Kurz, and Lohoff respond to and in turn reproduce a certain a hopelessness and cynicism about the empirical realities of fragmentation, alienation, reification, and human suffering that characterize the present and that appear to loom in even more terrifying ways over the foreseeable future. This, I submit, is a

predictable symptom of asocial sociality itself, unsurprisingly intensified during periods of crisis. That said, however unsatisfying Trenkle's gestures towards a non-hierarchical, non-totalizing "struggle without classes" may be, they nevertheless suggest that he has not entirely resigned himself to a catastrophism in which the inevitable negation of capitalism can only mean barbarism or extinction. The demands of the present require that we, too, hold to the recognition that our contemporary moment is historical. That is, the historical present remains "in a fluid state, in motion," with "room to move," a principle all the more salient and necessary in the face of crisis. If we should be wary of metaphysical appeals to proletarian class consciousness absent an empirical subject, even more so must we remain skeptical about eschatological metaphysics that appear to announce an end to history. Crisis as such cannot resolve underlying contradictions and we should resist the temptation to celebrate its strictly negative potential. Marx writes, "crises are never more than *momentary*, violent solutions for the existing contradictions, violent eruptions that reestablish the disturbed balance *for the time being*."<sup>75</sup> Best's formulation of value-struggles reasserts the necessary commitment to a critical theory of determination relative to the value-form that in turn posits the necessity of historical actors to not merely negate capitalism, but also to move beyond it and establish a society able to provide for human needs and capabilities. In struggling to concretize the contents of how value struggles or a struggle over the social as such might manifest in the world, I take comfort in McNally's stirring words on reform *and* revolution:

Every mass movement to change the world begins with struggles to reform society. No movement for radical change begins by demanding revolution as such. Instead, world-transforming struggles emerge when oppressed people take to the streets and shut down places of work to demand a living wage, civil rights, a shorter working day, housing for all, or an end to war. It is in the course of mobilizing — in the process of reclaiming the streets, creating roadblocks, occupying workplaces, deliberating in mass assemblies, creating new forms of democratic self-rule — that people gain a sense of their own power, expand their horizons, and begin to imagine that another world is truly possible.<sup>76</sup>

This, of course, is no answer in itself; it asserts only that the subject/object of history will emerge in its becoming. But it places critical emphasis on the process of affirmative struggle with an optimism of the will that consciousness of and for value-subjects must follow from our efforts to remake a sociality radically different from the asociality of the capital-relation.

### **Committed Struggle**

In assessing the potential relevance of the NIEO for contemporary struggles, then,

we can and should look back to the Bandung era for its legacy of committed struggle. Would that we could rekindle in our age those powerful utopian currents that moved so many during the era of liberation. But if we are to look to NIEO for a model of Third World radicalism, we must recognize that its political and economic programs were forged in response to the value-dynamics of the early years of the Bandung era. Politically, the program emerges from a period marked by the post-war expansion of a US-led world market accompanied by the slackening of direct political control of European states over their colonial territories. It asserted Third World alignments and international governance founded on the principles of national sovereignty and the right to self-determination, principles that the era's protagonists considered unassailable. It envisioned global wealth redistribution, leveraged through expanded consumption demands, direct monopoly control over natural resources, threats of nationalization, embargo and/or South-South economic cooperation. From the historical vantage of 1974, this program was both utopian as a response to colonial rule and the ongoing unevenness of imperial domination, and eminently rational as a pragmatic response to the value-dynamics of the Bandung era.

Indeed contemporary Marxist thinkers such as Prabhat Patnaik, following Samir Amin, continue to argue that Third World states, in the absence of any sufficiently powerful international peasants' or workers' movements, should practice forms of strategic de-linking in order to resist imperialist coercion and claw back some of the gains made during the post-independence period of dirigisme.<sup>77</sup> Such a model would be in line with the tenets of the NIEO program, and offers a politically rational program of reforms that, if achieved, might provide some protections to the most exploited segments of the contemporary workforce. Given that it would require substantial Left victories to reorient existing state policy, de-linking represents a comparatively radical program for Third world states mired in the post-1970s crisis that has, among other things, considerably diminished those states' capacity to resist imperialist capital. The NIEO drafters, however, posited an even more ambitious horizon of activity. They envisioned the collective withdrawal of economic participation by a Third World bloc as a lever to radically remake structural relations within a capitalist world market. In asserting the ideal of a NIEO, its drafters attempted to lay claims to the radical legacies of internationalism and anti-capitalism (of a sort). And yet, they asserted such claims through the institutional mechanisms of international law and the United Nations Assembly rather than through the mobilization of class struggle or value struggle in relation to a radicalized Third World liberation movement. The NIEO, whether by choice or coercion, was ultimately left to fight only with the weapons of the weak. Likewise de-linking reforms will never simply be achieved through treaties or international agreements; as McNally reminds us, they, too, will need to be won through mass struggle, perhaps setting in motion more revolutionary demands.

The fact, therefore, that the NIEO was forced into a pragmatic, reformist posture, need not in itself be damning. Reform can transform into revolution under the right



conditions. But in this case the reformist program was mismatched to the value dynamics of its moment. As I have tried to demonstrate above, the NIEO, forged in relation to national liberation struggle and two decades of capitalist expansion, was untenable by 1974 as capital entered its sustained crisis. By reexamining the historical record of Bandung and NIEO in light of the value-form critique of Kurz, Lohoff, and Trenkle we find that the Bandung-era-victories ultimately hastened the further development of capital and intensified the contradictions of valorization within the world market. The developmentalist project of Bandung and NIEO opened virtually the entire planet to capital's reach. It subsumed huge segments of the world's population into productive and unproductive wage labor (unevenly, of course). But it did so under conditions that, at the level of the total social capital, displaced more value-productive labor than it could absorb. Moreover, the Bandung era's principal victories — the end of direct colonial rule with all its attendant brutalities, the establishment of independent, self-determining nation states, and the expanded social horizons for huge portions of the world's population (all of which should be celebrated) — emerged concurrently with a systemic crisis of accumulation that forced capital to cannibalize social wealth in its state form. Ultimately this dynamic assumed its most devastating forms of austerity and structural adjustment within the Bandung states themselves, and further undermined the preconditions for expanded accumulation even as vast numbers of commodity-subjects were newly pulled into the capital relation, often under the banner of national liberation.

I remain skeptical, therefore, about efforts to excavate Bandung and NIEO as models of radicalism that might be recovered by Left movements of our day. Nevertheless, even losses or failed initiatives provide necessary lessons and leave structural legacies. A great deal can be gained by a careful historical consideration of the Bandung era. At least three distinct legacies from that period continue to shape our own. First, in the aftermath of Bandung, it has become inconceivable to imagine a Left political agenda that is not thoroughly grounded in the critique of capital's relation to imperialism, racism, and uneven geographical development. This critique did not originate in the Bandung era; but Bandung cements it as an incontrovertible element of any struggle for emancipation and equality. Second, the value struggles of the Bandung era create the conditions for the export of productive industry and manufacturing to the global south, and the subsequent proletarianization of vast numbers of workers. No serious assessment of contemporary capitalist production or its source of value — productive, waged workers — can fail to consider the International Division of Labor that arises in the wake of Bandung. Third, and finally, the Bandung era transformed relations between the dynamics of value accumulation and struggles over the state and over social wealth. On the one hand, the Bandung era witnessed the near-universalization of self-determination, with the number of independent, sovereign states roughly tripling during the era of liberation.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, the period oversees a qualitative shift in the relationship between the state and the provisioning of social



wealth under conditions of value-crisis, setting in motion the radical dismantling of many southern states leveraged by debt, structural adjustment, and neoliberal austerity.

The NIEO, then, offers us no ready-made political program of South-South radicalism that might be retooled for our moment. The conjuncture from which it arose, and which it strove to overcome, has now been fully superseded by an epoch characterized by a crisis of accumulation that has metastasized into all manner of financial, political, ecological, and social crises. This value crisis has both hollowed out the promise of national liberation and foreclosed any possibility of a developmentalist, demand-oriented, international redistributionist program along the lines envisioned by the NIEO. That said, the value struggles of today take place within the permanently altered landscape of a world market forged in part by the value struggles of the Bandung era: its critique of imperialism, its near-universal subsumption of commodity-subjects, its aspirational calls for national liberation, and the destruction of social wealth in the state form that follow in its wake. If the political content of the era's radicalism is irretrievably of the past, the sedimented legacies of Bandung nevertheless persist into our own time, adding structural features to the historical forms within which we must now find the room to move.

## Notes

1. This essay had its genesis in an engaging weeklong seminar to reconsider the legacies of the NIEO held from April 30-May 4, 2014 in Kandersteg, Switzerland graciously hosted by the editors of the journal *Humanity* and New York University's Remarque Institute. The first body section of this essay draws heavily from my previously published article: "Bookend to Bandung: The New International Economic Order and the Antinomies of the Bandung Era," *Humanity* 6.1 (2015) 33-46. I am grateful to the editors of *Humanity* for their willingness to allow a re-printing of this material. Thanks to Neil Larsen, who was also present at the Kandersteg seminar, and whose tutelage about *Wertkritik* and comments on an earlier draft were indispensable. I likewise thank my colleague Paul Stasi, whose predictably helpful feedback has sharpened my arguments and untangled many unwieldy sentences. Finally, I am grateful to the insightful challenges posed by Nicholas Brown and the *Mediations* editors.
2. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1976) 198.
3. Marx, *Capital* 125.
4. Julius K. Nyerere, "Unity for a New Order" (speech, Arusha, Tanzania, February 12, 1979) 7.

5. Mouari Boumediene, "The Problems of Third World Development," *Black Scholar* 6.8 (1975) 2-10.
6. Vijay Prashad, *The Poorer Nations* (London: Verso, 2012) 3.
7. See, for example, Prashad, *The Poorer Nations*, and the special NIEO issue of *Humanity*, in particular, Nils Gilman's contribution, "The NIEO: A Reintroduction," *Humanity* 6.1 (2015) 1-16.
8. I've adopted the term "Bandung Era" from Neil Larsen, "Imperialism, Colonialism, Postcolonialism" in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, eds. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) 32.
9. Marxist scholars in the Anglophone world who do not read German owe a collective debt of gratitude to Neil Larsen, Mathias Nilges, Josh Robinson, and Nicholas Brown, who have edited and translated a dossier of *Wertkritik* essays published as special double edition of *Mediations*, "Dossier: Marxism and the Critique of Value," *Mediations* 27.1-2 (2013-14). The dossier is also published in book form as *Marxism and the Critique of Value* (Chicago: M-C-M' Publishing, 2014). Henceforth, when citing specific passages I will refer to the book publication, since that allows me to identify specific pages.
10. The organic composition of capital is referenced repeatedly throughout *Capital*, and forms the basis for Marx's falling rate of profit arguments in volume 3. The concept is most concisely introduced in *Capital* 762.
11. Though Bandung is a convenient naming convention, the Afro-Asian conference itself has, of course, many intellectual lineages including the various pan-African Congresses held in London (1910), Paris (1919), London, Paris, and Brussels (1921), London, Paris, and Lisbon (1923), New York (1927), and Manchester (1945). See George Padmore, *Colonial and Coloured Unity: A Program of Action: History of the Pan-African Congress* (London: The Hammersmith Bookshop, 1947). Sukarno opens his speech at Bandung by noting how many of the Bandung attendees were also present at the 1927 "League Against Imperialism and Colonialism" in Brussels. George McTurnan Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956) 40.
12. I have written about the Bandung conference elsewhere, though I approach the material with a different method and emphasis here. See Bret Benjamin, *Invested Interests: Capital, Culture, and the World Bank* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) 117-134.
13. "Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order," UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 3201 (S-VI), 1 May 1974.
14. Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference* 80-81.
15. "NIEO Declaration"
16. "NIEO Declaration." The term *neocolonialism* comes into broad usage only after the publication in 1965 of Kwame Nkrumah's book by the same name. Nkrumah, the first President of an independent Ghana, was a celebrated attendee at Bandung. Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: International Publishers, 1966). Here, the NIEO echoes the UN's Charter for Economic Rights and Duties of States, passed in 1974 as well. The Charter likewise declares the rights of states to nationalize foreign property, upending the existing regime of international property rights law of which the US according to Stephen J. Korbin, had been "the principal guarantor." The early- to mid-1970s represented the high point of such nationalizations, most notably in manufacturing, and the mining and petroleum industries. The number of expropriation acts jumped from only 6 in 1960 to 68 in 1974 and 83 in 1975. These numbers fall precipitously by

- the end of the decade, and the 1980s see single digit or zero expropriations annually. See Stephen J. Korbin, "Expropriation as an Attempt to Control Foreign Firms in LCDs: Trends from 1960-1979," *International Studies Quarterly* 28.3 (1984) 333-336 and Michael S. Minor, "The Demise of Expropriation as an Instrument of LDC Policy, 1980-1992," *Journal of International Business Studies* 25.1 (1994) 180.
17. Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, gives voice to a related assessment of the contradictions within the NIEO: "What we have in common is that we are all, in relation to the developed world, dependent — not interdependent — nations. Each of our economies has developed as a by-product and a subsidiary of development in the industrialized north, and is externally oriented. We are not the prime movers of our own destiny. We are ashamed to admit it; but economically we are dependencies — semi-colonies at best — not sovereign states." Nyerere, "Unity for a New Order" 5.
  18. *The Asian-African Conference* 76.
  19. *Daily Mirror*, 19 March, 1955, Manila, in *Asian-African Conference: Views and News* (The National Committee for the Commemoration of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Asian-African Conference, 1985) 14.
  20. Consider the historical synchronicity that witnessed, just weeks prior to the NIEO declaration, a coup in Portugal that was in no small part the result of the African national liberation struggles in the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau/Cape Verde, the latter of which was home to the seminal Marxist anti-colonial theorist Amilcar Cabral, who himself had been assassinated a few short months before.
  21. This traces back to the Lenin-M.N. Roy "Theses on Colonialism and the National Question" from the 1920 Second Congress of the Third International. Although the rhetorical shift from "bourgeois-democratic" to "national revolutionary" tries to distinguish between more and less revolutionary forms of national liberation, the Congress admits that all such national movements essentially are of a bourgeois character. See "Minutes of the Second Congress of the International, Fourth Session," 25 July, 1920 (Marxist Internet Archive). <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/cho4.htm>
  22. V.I. Lenin, "The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution." (Marxist Internet Archive) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/>. See especially Chapter 1, "Class Society and the State."
  23. Alex Callinicos, *Imperialism and Global Political Economy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009) 84-93. Fred Block, "The Ruling Class Does Not Rule," *Revising State Theory: Essays in Politics and Postindustrialism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987) 51-68.
  24. *The Asian-African Conference* 46.
  25. Consider, for instance, the following recommendation from the Bandung Final Communiqué: "The early establishment of the Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development; the allocation by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development [the World Bank] of a greater part of its resources to Asian-African Countries; the early establishment of the International Finance Corporation [a member of the World Bank Group]." Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference* 77.
  26. John Smith, *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016) 100-104. Smith, in his salutary effort to develop a value theory of Imperialism, places great emphasis on super-exploitation as an explanation for wage differentials between north and south. My own

- reservations about the concept of “super-exploitation” in relation to the falling rate of profit are very similar to those expressed by Michael Roberts’ in his helpful review and discussion of Smith’s book. Roberts, “Imperialism and Super Exploitation” and “Thoughts on the Debate about Imperialism.”
27. Marx is fond of this metaphor when referring to the role of colonies in the development of capital. See among other places *Capital* 915, 918 and Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1973) 225.
  28. Marx discusses “latent” populations and “reserve army” in *Capital* 796, 784. The entirety of Chapter 25, “The General Law of Accumulation” is essential for the argument developed in this paragraph and throughout the essay. As Marx writes, “Capital acts on both sides at once. If its accumulation on the one hand increases the demand for labor, it increases on the other the supply of workers by ‘setting them free,’ while at the same time the pressure of the unemployed compels those who are employed to furnish more labor, and therefore makes the supply of labor to a certain extent independent of the supply of workers. The movement of the law of supply and demand of labor on this basis completes the despotism of capital.” *Capital* 793.
  29. On urbanization, see Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006). On the role of a reserve army to maintain imperialist coercion see John Smith, *Imperialism In the Twenty-First Century* and Utsa Patnaik and Prabhat Patnaik, *A Theory of Imperialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), especially 47-60.
  30. Among many others, see John Bellamy Foster and Robert McChesney, *The Endless Crisis: How Monopoly-Finance Capital Produces Stagnation and the Upheaval from the USA to China*, Monthly Review Press, 2012); Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (London: Verso, 2006); Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); the *Endnotes* journal/book series; Chris Harman, *Zombie Capitalism: Global Crisis and the Relevance of Marx* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009); David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Andrew Kliman, *The Failure of Capitalist Production: Underlying Causes of the Great Recession* (London: Pluto Press, 2012); Larsen et. al., *Marxism and the Critique of Value*; David McNally, *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance* (Oakland: PM Press, 2011); Leo Panitch and Sam Gindon, *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of an American Empire* (London: Verso, 2012); Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 1993); Smith, *Imperialism In the Twenty-First Century*. McNally represents a variation on the theme in that he does not consider this period as a single, extended crisis, but rather asserts there was a return to profitability in the 1980s, followed by decline and what he predicts as a decade-long global slump in the wake of the Great Recession.
  31. These trends are particularly true within the US, Europe, and Japan; China poses a complex exception. It has experienced considerable economic growth and witnessed enormous proletarianization during this period. However inequality rates have continued to surge in China despite this growth. See McNally, *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance*; Bellamy Foster and McChesney, *The Endless Crisis*; and (on inequality) Cristopher Lakner and Branko Milanovic, “Global Income Distribution: From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to the Great Recession,” *The World Bank Economic Review Advance Access*.

32. Robert Kurz, "The Crisis of Exchange Value: Science as Productivity, Productive Labor, and Capitalist Reproduction" in *Marxism and the Critique of Value* 17-76; Ernst Lohoff, "Off Limits, Out of Control: Commodity Society and Resistance in the Age of Deregulation and Denationalization" in *Marxism and the Critique of Value* 151-186.
33. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London: Routledge, 2003). Nikolai Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1929). V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2010). I cite the LeftWord edition of Lenin to highlight the wonderful introduction by Prabhat Patnaik.
34. Kurz, "The Crisis of Exchange Value" 21.
35. Again, much of this forms the foundation of Marxist theories of Imperialism. On "moral depreciation," see *Capital* 528 and Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 2, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1978) 250, 264.
36. On the distinction between profit and surplus value see *Capital*, Vol. 3 267-69.
37. See Chapter 3 of *Capital Vol. 1* including the following passage: "The possibility, therefore, of a quantitative incongruity between price and the magnitude of value, i.e., the possibility that the price may diverge from the magnitude of value, is inherent in the price-form itself. This is not a defect, but, on the contrary, it makes this form the adequate one for a mode of production whose laws can only assert themselves as blindly operating averages between constant irregularities." *Capital* 196. See also the Chapter on Money in *Grundrisse* 115-238.
38. "The Crisis of Exchange Value" 27.
39. Lohoff, "Off Limits, Out of Control" 5.
40. "Off Limits, Out of Control" 4.
41. See note 17.
42. NIEO Declaration.
43. Even by 1955 Japan's remarkable period of economic growth had begun. The decade of 1950-60 sees enormous gains in manufacturing investment which yields output gains averaging 16.7 percent each year. That growth continues spectacularly, with corresponding increases in GNP, up to its high point in 1970, where Japan's profitability far outpaces the US and Germany. Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence* 80-93.
44. *The Economics of Global Turbulence* 80-93.
45. Panitch and Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism*.
46. Utsa and Prabhat Patnaik lean heavily on this period of dirigisme in their arguments in favor of strategic de-linking for Third World states who are attempting to reverse the coercive pressures of imperialist globalization, Patnaik and Patnaik, *A Theory of Imperialism*.
47. Joshua Clover and Aaron Benavav make similar claims about the BRICs nations, arguing that although industries in these nations may initially enter at a lower organic composition than competitors in the north, the overall tendency towards mechanization and intensified productivity continues across the world market, displacing more value-productive labor than can be absorbed by industrial capitals located either in the north or the BRICs countries. Clover and Benavav, "Can Dialectics Break BRICS?" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113.4 (2014) 743-759.
48. Utsa and Prabhat Patnaik grant this notion, though argue that the use-values of southern goods

have become indispensable in northern markets. David Harvey refutes the Patnaik's argument about use-value in his commentary, included in *A Theory of Imperialism*.

49. Panitch and Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism* 102.
50. The formulation "monetary-subjects without money," or "commodity-subjects without commodities" recurs throughout *Marxism and the Critique of Value*. See "Off Limits, Out of Control" 161, and Claus Peter Ortleib, "A Contradiction between Matter and Form: on the Significance of the Production of Relative Surplus Value in the Dynamic of Terminal Crisis" 117. As I understand it, the phrase originates from Kurz's *Der Kollaps der Modernisierung: Vom Zusammenbruch des Kasernensozialismus zur Krise der Weltökonomie* [*The Collapse of Modernization: From the Breakdown of Barracks Socialism to the Crisis of the World Economy*] (Frankfurt: Eichborn, 1991).
51. See, for instance, Norbert Trenkle, "Labor in the Era of Fictitious Capital," trans. Joe Keady, *Krisis* 3 (2015). This line of argument is further developed in *Die grosse, Entwertung* (2012). An analytically distinct variation on these claims that the explosion of finance capital has its roots in managing a fundamental crisis of also appears in the monopoly capital school of Marxist thought associated with the Monthly Review. See Paul M. Sweezy and Harry Magdoff, *Stagnation and the Financial Explosion* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987). For a recent reevaluation of fictitious capital and the value-form in relation to Marxist writings on finance, see Beverly Best, "Political Economy Through the Looking Glass: II Imagining Six Impossible Things about Finance before Breakfast" *Historical Materialism* 27. (2017) 76-100.
52. The statistics on Third World Debt are taken from *Global Slump* 98, 127. See also Elmar Altvater, et. al., *The Poverty of Nations: A Guide to the Debt Crisis from Argentina to Zaire* (London: Zed Books, 1991); Sue Bramford and Bernardo Kucinski, *The Debt Squads: The US, the Banks, and Latin America* (London: Zed Books, 1988); Susan George and Fabrizio Sabelli, *Faith and Credit: The World Bank's Secular Empire* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Eric Touissant, *Your Money or Your Life: The Tyranny of Global Finance* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005). On the Euro-dollar market, see *The Making of Global Capitalism* 118-20 and *Global Slump* 90-92.
53. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, "Articles of Agreement" Article 1.ii.
54. Marx, *Capital* vol. 3 273-301.
55. Trenkle, "Labor in the Era of Fictitious Capital." While I am persuaded by much of this essay, the formulation "capital accumulation without capital valorization" seems to me questionable. Similarly overstated is the later claim that "capital has become completely self-referential; the commodity that has the magic quality of augmenting capital comes about within the sphere of capital itself." Valorization, as I understand it, is what defines true accumulation as distinct from, for instance, the centralization of capital. It seems to me that Trenkle here conflates value and the appearance of value for hyperbolic effect. His term "induced value production," which references "the imaginary material that underpins financial markets' future expectations," better captures the fictitious character of future value that is anticipated — and which circulates independently even in this anticipated form — but will ultimately never be produced.
56. Norbert Trenkle, "Struggle Without Classes" in *Marxism and the Critique of Value* 202.
57. Trenkle, "Struggle Without Classes" 204-206.
58. It is worth noting that this corresponds quite closely to a definition Marx provides for the proletariat



in *Capital*, “‘Proletarian’ must be understood to mean, economically speaking, nothing other than ‘wage laborer,’ the man who produces and valorizes ‘capital,’ and is thrown onto the street as soon as he becomes superfluous to the need for valorization...” *Capital* 764n1. It is also a concept that recurs throughout *Grundrisse*. For example, “the creation of surplus labor on the one side corresponds to the creation of minus-labor, relative idleness (or *not-productive* labor at best), on the other. This goes without saying as regards capital itself; but holds then also for the classes with which it shares; hence of the paupers, flunkeys, lickspittles etc., living from the surplus product” *Grundrisse* 401n. Or, “It is already contained in the concept of the *free labourer*, that he is a *pauper*: virtual pauper.. Only in the mode of production based on capital does pauperism appear as the result of labor itself, of the development of the productive forces of labor” (604)

59. “Struggle Without Classes” 208.
60. “Struggle Without Classes” 221.
61. “Struggle Without Classes” 220.
62. Trenkle’s arguments about totality follow from Postone. They suggest that totality comes to define capitalism because capital creates a “qualitatively homogeneous ‘substance,’” abstract human labor. Hence, in the words of Postone, “the historical negation of capitalism would not involve the *realization*, but the *abolition*, of the totality.” Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, qtd. in Trenkle, “Struggle Without Classes” 213.
63. Larsen, “Lukács Sans Proletariat” in *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence*, eds. by Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (London: Bloomsbury, 2011) 92.
64. Larsen, “Lukács Sans Proletariat” 92.
65. “Lukács Sans Proletariat” 97, 96. Larsen, thinking alongside Lukács here, refuses to abandon totality, and instead appears to posit a totality immanent to capital that might, in turn, remake social relations based on premises beyond abstract human labor.
66. See, for instance, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharaya, (London: Pluto Press, 2017).
67. Roswitha Scholz, “Patriarchy and Commodity Society: Gender Without the Body” in *Marxism and the Critique of Value*. “The Logic of Gender: On the Separation of Spheres and the Process of Abjection,” *Endnotes Collective*.
68. *The New Imperialism* 137-182; *Global Slump*. McNally is associated with SRT as well, contributing a thoughtful critique of intersectionality to the collection cited in note 66.
69. Of particular concern from the perspective of value-form critique is the fact that Harvey’s “accumulation by dispossession” seems to conflate “accumulation” with what Marx would term the “centralization” of capital. The former presupposes the ongoing valorization of surplus value — the absence of which, for value-form critique, defines contemporary capitalism — whereas the latter refers to the relative distribution of capital. *Capital* 777.
70. Best, in a reading of Joshua Clover’s *Riot, Strike, Riot* has offered some valuable preliminary theorizing of the continuity between nineteenth-century and contemporary forms of collective struggle, arguing that struggles over both sites of production and circulation constitute different modes of value struggle: “Value Crisis and Value Struggle” unpublished conference paper delivered at Historical Materialism’s “The Great Transformation,” Montreal, Canada, May 18, 2018, and in revised

form at the Marxist Literary Group's "Institute for Culture and Society," Albany, NY June 20, 2018.

71. *Grundrisse* 104.
72. *Grundrisse* 101.
73. See, for example, *Capital*, vol. 3 172, 179, 298, 406-408.
74. *Capital* 103 (emphasis added).
75. *Capital* vol. 3 357.
76. *Global Slump* 175-76.
77. See Prabhat Patnaik, "De-Linking' and Domestic Reaction," *People's Democracy*, [https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2015/0830\\_pd/\"de-linking\"-and-domestic-reaction](https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2015/0830_pd/\) and *A Theory of Imperialism* 152-153.
78. For instance, consider the number of World Bank member states. Prior to Indian independence in 1947, there were 40 members. By the time of the NIEO Declaration in 1974 that number climbed to 123. Currently there are 189. [www.worldbank.org/en/about/leadership/members](http://www.worldbank.org/en/about/leadership/members).

## **Explorations of the Political/Ideological Unconscious: Fredric Jameson and Juan Carlos Rodríguez**

**Malcom Read**

While the notion of the unconscious perforce remained embryonic in Marx, who was, after all, writing in a pre-Freudian age, it received an original treatment at the hands of Althusser, for whom ideology was eminently unconscious in its functioning. Fredric Jameson and Juan Carlos Rodríguez both took the French philosopher as their point of departure to theorize respectively the "political unconscious" and the "ideological unconscious." Superficially, they appear to have much in common: Jameson begins *The Political Unconscious* (1981) with the command to "always historicize," whereas Rodríguez protests at the outset of *Theory and History of Ideological Production* (1975) that "literature has not always existed." In other respects, however, their works are radically divergent: Jameson's re-inscribes Althusser within the framework of a Hegelian Marxism based upon the subject/object opposition, whereas Rodríguez's foregrounds the notion of the social formation structured on the basis of a mode of production. The consequences for their literary analyses are far-reaching: Jameson confines his attention to the (post)modern culture of "late capitalism", whereas Rodríguez traces the transition from feudalism to early capitalism.<sup>1</sup>

We will be exploring below the definition and determination of two theoretical concepts, namely the "*ideological unconscious*" and the "*political unconscious*," both rooted in Althusser's understanding of Marx and his relation to Hegel but developed along very different, even contrasting lines in, respectively, the work of Juan Carlos Rodríguez and that of Fredric Jameson. Before entering into detail, let us broadly locate the relevant texts and their authors in their social and intellectual contexts.

While Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* appears in 1981, some six years after the publication of Rodríguez's *Theory and History of Ideological Production*, it has its origins in an earlier period — by his own reckoning, Jameson was a product of the late 1950s, otherwise the age of McCarthyism, and of an academy lacking not only any sense of affinity with the Soviet Union but also anything resembling the tradition of Western Marxism.<sup>2</sup> To have matured intellectually during that decade meant for many on the

Left, including Jameson, to have imbibed the existential philosophy of Sartre, together with its Hegelian brand of Marxism; and while certainly the latter was conspicuous by its absence from the American's early research, it was perhaps inevitable that, following in the wake of Sartre, his theorization of the unconscious, when eventually undertaken, should take a distinctively "political form," inflected along the lines of an Hegelianized Marxism. Such political allegiances notwithstanding, Jameson would look to rest his political unconscious upon a reading of the resolutely anti-Hegelian work of Althusser. Other key ingredients would be provided by Lacanian psychoanalysis. The final result, although undoubtedly provocative, was destined to enjoy a wide currency and to be widely debated.<sup>3</sup>

Even at this introductory stage, it is impossible not to pose the obvious question: how does Jameson manage to reconcile such contradictory attachments? The answer, as we will see, is that the matrix effect of a social formation, as theorized by Althusser, will be systematically reworked so as to eliminate its internal structural levels and thereby to bring it into line with the Hegelian notion of Absolute Spirit. Eliminated also is the alleged "break" between the early and late Marx, upon which Althusser otherwise insists, and the consequent displacement of focus from subject to structure. In sum, with the Althusserian threat attenuated if not entirely removed, the Hegelian can freely continue to prioritize the subject/object opposition fundamental to bourgeois ideology – which doubtless helps explain Jameson's widespread appeal in the US academy and elsewhere – and, correspondingly, to prioritize a subjective *consciousness*. To the latter, the Jamesonian "political unconscious" will always remain mortgaged.

The "ideological unconscious" is systematically theorized for the first time by Rodríguez in his *Theory and History of Ideological Production*, wherein it is envisaged as consisting of an ideological matrix or nucleus, the effects of which are felt throughout the entire social formation. This matrix further takes the form of certain binary pairings, the master/slave, in the case of slavery; the lord/serf, in the case of feudalism; and the Subject/subject in the case of capitalism. While Rodríguez will continue to deploy the key Althusserian concepts of "social formation," "mode of production," economic, political and ideological "instances," etc., his "ideological unconscious" will require some significant reconfigurations of the Althusserian legacy. For example, ideology will not necessarily exist through and for the "subject" – the dominant ideology of feudalism, it will transpire from the Spaniard's work, knows no such category – and to assume otherwise, whether from a bourgeois or Marxist standpoint, is, arguably, to think ahistorically. Nor, contrary to what Althusser sometimes implies (when he regresses unconsciously to bourgeois orthodoxy), does the subject pre-exist its social formation or, to use Althusser's own terminology, its social "interpellation," other than as a bundle of genes. The existence of a libidinal unconscious is recognized but does not enter into the Spaniard's theoretical equations.

How is one to account for such radical innovations? Undoubtedly, much was owed to

the direct influence of Althusser at the *Rue d'Ulm* where Rodríguez studied in the mid 1970s. But other circumstantial factors must have been relevant, beginning with the Spaniard's prior and equally direct exposure to fascism. Strange to say, the exposure came with its advantages. What better starting point could anyone have had, when it came to theorizing the ideological unconscious, than the personal experience of being smothered by layers of feudal ideology in a Francoist guise? Perhaps more importantly, Spain's belated incorporation into capitalism – the indispensable condition for the rise of fascism – meant that Rodríguez was able to observe liberal ideology objectively, from *without*, or at least from its margins.<sup>4</sup> Such benefits, it should be said, came at a price, namely professional isolation on the outer circuits of the global academy: symptomatically, Rodríguez's work has been the subject of only one monograph.<sup>5</sup> But while such factors undoubtedly explain in part the contrast with Jameson's fortunes, the root cause of the peculiar "silence" that has dogged the Spaniard's work must undoubtedly be found elsewhere, namely in the nature of its object, a social formation structured on the basis of a mode of production, and its seeming incompatibility with the subject/object paradigm prioritized by the dominant ideology, or so at least we will be arguing.

Our first task, by way of assessing the contributions of both scholars, must be to return to Marx and Althusser and to consider those aspects of these predecessors' work that are relevant to the notion of the unconscious, both ideological and political.

### **From Marx to Althusser**

Even as he redefined the original, Enlightenment concept of ideology, so that it ceased to refer to an individual's distorted ideas and came instead to correspond to supra-individual systems of beliefs, the young Marx continued to think within the horizons of a problematic centred on the subject and, by the same token, to detach ideology from the base and locate it as a differentiated block of consciously held, although false, ideas within the superstructure. The shift, it follows, from "Man" to the "economic law of motion," in evidence in the mature Marx, is undeniably qualitative and far from being the private fantasy of Althusser, as it is sometimes portrayed. The text of *Capital* is perfectly explicit: "individuals are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers [*Träger*] of particular class-relations and interests."<sup>6</sup> It is undoubtedly significant that, more or less contemporaneously, we glimpse the first intimations of ideological processes operative at the infrastructural level, as when, in the *Grundrisse*, for example, Marx describes in suggestive terms how a specific kind of production can predominate over the rest: "It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it."<sup>7</sup> Even so, powerful factors militated against any theoretical advancement: to begin with, the concept of the unconscious necessarily remained embryonic in what was, after all, a pre-Freudian age; moreover,

within the limited context of Marxism, it was never a question of simply inverting Hegel – after all, even within the context of *Capital*, economic activity necessarily retained an ideational component. In other words, much remained to be done if the unconsciousness of ideology was to be detached conceptually from “consciousness” and developed to its full potential. At which point, enter Althusser.

Whether or not the mature Marx himself subscribed to the criticism of humanism that Althusser attributed to him need not concern us here. There is no gainsaying the fact of the philosopher’s own point of departure, namely the “ever-pre-givenness of a structured complex unity,” nor of its consequences for his view of ideology: human societies allegedly “secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life,” in the form of structures, of images, myths, ideas and concepts, impersonally imposed upon their subjects.<sup>8</sup> The latter, we should know, “live” their ideologies “*not at all as a form of consciousness, but as an object of their ‘world’ – as their ‘world’ itself*”; and that lived relation, between individuals and their world, “only appears as ‘conscious’ on condition that it is *unconscious*, in the same way that [it] only seems to be simple on condition that it is complex.”<sup>9</sup> In essence, therefore, we are talking about an *imaginary* relation. Even the bourgeoisie, Althusser concludes, *believes* in its ideology, namely that of freedom, for the simple reason that its ideology is secreted “originally” and unconsciously in the relations of production, “before” it is consciously formulated at the level of the superstructure.<sup>10</sup>

Given such emphasis upon the unconsciousness of ideology, one is bound to ask what prevented Althusser from arriving at the notion of an ideological unconscious. The answer, seemingly, was that he found the “unconscious” inescapably rooted in psychology.<sup>11</sup> Symptomatically, in a private letter, the philosopher will take to task his psychoanalyst, René Diatkine, for sparing psychology in his theoretical critique of empiricism:

In my telling you that, you will see that I too *interpret* what one might be tempted to call your ideologico-theoretical *unconscious*. I would have many reservations to make on those *terms*, since I believe that [it] is not possible to speak of an ideological unconscious. In the event, that “unconscious” (which I would call by a different name, but never mind) exists, and it *should not be confused with the psychoanalytic unconscious*.<sup>12</sup>

The ideological unconscious, then, remained a concept to be explored, as did Althusser’s complex web of transitive and intransitive causalities. But there was one question that, even at this early stage, clamoured for consideration, namely the displacement of the subject and its relevance to the science/ideology relation.

### **Science and Ideology**

Bourgeois ideology, to remind ourselves, in any of its variants, takes the same subject/



object paradigm for granted. In the words of Althusser: “The subject and object, which are given and hence pre-date the process of knowledge, already define a certain fundamental theoretical field.”<sup>13</sup> The French philosopher’s solution, after Marx, was to transfer the whole debate onto a different terrain by accepting from the outset, as basic theses, the priority of the real over thought about the real, and the specificity of thought and the thought process. In other words, he does not answer the philosophical question of the validity of knowledge; rather he bypasses it.

Matters came to a head in *Reading Capital* during the course of a commentary upon a famous passage of the *Grundrisse* in which Marx expatiates on the contrast between, on the one hand, traditional attempts to depart from the concrete in order to reach the abstract and, on the other, the (in his view) scientifically correct method that begins with abstract definitions and, by way of them, “rises” to the concrete during the course of reasoning.<sup>14</sup> Althusser, for his part, is emphatic as to how the section is to be read and, more importantly, how it is *not* to be read. Marx, we are informed, is not concerned with the “problem of knowledge,” as traditionally understood, which is to say with the relation between thought and reality; from which it follows that, “he is not for one second falling into an idealism of consciousness, mind or thought.”<sup>15</sup> Marx, then, is concerned with how the scientist comes to have a theory, the point being that “theoretical practice constitutes a process that takes place *entirely in thought*”; from which it follows that, contrary to what empiricism claims, knowledge never confronts a *real object*, only ever an “object of knowledge,” which is not to say, by any means, that we *produce* the reality we contemplate.<sup>16</sup>

The case is convincingly argued: the underlying tenor of Marx’s work is undoubtedly one of both epistemological and ontological realism. But while he otherwise interprets the same passage of the *Grundrisse* along the same lines as Althusser, David Hillel Ruben acknowledges that the methodological and epistemological considerations cannot ultimately be separated.<sup>17</sup> In focusing on the specificity of thought, one is bound to wonder whether Althusser is not letting slip the primacy he otherwise accords to the real. The immediate signs are not encouraging: he leaves unexamined the specific modes – experimentation in the hard sciences and abstraction in the human sciences – through which science appropriates the real world; new knowledge, we learn, simply “concerns” the real object, without necessarily corresponding with it.<sup>18</sup> The effect is to drain ontology into epistemology, such that while knowledge itself is progressively “deepened,” vertically, and “extended,” horizontally or, to use Althusser’s own term, geographically, as new continents are revealed, the “*labour of theoretical transformation... necessarily affects the object of knowledge, since it is only applied to the latter.*”<sup>19</sup> What is missing is any sense of a correspondingly deep ontology.

Once set in motion, the weakening or, more strictly, flattening out of ontology rolls inexorably onwards, to the extent that we find Marx himself castigated for failing to situate the opposition between *essence* and *appearance* where it properly belongs,

in the “inner site of its concept.”<sup>20</sup> But with unfortunate consequences: Althusser opens himself up to the charge that he undertheorizes the intransitive dimension of knowledge production and, specifically, that, in his hands, the theoretical constructs of science serve simply “to ease our mental labour.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Fredric Jameson: The Seeds of a Political Unconscious**

Like so many of his Leftist contemporaries in literary studies, Jameson’s focus in the research he conducted in the 1950s was upon the work of Sartre, the defining features of which were a radical splitting of the world into two parts, subject and object, and, in a characteristically Hegelian manner, the collapsing of the latter into the former. Thus, in Jameson’s own words: “The reflection of subjectivity on the thing, the manner in which a subjectivity betrays its secrets through an apparently objective perceiving of a thing outside it, is possible because this facticity can never be directly apprehended, because it must be *assumed* by consciousness and thus immediately compromises the viewer and reflects him back.”<sup>22</sup> The priority thereby accorded to consciousness will prove to be a lasting legacy: in an afterword, written some twenty years later, his youthful first book still strikes Jameson as “plausible,” requiring nothing more than some terminological tinkering.<sup>23</sup> Nor, carefully considered, would the Hegelian dialectic he proceeded to enthusiastically embrace require any “break,” of the kind that distinguished the work of Althusser, insofar as the Spirit that allegedly unfolds during the course of human history is nothing less than a Subject.

The continuity in Jameson’s thought is in evidence from the early *Marxism and Form*, which continues to foreground subjectivity. Dialectics, as a result, emerges primarily not as a dialectics of nature, of the real world, with its suffering, exploitation, and violence, but of *thought*, which is to say, “nothing more or less than the elaboration of dialectical sentences,” an argument that would be pressed to the extreme through a detailed appraisal of the work of Adorno.<sup>24</sup> And even as he sets rather more store than Adorno by the revolutionary potential of the working class, Georg Lukács, who also figured prominently in Jameson’s pantheon, was never going to offset the centrality attached to consciousness. Indeed, he, more than anyone, notoriously envisioned social structures as reducible ultimately to consciousness. As he wrote: “... the act of consciousness overthrows the objective form of its object.”<sup>25</sup>

It is difficult to imagine, at first, how, in such circumstances, anything like an *unconscious*, and a political one to boot, could possibly emerge from such divagations. Unsurprisingly, Jameson’s *Marxism and Form* continues to take its cue from a brand of Lukácsian Marxism that emphasized consciousness. That said, the concept of a class consciousness spontaneously generates its opposite, a class-conditioned *unconsciousness*, and, as even Althusser was the first to admit, the Hegelian tradition adds one crucial ingredient to any Marxism worthy of the name, and certainly to any Marxist formulation of an unconscious, namely the concept of a “process without a subject.” Jameson elaborates: “The former subject no longer thinks, he ‘is

thought,' and his conscious experience, which used to correspond to the concept of *reason* in middle-class philosophy, becomes little more than a matter of registering signals from zones outside itself, either those that come from within and 'below', as in the drives and bodily and psychic automatisms, or from the outer circles of interlocking social institutions of all kinds."<sup>26</sup> All of which would be very encouraging, from a Marxist standpoint, were it not for the fact that, the references to "social institutions" notwithstanding, the emphasis remains firmly fixed upon the world of thought: what happens is that "the mind is able, momentarily, to glimpse a concrete totality."<sup>27</sup> It is not that the material world is absent: dialectics is emphatically *about* the empirical world; simply that the *aboutness* constantly slips from view. The result is a *de-ontologization* that deprives the world of any material depth.<sup>28</sup>

### **Althusser Reconfigured: from Kant to Hegel**

Given his formation within the womb of Hegelian thought, it might well be wondered how Jameson, notwithstanding his capacity to accommodate all-comers, is going to find room for a thinker as resolutely *anti*-Hegelian as Althusser, who consistently argued against "an idealism of consciousness," and emphatically asserted the primacy of the real over thought about the real. That said, as we also conceded, the importance the French philosopher attached to the specificity of thought was conducive to a correspondingly flat ontology, and Jameson will quickly seize upon the opportunity that such an ambiguity offered. Thus, in *The Prison House of Language* he set out systematically to (mis)construe the relevant texts along Kantian lines. Althusser's originality, we learn, was to have "reversed the terms of the old materialistic epistemology, for which reality is 'outside the mind.'"<sup>29</sup> Willy-nilly, the philosopher is re-located within the familiar epistemological scenario of the subject/object opposition, where a theory of theoretical practice is reconfigured as a *psychology* and thence transposed into a theory of knowledge. "For Althusser, in a sense, we never really get outside our own minds," which is to say that "theoretical praxis" runs its course "in the sealed chamber of the mind."<sup>30</sup> Given such premises, "the basic terms of the problem have now become recognizable: it is essentially a replay of the Kantian dilemma of the unknowability of the thing-in-itself."<sup>31</sup>

Still, if Althusser was always vulnerable to an epistemological, as opposed to methodological, reading of his notion of theoretical production, he might have seemed well equipped to resist attempts to draw him into the field of Hegelian Marxism. For the French philosopher, we recall, a world of difference separated the Marxist whole – a complex structure in dominance – from the Hegelian view of society as pervaded expressively by a single spirit. The letter of his texts, however, will offer Althusser little protection against Jameson's homogenizing enthusiasms. Nor will it deter the American critic from taking full advantage of Althusser's failure to coherently thematize ontology.

Thus, things begin rather ominously in Jameson's next work, *The Political*

*Unconscious*: economic determination “in the last instance” – the scare quotes deployed unambiguously signal an Althusserian provenance – is replaced with its political equivalent, to arrive at the view that “everything is ‘in the last instance’ political.”<sup>32</sup> And even before we have been able to assess the full import of this manoeuvre, the American critic is already busily dismantling the Althusserian “structure in dominance,” on the alleged basis that, for its originator, “the more narrowly economic... is, however privileged, not identical with the mode of production as a whole, which assigns to this narrowly ‘economic’ level its particular function and efficiency as it does all the others.”<sup>33</sup> Conveniently but, from the Althusserian standpoint, deceptively elided are the causal complexities of the social process and, specifically, of the intransitive effectivity exercised by the economy through the matrix effect of the whole. The elision proves crucial: through it, Jameson ensures that we are left with only one structure, that of the mode of production, which simply awaits correlation with the Hegelian Spirit. “Such momentary reunification would remain purely symbolic, a mere methodological fiction, were it not understood that social life is in its fundamental reality one and indivisible, a seamless web, a single inconceivable and transindividual process, in which there is no need to invent ways of linking language events and social upheavals or economic contradictions because on that level they were never separate from one another.”<sup>34</sup>

Althusser, the arch-anti-Hegelian, drawn within the horizon of Hegelian Marxism! One has to marvel at Jameson’s audacity and what is tantamount to a conjuring trick. In effect, Althusser has been re-written in terms of the very “expressive causality” that it was his prime concern to critique. Gone are the contradictions internal to each instance; gone those between the various instances of the social formation; gone also, the action of the social formation on each practice and each contradiction; gone, in sum, the irreducible presence of multiple levels, the structure of structures, to be displaced by a concept of continuity across a homogeneous theoretical space.<sup>35</sup> The Hegelian process without a subject, it follows, is less the explanation of a process than the transitory expression of a process. None of which augurs well for the ensuing theorization of a political unconscious.

### **The Political Unconscious**

In the discussion of Conrad’s *Lord Jim*, in the concluding chapter of *The Political Unconscious*, entitled “Romance and Reification,” Jameson takes time to consider the role of the sea in Conrad’s fiction, as a non-space of life and work that “is also the space of the degraded language of romance and daydream, of narrative commodity and the sheer distraction of ‘light literature.’”<sup>36</sup> A long quote follows, by way of illustration, in which Conrad draws a contrast between the passengers, otherwise the “mass of sleepers,” and the workers labouring in the engine-room, both contained within the bounds of the same steamer, as it ploughs its way through the ocean. Jameson himself

then picks up the refrain, rehearsing the contrast between these “sleepers” and the workers in existential terms, before proceeding to explore the deeper level of the consumable commodity, at which realities are transformed into style.<sup>37</sup> Next comes a reference to Berkleyan idealism, followed in turn by a long quotation from Marx and Engels’ *The German Ideology*, which Jameson expands along the following lines:

So this ground base of material production continues underneath the new formal structures of the modernist text, as indeed it could not but continue to do, yet conveniently muffled and intermittent, easy to ignore (or to rewrite in terms of the aesthetic, of sense perception, as here of the sounds and sonorous inscription of a reality you prefer not to conceptualize), its permanencies ultimately detectable only to the elaborate hermeneutic geiger counters of the political unconscious and the ideology of form.<sup>38</sup>

At first blush, one scarcely knows what to make of it all: at one moment we confront a text that teeters upon paraphrase; at the next, an active and autonomous critique whose aim, seemingly, is to formulate the concepts or laws of the text’s production. An intriguing ambivalence, to be sure, but deployed to what effect? To disguise theoretical practice, one ventures to suggest, in the case of a critic who is struggling to *theorize* within the confines of an academic culture deeply suspicious, if not antagonistic, to abstraction. Alternatively, to remain attached to an object that, true to his instincts, the Hegelian theoretician is reluctant to relinquish. These, certainly, are part of the truth, but not the whole truth. The always insightful Terry Eagleton, discerns, more precisely, the operations of a dialectical criticism that “both evokes and displaces its object” by drawing this object onto its own critical terrain; and that, furthermore, eradicates the object’s existence “as a mere fiction of the subject’s power and desire.”<sup>39</sup> Such, we recall from above, are the dynamics of Hegelianism: subject and object pass into one another, to the advantage of the former, insofar as the object must itself be a creation of the subject. A creation or, possibly, as Jameson himself seems to be implying, a *re-creation*, through which the aesthetic strips the commodified object of its reified crust and so returns it to something like its pristine form.

Our suspicions are confirmed in what follows: for all his references to the world, society, and so on, Jameson is committed to extending the bounds of epistemology at the expense of ontology, through a process whereby thinking is transformed into an independent subject (the idea), as the demiurge of an empirical world. Thrown into relief by the same token is a rather curious paradox: a body of work rooted in the command “always to historicize” finds real history pressed beyond conceptualization, relegated to the status of an “absent cause” that is inaccessible other than in a textual form.<sup>40</sup> The consequences are severe: with all outlets to the Real blocked, the critic is left little option but to seek compensation in a style of writing that can leave even



his more sympathetic readers “engulfed by the threatened onset of an ideational congestion, a cerebral meltdown or synaptic overload, a sense of argumentative threads and suggestions, themes and variations, multiplying beyond any hope of keeping track of them.”<sup>41</sup> If this is the example of the political unconscious at work, one is bound to conclude, the concept is ill-defined, except upon the basis of a most radical re-definition of the term “political.”

So beguiling is Jameson’s style that one crucial aspect of his criticism easily passes unnoticed, namely that it selects its texts very carefully. Typically, in the present instance, he focuses upon Conrad’s brand of “schizophrenic” writing. To blend with its object, the subject prefers a text deeply rooted in a Romantic “sensibility,” that positively cries out for readerly communion, as, to some degree, does any text that is inscribed within the bourgeois ideological horizon: “literature,” by definition, is the medium through which an author “expresses” his or her inner-truth to a similarly sensitized reader – hence the need for any “scientific” conceptualization to be smuggled into the critical commentary *obliquely*. Jameson’s treatment of the *chanson de geste*, by way of contrast, is brief and starkly objective: here, any intimacy between the bard and his audience is precluded from the outset, even as a convenient slippage from the Lacanian Real to “reality” enables the modern critic to discourse at relative length upon the social circumstances of the late Carolingian period, and even upon the niceties of the agon between good and evil. What precisely is the obstacle to the lovers’ tryst? The answer is surprising: nothing less than History itself, in the form of the radical alterity of the bard, who, in his capacity as a servant of his lord/Lord, as opposed to an interiorized subject of modernity, must remain austere aloof.

### The End of Ideology

*The Political Unconscious* carries through several important theoretical displacements. The first we have already had occasion to consider, namely that from economics in the last instance – a concept of classically Althusserian extraction – to that of politics in the last instance. But, in the present context, it is a second displacement that is of more interest, namely that from ideology to politics. Interestingly, in this case, Jameson feels called upon to “explain himself.” Many of the findings of *The Political Unconscious*, he confesses, could well have been expressed more forcefully in a Marxist “manual,” that “would have as its object *ideological analysis*” and that would thereby require that he “settle its accounts with rival methods in a far more polemic spirit.”<sup>42</sup> Such a prospect clearly does not appeal to Jameson in the slightest, notwithstanding his artful appeal to Althusser’s lemma of “class struggle within theory.”<sup>43</sup>

The more cynically minded might argue that the substitution of an etiolated “politics” for the marked category of “ideology” could only have served one purpose: to avoid a term whose use, within the precincts of a conservative academy, could only have signalled a damaging allegiance to Marxism.<sup>44</sup> Even so, as the political tide began to turn decisively against the Left in the 1980s, Jameson was forced to



make a further reformist concession by actively disowning “ideology” altogether. The latter, we are informed, in *Postmodernism* (1991), no longer provides the key social function it formerly exercised; indeed, it may now be legitimate to speak of the “end of ideology,” understood in the sense of “conscious ideologies and political opinions,” which is to say, more strictly, understood as constitutive of “thought systems” or official philosophical ideologies. Jameson elaborates: “... the whole realm of *conscious* argument, and the very appearance of persuasion itself (or reasoned dissent)... has ceased to be functional in perpetuating and reproducing the system.”<sup>45</sup>

The convenience of limiting ideology to *consciously held ideas* should be obvious: such reductionism leaves a space open, that of the unconscious, to be occupied by a less provocative concept: no longer politics but “culture,” sometimes to be celebrated in its postmodern guise, sometimes to be critiqued, but which, in either instance, now permeates the entire social fabric in the familiar guise of a Hegelian Spirit. Ideology, to be sure, will make an occasional appearance as an unconscious force, as when, in *The Seeds of Time*, in its postmodern guise, it is portrayed as a “symptom of the deeper structural changes in our society,” rooted in the mode of production.<sup>46</sup> But for the most part, it remains an eminently conscious phenomenon and therefore surplus to explanatory requirements, replaced by a culture that, among other things, serves as a convenient bridge over which to pass from Hegel to Marx, insofar as readily identifiable with the forces of commodification. In *A Singular Modernity*, these forces “colonize” the libidinal unconscious not through ideological and political activity but through commercialized practices and habits.<sup>47</sup> The reference, note, is to the distinctively *libidinal* unconscious: once the complex intervening layers of the Althusserian structure in dominance have been stripped away, little remains but for the Hegelian Moving Spirit to impregnate this unconscious directly, through the operations of an expressive causality.

The psychological effects of commodification are, it must be conceded, only too real and their pertinence to any Americanized culture undeniable, except that, as Terry Eagleton observed apropos Jameson’s work, the focus upon reification redirects attention away from class conflict and the material realities of the process of production towards consumption, notably of literary texts, and the quality of *lived experience* under capitalism.<sup>48</sup> This emphasis upon “lived experience”, it will transpire, is the key to Jameson’s notion of the unconscious. With the Real pressed, in Lacanian terms, beyond the bounds of language, confined within the realm of the unknowable, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to pass from the study of commodified forms to infrastructural dynamics.<sup>49</sup> The conclusion is then unavoidable: cut off from the material base, notably from the relations of production, Marxism, as a science dedicated to the analysis of class conflict, is a dead letter.

A hasty reading of Jameson’s more recent texts might lead one to conclude that the critic has finally relieved himself of the burden of the Marxist hermeneutic. But not so: theirs is a conceptual framework equipped for all weathers, and when, following

the global crisis of 2008, the wind began to blow from a different quarter, Jameson was quick to respond with *Representing Capital*, a work that significantly qualifies some of his earlier claims. While capitalism, in its complexity, continues to be *unrepresentable*, theoretically speaking, it was never Jameson's intention, or so he now assures us, to imply that it was *ineffable*, like some kind of mystery located beyond language and thought. And unsurprisingly, after having consistently dismissed Althusserianism as "now somewhat outmoded," with its "now extinguished" canon, Jameson now wishes to emphasize "what is still stimulating, suggestive, and even urgent about this unfinished theoretical business"; and so, quite soon, is discovering, after a close reading of *Capital*, that Marx's text "seems retroactively to confirm Althusser's insistence on system rather than subject."<sup>50</sup> The effect of such vacillations and contradictions, habitual throughout Jameson's texts, is to prohibit conclusions of any kind: no tidal waters can be found to compare to these shifting sands.

### Theorizing the Ideological Unconscious

Petty-bourgeois intellectuals, Althusser himself insisted, "have to carry out a radical revolution in their ideas" if they are to think from a Marxist standpoint.<sup>51</sup> Juan Carlos Rodríguez would agree, except with one important qualification: it is not with their *consciousness* that these intellectuals must break, as the philosopher implies, but with their ideological *unconscious* and, specifically, with their attachment to the subject/object dichotomy. Symptomatically, the Spaniard will announce his own particular revolution by literally casting all his previous intellectual endeavours through the window and into the street! Or so at least he informs us in the preface to *Theory and History of Ideological Production*.<sup>52</sup>

And that was only the beginning of Rodríguez's own version of the epistemological "break." His first task was to do something that Althusser, for all his emphasis upon the forms of existence of historical individuality, never dared to do, namely to historicize the notion of the "subject." Hence, the calculated shock of his point of departure: "literature" has not always existed, at least in the traditional sense of the term, namely as "a series of discourses that are above all the *works* of a single *author*."<sup>53</sup> Defined thus, its existence coincides with the beginnings, in the fifteenth century, of bourgeois ideology itself, one of whose unquestioned assumptions will be that, while the "subject" may not be *unique* to literary discourse – it is shared by its equivalents in science, politics, etc. – literary discourse certainly *expresses* better than any other the *inner truth* of the subject or, in Rodríguez's own words, "the true intimacy of the 'subject/author of a work.'"<sup>54</sup>

Ominously, Rodríguez's project is barely underway. "Author," "work," "subject," "expression" – these will be supplemented by others: the "free individual," "autonomy," "inwardness," "intimacy," "mind," "reason," "judgement," "tastes," "values," etc., in other words, the very conceptual tools that the bourgeois critic *thinks with*. These, in combination, will make up what the Spaniard calls "the productive logic of the

text,” which constitutes a whole system of concepts, structured around the notion of the subject.<sup>55</sup> This logic, furthermore, “is secreted from the bourgeois ideological matrix” consisting of the Subject/subject opposition and functional to a mode of production whose class articulation requires that “its” individuals think of themselves as “subjects,” each possessed of their own interior truth and, more fundamentally, possessed of their own labour power, which they are “free” to sell to a Subject, otherwise the owner of the means of production.<sup>56</sup> Without individuals who imagine themselves to be free, the capitalist system quite simply cannot function, or so at least Rodríguez wishes to argue.

While doubtless the above constitutes a thoughtful elaboration of Althusser’s work, it does not depart fundamentally therefrom. That is about to change as Rodríguez advances into uncharted territory.

For Althusser, it will be recalled, ideology was the discourse of the subject; for Rodríguez, the discourse of the subject was the product of a distinctively bourgeois ideology, the historically limited nature of which is clear if we compare its ideological matrix with that of the preceding mode, namely the lord (Lord)/serf (servant) matrix characteristic of feudalism, and similarly functional to the re-production of feudal relations.<sup>57</sup> Under feudalism, the last thing that the serf imagined him/herself to be was “free,” other than (in special cases) free to serve this as opposed to that lord, to whom they were otherwise “bonded.” But a word of warning: it is wrong to think of a dominating class “consciously” exploiting a dominated. In reality, people are collectively convinced of the truth, as it appears to them, of the human condition, are caught up in social relations that, however “imaginary,” are objectively “secreted”; even the lord *really* believes he is a lord, just as the free subject *really* believes s/he is a free subject. The contrast with, and the threat to, critical orthodoxy could not be clearer. Gone is the truth of nature, displaced by an ideological secretion, to be formalized as a distinctively *ideological unconscious*:

The notion of the subject (and the whole problematic within which it is inscribed) is radically historical because... it derives directly (and exclusively) from the very matrix of the bourgeois ideological unconscious: the “serf” can never be a “subject,” etc. But for that very reason also the theoretical perspectives originating in the same bourgeois ideology will never be able to accept that their own unconscious is at root an ideological (that is to say, historical) issue, but will always believe that the elements and logic peculiar to such an “unconscious” constitute the truth about the human condition, in all its clarity.<sup>58</sup>

To drive home this extension of Althusserian thought, Rodríguez has to rethink the functioning of the social formation and the role of ideology within it. Althusser, to recall, tied ideology to the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), conceding only parenthetically

the fact that ideology was “originally” secreted in the social infrastructure. The Spaniard, by way of contrast, aims to locate ideology unambiguously in the relations of production: “... the dialectic inscribed in the literary texts (that which produces them as such, their internal logic) is what shapes an ideological unconscious. The latter is ‘born’ not in the School, but in the interior of the social relations themselves, and derives directly from these relations.”<sup>59</sup> In effect, Althusser’s original model has been turned on its head: ideology is now firmly rooted not in the superstructural State Apparatus but in the base component, whence it is circulated through the social formation: “... it seems clear that the functionality of literary discourse and its real meaning for our societies are issues that need to be sought more in the interior of the ideological level proper than in the apparatuses that materialize and reproduce them.”<sup>60</sup>

In his second seminal work, *State, Stage, Language*, Rodríguez provided more of an overview of the ideological dialectic, which allegedly takes the form of a double articulation: the elements secreted by the ideological unconscious are reproduced within the ISA, where they are formalized, thematized, theorized, etc. by philosophers, critics, writers, “situated within the horizon of a class”; once processed, ideology is then fed back into a generalized unconscious that pervades the whole of society and is accepted by everyone as “the very truth of nature, as being as natural as their own skin” or, alternatively, in the form of a “humus.”<sup>61</sup> Certain details call for clarification. Firstly, while it registers the fact that the base determines the superstructure asymmetrically (“in the last instance”), Rodríguez’s schema specifically allows for the reciprocal effectivity of the superstructure upon the base; this is important, given the lurking presence of versions of vulgar Marxism. Secondly, it is strictly misleading to talk in terms of a causal *sequence*, involving a “before” and an “after,” as opposed to a circular process that is “always already” in action. Thirdly, while the “humus” metaphor effectively captures the matrix effect of the social whole, it is not without its dangers, as Rodríguez was the first to realize. Crucially, unless qualified, it overloads the notion of continuity across a homogeneous theoretical space, after the fashion of a Hegelian spirit. What needs to be asserted, by way of a counter-balance, is the restless dialectical interplay within and between structures and, above all, the essentially conflictual nature of class relations, even within the relatively autonomous, class-dominated realm of the literary norm:

because it is *unconscious* and therefore *latent*, ideology never coincides exactly with itself; and also, because it is *objective*, this same ideology has cracks and crevices everywhere (which need to be filled in endlessly, which is what gives rise to the norm). Literature, then, because it is conscious/unconscious, and because it takes an objective form, as a productive process, can be at odds with its growing medium and its own intentions. I speak, in short, of writing qua ideological struggle, as it is

conducted inside the hegemonic ideology proper.<sup>62</sup>

To illustrate how the ideological unconscious works in practice, let us consider the thematic of “tears” and its treatment in a number of historically disparate works. To contain our discussion within workable limits, we will concentrate upon specific historical junctures, encapsulated in key texts, beginning with the twelfth-century epic, *Poema de Mio Cid* (*Poem of the Cid*).

### Feudal Tears: “From his eyes so strongly crying”

“De los sos ojos tan fuerte mientras lorando” (From his eyes so strongly crying), we read of the Cid as he sadly departs into exile.<sup>63</sup> Modern readers may well protest that such a typically feminine expression of grief ill becomes a warrior knight. But that, of course, is precisely the point that Rodríguez will go on to make: the habits of modern readers are rooted in the prevailing ideological unconscious, which dictate that the Cid’s tears be construed along petty-bourgeois lines, as the expression of a privatized “sensibility.” A reading attentive to the historicity of ideological artefacts will interpret the tears alternatively, along *organicist* lines, which is to say, as the “substantial,” “exteriorized” display of a “public” grief. As Rodríguez explains: “Strictly speaking, for feudal organicism the *interior/exterior* relation is never posed as a problem.”<sup>64</sup> The Cid must therefore cry because it is important that his sadness be raised above the level of the constituent ambiguity of *this world* and seen, as God might see it, in all its purity.

And that of course is only the beginning. What must be further understood is that the absence of an interior, therefore, private sphere is dependent upon the substantial nature of feudal signs or, to be more exact – for here it is vitally important to make the necessary distinctions – of *signatures*, understood as traced by the voice of the Lord: “... within the feudal horizon everyone ‘knew’ who was a noble and who was not, who was a serf and who was not.”<sup>65</sup> But it is not simply a question of semantics: at the syntactic level as well, the *Poema*’s halting, spasmodic, pro- and retrogressive paratactic structures provides a similar God’s-eye view of events, in stark contrast to the perspectival norms of the “Renaissance.”<sup>66</sup>

Pulling back even further, what the epic’s syntax betrays is the dominance of the “figural” historicity characteristic of feudal organicism, for which the future is already written, in the sense of pre-ordained, along the lines of the biblical model: the Old Testament as a “prefiguration” of the New, as a half-truth that will only be fully realized later. Thereby legitimized is an ideological unconscious that further conceives human life as articulated *dualistically*, through the opposition between *this* life and the *next*: “... the passage of Man on this earth (his earthly life) and the need to “find salvation” after death.”<sup>67</sup> With one important qualification in the case of the *Cid*: transcendence is displaced along secular lines, towards the opposition between the servant and his lord, in *this world*, in accordance with relevant feudal hierarchies.



That said, the key dualism is repeated in the relation between the secular lord and “his” Lord in the *next*: “In the *Poem of the Cid*, the duality is perfect: what Rodrigo does during the time of his ‘exile’ is exactly the ‘prefiguration,’ the transparency of what will later be his ‘plenitude’: recognition by ‘his’ Lord.”<sup>68</sup> The allegorized narrative that is the vehicle of this dualism will be progressively corroded by the one-dimensional chronology of its bourgeois counterpart.

### The Garcilasan Sonnet: From Ice to Tears

The dominant seigneurial ideology was contested from the fifteenth century onwards by bourgeois ideology in its first, emergent form, otherwise *animism*, as reformulated and theorized by Rodríguez. Symptomatically, the ideological role of “tears” is radically transformed, as is immediately apparent from the famous Garcilasan eighth sonnet.

A Dafne ya los brazos le crecían  
y en luengos ramos vueltos se mostraban;  
en verdes hojas vi que se tornaban  
los cabellos qu’el oro escurecían;  
de áspera corteza se cubrían  
los tiernos miembros que aun bullendo ’staban;  
los blancos pies en tierra se hincaban  
y en torcidas raíces se volvían.

Aquel que fe la causa de tal daño  
a fuerza de llorar, crecer hacía  
este árbol, que con lágrimas regaba.

¡Oh miserable estado, oh mal tamaño  
que con llorarla crezca cada día  
la causa y la razón por que lloraba!<sup>69</sup>

Daphne’s arms were already growing  
and turning into long branches;  
in green leaves I saw was being transformed  
the hair that outshone gold;

in rough bark were becoming covered  
the soft members that were still moving;  
the white feet in the earth were taking root  
and becoming twisted roots.

He who was the cause of such harm,  
by dint of crying, caused to grow  
this tree, that he watered with his tears.

Oh, miserable state! How great the misfortune  
that the tears spilt on its account each day should compound



the cause of and reason for the crying.

To move from the epic text to the Garcilasan sonnet is, perforce, to move from one ideology, through which the serf/servant, qua commentator, is called upon to decipher the allegorical signatures of the World, to another in which the proto-subject, otherwise the beautiful soul, views the literal object from *his*, that is to say, Apollo's perspective ("I saw"), in a chronological present ("were still moving"), caught up in the process of the moment. Gone is the static hierarchy of lineages and "blood" – rungs in a vertical Chain of Being that accords to each object its natural niche in the Creation – in favour of a new ideology, that of *animism*, which arrives to grease the workings of an emergent capitalist mercantilism, against the backdrop of a new, heliocentric cosmology, in which, all things are bound together by the all-pervasive spiritual force of the Sun's rays.

The key to the workings of animism is the "dialectic of tears," enacted in the soul's failed attempt to unite with the loved object; tears that, in radical contrast to their substantial, organicist counterpart, are constructed "as pure, direct secretions of the inner spirit."<sup>70</sup> Here, it is particularly important to proceed with critical caution, for the simple reason that the apparent familiarity of the scenario positively invites misrecognition. Let it be emphasized: these are not the tears of the petty-bourgeois subject, of Romantic extraction, but of the animist sensible soul, through whose transparency the Soul of the World finds expression. Together with "sighs," tears so configured externalize the frustration of the soul, whose love finds no exit from a newly created but still embryonic interior realm.<sup>71</sup> Such is the frustration of Apollo, before whom the interiorized spirit that is Daphne is transformed into a "vegetable spirit."

We now begin to grasp *in practice* the importance of the theoretical concepts constitutive of the Althusserian problematic. For as Rodríguez had argued at length, even before entering upon the detailed analysis of the Petrarchan lyric, it was the conflict between the feudal and capitalist modes that explains the *dominance* of the political level during the transition and, just as importantly, its *autonomy*, materialized in the absolutist state and *determined* in the last instance by the economy: "In both cases, the constitution of the political level as autonomous and dominant is symptomatic of the tendency, within social relations, for bourgeois relations to dominate feudal ones."<sup>72</sup> The existence of a *public* space, the Spaniard goes on to argue, implies, as a corollary, that of its *private* equivalent, otherwise the interiorized realm of the beautiful soul. At which point, distinctions become of the greatest importance: the claim is not that social transformations of a generalized kind *directly* caused the birth of lyric poetry; still less that there are no connections between the general and the particular; Rodríguez is rather arguing for the existence of *structural mediations* between the political instance and the otherwise remote realm of lyric poetry, even

as he recognizes the relative autonomy of the respective levels. Thus: "... although it 'believes' absolutely in the division between private and public, animism presupposes, through its own internal logic, the existence of a special transparency between the 'inside' and 'outside' of signs only in those cases in which the soul is able truly to express itself in each thing."<sup>73</sup>

### **The Sentimental Novel: Jorge Isaacs' 'María'**

Animist ideology was driven underground in the seventeenth century, only to re-emerge subsequently in a petty-bourgeois guise in the following, in which form it functioned, and would continue to function, as the underside to the classic forms of bourgeois ideology. Let us consider a passage from Jorge Isaacs' *María* in which the protagonist, Efraín, agonises over his love for his beloved.

I went to bed when it struck two in the same clothes I was wearing. María's handkerchief, still fragrant with the perfume that she always used, crumpled and wet with her tears, received on the pillow the tears that rolled from my eyes as from a fountain that would never run dry.

If those that I still spill, on recalling the days that preceded my journey, serve to moisten this pen that records them; if it were possible once more, even for a single moment, for my mind to discover in my heart the extent of my secret pain, so as to reveal it, the lines that I am going to trace would be beautiful for those who have cried, but perhaps terrible for me.<sup>74</sup>

The plot of the novel is summary in the extreme. Efraín, the son of a rich, learned landowner, also a poet, and María, cousin of Efraín, live an intensely idealized, chaste relationship in the midst of an idyllic setting in Colombia. That is until María, of Jewish extraction, is stricken with a fatal, inherited illness and dies before Efraín is able to return from his studies in Europe. All of this in the setting of a social order consisting of a variety of levels, each disposed in their allotted place, the whole pervaded by the paternalism of Efraín's family and redolent of a regime that is at the same time neo-colonial, neo-feudal, and pre-capitalist. Efraín, according to Rodríguez and Álvaro Salvador, "treats María with all the clichés typical of an aristocratic, gallant culture, typical of the 'animism' that begins with Petrarch, at the same time that the text itself intensifies the purely abstract, ideological values of the idolatry of which his beloved is the object."<sup>75</sup>

We are talking here about an ideology made up of elements drawn from a residual organicism and animism; more importantly, about an animism that, to reiterate, is re-emerging after a period of forced hibernation and, at the same time, mutating into a distinctively petty-bourgeois ideology. Subserving to the dominant ideology of the

classic bourgeoisie, namely empiricism, this new ideology, which numbers among its most prominent exponents Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel, masquerades under the guise of “sensitivity,” condensed in the image of tears as these pour forth in the new genre of the “sentimental novel.” Rodríguez and Salvador explain: “The tears are transformed into an archetypal value in the context of a petty-bourgeois mentality, an archetypal value that manifests itself even in daily life.”<sup>76</sup>

Like any ideological unconscious, this petty-bourgeois variation performs a crucial function in the reproduction of the prevailing social relations. Specifically it acts as a conveyor belt “between the values of the dominant classes and the unconscious of the dominated classes,” along which are conveyed goodness, idealized love, fraternity, filial love, beauty, religious sentiment and other such emotions, and human qualities that serve to bind the social classes together in perfect harmony.<sup>77</sup> In the process, the subdivisions of these classes, notably proletarians, peasants, indigenous elements, marginal groups, etc. are moulded into the category of “the people.” As the same authors elaborate:

The dominating classes have a vested interest in speaking of the “people” because this term shrouds them in a curtain of equality, but they do so indirectly, so as to make the curtain appear more credible, through the mediation of the petty-bourgeois ideologues. The latter do sincerely believe in the existence of the “people,” precisely through being where they are, namely perched between one class and another; perched insofar as not identifying fully with either class but with both simultaneously.<sup>78</sup>

## Two Marxisms

Through the figures of Jameson and Rodríguez, we have been able to compare and contrast two cognate concepts: the political unconscious and the ideological unconscious, both mediated through the work of Althusser but otherwise framed by two very different problematics, namely those of Hegelian Marxism and its structural counterpart. The difference between both Marxisms cannot be sufficiently emphasized: the Hegelian variant takes as its point of departure the subject/object or agency/structure binary; its structural variant, the social formation structured on the basis of a mode of production.

The major problem that confronted Jameson, in his effort to theorize a *political* unconscious, was the centrality accorded to *consciousness* within his Hegelian paradigm. This centrality, predictably enough, encouraged him to gravitate towards the early Marx and the notion of alienation, in other words, towards “Man,” as explored in various major figures of Western Marxism, in an attempt to assimilate to Marxist critical theory the fundamental Hegelian category of a reified culture. At

the same time, the American registered the strong sense in Marx of how structures of social relations shape human consciousness, which found him having constantly to negotiate the gulf that separated Marxism from Hegelianism. His first task was to strip the Althusserian social formation of its structural complexity, so as to leave in place only an Absolute Spirit, masquerading as the spirit of capitalism. Once this was achieved, it was then feasible to imagine how the individual unconscious, of libidinal extraction, might be injected directly with a consumerist reflex. What might have seemed like a reductive concentration on the fetishism of commodities in fact proved to be experientially amenable to the American academy and doubtless explains the continuing appeal of what is otherwise a dense and difficult body of work.

Rodríguez, by way of contrast, took the unconscious as his point of departure, understood as the secretion of an ideological matrix itself determined in the last instance by the economy, which is to say mediated through the matrix effect of the social formation functioning as a whole. This encouraged him, predictably, to gravitate towards the late Marx and, specifically, towards *Capital*, which the Spaniard, like Althusser, insisted on viewing as the authentic Marx. Of course, the author of *Theory and History of Ideological Production* accepted the possibility that an individual might achieve *conscious* awareness of his or her ideological entrapment and thereby take informed decisions in practice, in the light of existence of social contradictions. That said, such decisions needed to be based on a theoretical understanding. If Rodríguez did not begin with Man, it was in order to break with the mystificatory force that this concept exercises ideologically. Like Althusser and, allegedly, Marx, he preferred to start instead with the structural cause that maintains the illusion of the centrality of Man. For this displacement of the free subject from its position of eminence, the Spaniard was to pay a heavy price, namely the non-reception of his work within the academy and elsewhere; at which point his ideological unconscious finally connects with its libidinal equivalent: in both cases there are things that people just do not want to know.

## Notes

1. This article first appeared in translation in *Pensar Desde Abajo* 5 (2016): 193-224.
2. Ian Buchanan, *Fredric Jameson: Live Theory* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006) 120-121.
3. For example, Adam Roberts, *Fredric Jameson* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Steven Helmling, *The Success and Failure of Fredric Jameson: Writing the Sublime, and the Dialectic of Critique* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Buchanan, *Fredric Jameson: Live Theory*.
4. Rodríguez's doctoral thesis, based on research conducted in the late 1960s and early-70s, has recently been published in an updated form as *Para una teoría de la literatura 40 años de Historia*, (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2015). In it, the Althusserian ranges over the totality of Western "theory."
5. See Juan Manuel Caamaño, *The Literary Theory of Juan Carlos Rodríguez: Contemporary Spanish Cultural Critic* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).
6. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, (Harmondsworth and London: Penguin Books and New Left Review, 1976) 92.
7. Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth and London: Penguin and New Left Review, 1973) 107.
8. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London and New York: Verso, 1990) 199, 232.
9. Althusser, *For Marx* 233, italics in original.
10. *For Marx* 234-235.
11. For a detailed discussion, see Malcolm K. Read, "Juan Carlos Rodríguez and Slavoj Žižek: the Ideological versus Libidinal Unconscious" (forthcoming).
12. Althusser, *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*, ed. Olivier Corpet and François Matheron, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 52, italics in original.
13. Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: NLB, 1970) 35.
14. Marx, *Grundrisse* 101.
15. Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital* 41.
16. *Reading Capital* 42; for a discussion of the subtle terminological developments in Althusser from *For Marx* to *Reading Capital*, see Norman Geras, *Literature of Revolution: Essays on Marxism* (London: Verso, 1986) 102. The details of Althusser's argument have not saved him from being charged, along with Derrida and Habermas and other such philosophers, with underplaying ontology. Bhaskar explains: "What happens in the case of these authors is that they implicitly inherit an implicit ontology, which is the positivist ontology, the epistemology of which they reject, so that you get a super-idealism." See Roy Bhaskar, *From Science to Emancipation: Alienation and the Actuality of Enlightenment* (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications, 2002) 63.
17. David-Hillel Ruben *Marxism and Materialism: A Study in Marxist Theory of Knowledge* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1977) 153.
18. *Reading Capital* 156.
19. *Reading Capital* 156.
20. *Reading Capital* 189.
21. Andrew Collier, *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy* (London and New York: Verso, 1994) 68.
22. Jameson, *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) 87.

23. Jameson, *Sartre* 205.
24. Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) xii.
25. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1973) 18.
26. Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 28.
27. *Marxism and Form* 41.
28. For this emphasis upon de-ontologization in Jameson, I am indebted to Alan Norrie, "Who is 'the Prince'? Hegel and Marx in Jameson and Bhaskar," *Historical Materialism* 20.2 (2012) 75-104.
29. Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) 106.
30. Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* 106.
31. *The Prison-House of Language* 108-09.
32. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981) 20.
33. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 36.
34. *The Political Unconscious* 40.
35. As even some of Jameson's more sympathetic commentators have felt obliged to conclude, this simply will not do, and fully justifies the complaint that such Hegelian synthesizing "threatens to homogenize the antitheses [Jameson] brings together." See Helmling, *The Success and Failure of Fredric Jameson* 143. His Marxist critics have been correspondingly more severe, taking the position that Jameson is in fact not terribly interested in Althusser's work in itself but more concerned to resolve problems internal to his brand of Hegelian Marxism. Callinicos, for example, argues that Jameson's attempt to enlist the support of Althusser in his Hegelian project, if successful, would have been a "remarkable feat," since Lukács' analysis of reification was a prime example of the kind of expressive totality that the French philosopher was most concerned to critique. See Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989) 131. Eagleton similarly argues that Jameson never seriously took on board the Althusserian critique of Marxist historicism. See Terry Eagleton, *Against the Grain: Selected Essays* (London: Verso 1986) 73.
36. Jameson *The Political Unconscious* 213.
37. *The Political Unconscious* 214.
38. *The Political Unconscious* 215.
39. Eagleton, *Against the Grain* 70, 76.
40. *The Political Unconscious* 35.
41. *The Success and Failure of Fredric Jameson* 122.
42. *The Political Unconscious* 12.
43. *The Political Unconscious* 12.
44. An early review of *The Political Unconscious* by Jerry Aline Flieger, "The Prison-House of Ideology: Critic as Inmate," *Diacritics* 12.3 (1982) 47-56, symptomatically carries the title "The Prison-House of Ideology." The implication, surely, is that Jameson has misnamed his work.
45. Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991) 398, emphasis



added.

46. Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) xii.
47. Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002) 12.
48. Eagleton, *Against the Grain* 63.
49. Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009) 334.
50. Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 345; *The Seeds of Time* 167; *Valences of the Dialectic* 337; *Representing Capital: A Commentary of Volume One* (London and New York: Verso, 2011) 40.
51. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971) 12.
52. In what follows I reprise some of the conclusions arrived at in Read, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Marxism: Juan Carlos Rodríguez, Althusser, And The Ideological Unconscious," *Mediations* 29.1 (2015) 69-100.
53. Juan Carlos Rodríguez, *Theory and History of Ideological Production: The First Bourgeois Literatures (the 16th Century)*, trans. Malcolm K. Read (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002) 17, italics in original.
54. Rodríguez, *Theory and History of Ideological Production* 17.
55. *Theory and History of Ideological Production* 18.
56. *Theory and History of Ideological Production* 19, translation amended.
57. To be fair, Althusser confesses in *On the Reproduction*, in his replay of his discussion of secular mirroring, "that, in capitalist societies, religious ideolog... no longer plays the same role that it did in social formations based on 'serfdom.'" Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London and New York: Verso, 2014) 198.
58. *Theory and History of Ideological Production* 21.
59. *Theory and History of Ideological Production* 23.
60. *Theory and History of Ideological Production* 24.
61. Rodríguez, *State, Stage, Language: The Production of the Subject* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008) 11.
62. Rodríguez, *State, Stage, Language* 22.
63. *Poema de Mio Cid*. ed. Colin Smith (Madrid: Cátedra, 1972) 1. Translation by author and subsequently.
64. *Theory and History of Ideological Production* 159.
65. *Theory and History of Ideological Production* 159.
66. See Read, *The Birth and Death of Language: Spanish Literature and Linguistics: 1300-1700* (Madrid: José Porrúa Turanzas, 1983) 10-11 for further detail. However, Read's text also exhibits an unconscious allegiance to the notion of a transhistorical subject that, for whatever reasons, fails to express its interiority fully under feudalism. For a self-criticism, see Read *Educating the Educators: Hispanism and its Institutions* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003) 76-78.
67. Rodríguez, *La literatura del pobre* (Granada: De Guante Blanco / Comares, 1994) 138-39.
68. Rodríguez, *La literatura del pobre* 140.
69. Garcilaso de la Vega, *Poesías completas*, Ángel L. Prieto de Paula. (Madrid: Castalia, 1989) 58-59.
70. *Theory and History of Ideological Production* 148.

71. *Theory and History of Ideological Production* 196.
72. *Theory and History of Ideological Production* 36.
73. *Theory and History of Ideological Production* 161.
74. Jorge Isaacs, *María* (México: Rei, 1988) 284.
75. Rodríguez and Álvaro Salvador, *Introducción al estudio de la literature hispanamericana: Las literaturas criollas de la independencia a la revolución* (Madrid: Akal, 1987) 146.
76. Rodríguez and Salvador, *Introducción al estudio de la literature hispanamericana* 133.
77. *Introducción al estudio de la literature hispanamericana* 136.
78. *Introducción al estudio de la literature hispanamericana* 137.

## **Accumulated Violence, or, the Wars of Exploitation: Notes Toward a Post-Western Marxism**

Sourayan Mookerjea

*It is the great merit of E.G. Wakefield to have discovered, not anything new about the Colonies, but to have discovered in the Colonies the truth as to the conditions of capitalist production in the mother country.<sup>1</sup>*

This essay sketches an outline of what I will call here "post-Western Marxism."<sup>2</sup> Though very few people really use this term, I believe that many of us around the world are working on such a project in a range of different ways because getting beyond the parochialism and sexism of much Western Marxist theorizing is crucial and urgent. Marxism, as Cedric Robinson observes, remains "distracted from the cruelest and most characteristic manifestations of the world economy. This exposed the inadequacies of Marxism as an apprehension of the modern world, but equally troubling was Marxism's neglect and miscomprehension of the nature and genesis of liberation struggles which already had occurred and surely had yet to appear among these people."<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Robinson offers us Black Marxism; but I want to honor and not appropriate that crucial radical tradition in this brief sketch. Like many, I also take it as self-evident that any theoretical Marxism reconstructed to be adequate for our times must also be a feminist theory. By post-Western Marxism, then, I don't mean a Marxism only by, or about, or for the people of the global South or any other geopolitical-cultural region, nor a Marxism displaced by postcolonial theory. Rather, I mean a truly global Marxism that builds on the insights of Western Marxism, Black Marxism, Asian, African, and Latin American Marxisms, but does not habitually universalize in a gender-blind way some fragments of the historical experiences of the United States and Western Europe. It is therefore not limited by Western Marxism's inability to think through the social, political, cultural, and ecological realities of most of the world; I mean then a Marxist theory that is not "passing for white" in the global order of knowledge power and a Marxist theory that is also a feminist theory

in this specific way.

In these notes, I make three related arguments. First, I will argue that both for Marx and for us today, exploitation is best understood not only as the private appropriation of surplus value but also as subalternization. Second, I will argue that Marx's critique of the so-called "logic" of capital is best understood through our critical understanding of the histories of colonization; that is to say, through our understanding of what Robinson calls "racial capitalism" and world-systems analysts call "historical capitalism" since the modern histories of colonization and historical or racial capitalism are essentially two sides of the same coin. Third, I will argue that since class politics is not available to us in its immediacy, all politics is identity politics, and that what is now commonly called the intersectionality of class politics and identity politics or feminist or cultural politics is better understood as their intermediation by the something I have elsewhere called "accumulated violence" — the "agency" of the histories of exploitation-subalternization in the present.<sup>4</sup>

My point of departure in this essay is the sheer heterogeneity of proletarianized people on a world scale today; something Gramsci had already begun to think through with his theory of subalternity. Marx's much derided "immiseration thesis" now seems terrifyingly prophetic. The last several decades have now seen dramatic increases in social inequality, but, more specifically, the proliferation of qualitatively different kinds of inequality; or, as it is often called, the proliferation of qualitatively different kinds of "interlocking systems of oppression" across local and global scales. In its contemporary forms, this social heterogeneity of wage dependency has provoked debates among some Western Marxist cultural theorists regarding the theoretical significance and political consequences of the neoliberal class project of rendering the postwar Fordist accord between capital and labor flexible, the normalization of structural unemployment, the informalization of ever more kinds of work, the swelling flows of migrant labor without access to citizenship rights in the Eurozone as elsewhere. In some discussions, the resulting political agents of such segmentation of the world proletariat through these different but coordinated processes are often vaguely and hastily collected through the category of the "the excluded" and opposed to a residual and privileged working class integrated with capital via the historic Fordist compromise. For Daniel Zamora, for instance, "it is a version of this perspective that — in different degrees — remains central to contemporary leftist Marxist thinkers like Antonio Negri, David Harvey, Slavoj Žižek, Nancy Fraser or Alain Badiou."<sup>5</sup> Zamora finds concepts such as the "multitude," the "precarariat," even Rancière's "*la part des sans-part*," along with the "excluded" to amount to a redefinition of the social question along neoliberal lines, stoking enmity between "two fractions of the 'proletariat' — between those who 'have given up enough, lost enough, and have had enough' and those who are in the 'welfare republic'" and decries this entanglement of the theoretical Left with the racist, classist stereotypes of the Right.<sup>6</sup> Yet he can do no better than to deliver us from what he considers to be such epiphenomenal

“contingent differences” by returning us to the orthodoxy of “structural” theoretical axioms regarding the “fundamental contradiction of the capital-labor relation” as if history counts for nothing in the face of a canonical text.<sup>7</sup>

But the vast proliferation of qualitatively different inequalities and oppressions especially connected to the relentless process of informalization has also provoked a substantial body of specialist research in the (often Marxist oriented or inspired) social sciences that draw our attention to a wide range of further mediations of this social heterogeneity. Beyond the question of access to citizenship rights and whatever kinds of labor rights and social security entitlements that might flow from them are questions of the length of time over the year any given household has access to wage incomes, access to educational opportunities, competence in English or regionally dominant languages, environmental protections (if any), the physical and mental health statuses of its members, exposure to (para-)military and police violence, vulnerability to state procedures of criminalization, and to innumerable forms of development dispossession that all both constitute and supplement — and in this way, make up the media of — interlocking systems of sexist, racist, hetero-normative, ableist and caste oppressions.

If we are to affirm another axiom of historical materialism and begin our critical theorization, as Brecht today might, with how “shit happens” rather than with either German ideology or the science of history or both, then the fundamental contradiction between capital and labor can only mean anything, I will argue, insofar as we grasp its mediation by what I have elsewhere called subaltern multitude social contradictions.<sup>8</sup> The theoretical and political problem posed by the proliferation of oppressions cannot be met by unmasking the alleged contingency of Weberian status identities through the alleged greater abstraction of class analysis since it is precisely the heterogeneity and status hierarchies of the subaltern classes that need theorization. Just as Brexit and Trumpism rekindled media narratives rhetorically similar to the discourse of the excluded Zamora critiques, some commentators on the Left also argued that the “whitelash” was a “symptom of a deeper illness” than racism, sexism and homophobia.<sup>9</sup> If the current neo-fascisms and white supremacies make it urgent for us to move beyond the deadlock that pits class politics and identity politics against each other, as some of us had thought we already had, then it is not only identity politics but also class politics that needs to be retheorized. Throughout historical capitalism and today, the proletarianized are largely the colonized and imperialized (though not exclusively by European Great Powers). For this reason, our theoretical understanding of capitalism cannot be disconnected from that of colonialism (and, I will argue, vice versa).

### **Accumulated Violence**

We find a promising starting point for post-Western Marxist theory in the growing

interest in recent years in Marx's sarcastic critique of classical political economy's fable of primitive accumulation.<sup>10</sup> Rather than capital springing forth from the prudence and thrift of proprietors, Marx points instead to the violence of enclosures, colonial plunder, and the trans-Atlantic slave trade as specific violent forms of class power exercised in order to create a new trans-Atlantic, and eventually, global space making the accumulation of capital possible.<sup>11</sup> These class projects are comprised of innumerable more specific forms of power and violence ranging from war, conquest, and genocide to impressment, criminalization, encroachment, expulsion, confiscation, monetization, taxation, commodification, debt bondage, environmental destruction, disenfranchisement, religious conversion and so on. Each of these strategies and tactics of class power sets in place, Marx argues, the conditions of possibility of world scale capital accumulation. Insofar as these strategies and tactics are recurrent, David Harvey renames all this as "accumulation by dispossession" and argues that accumulation by dispossession intensifies as accumulation crises intensify. This reading of Marx's critical genealogy anchors Harvey's theory of "spatial-temporal fixes" in class politics and struggle. "Solutions" to accumulation crises are only "found" through class struggle but as Harvey demonstrates they involve the production of new spaces and temporalities of accumulation. Though Harvey's own work often underplays it, his mentor Henri Lefebvre's foundational contribution to Western Marxism makes it clear that the capitalist production of space is never *ex-nihilo* but rather unfolds "backwards," as in Walter Benjamin's image of the "angel of history," from the destruction and subalternization of other modes of socio-ecological reproduction: "the Spanish-American 'Orders for Discovery and Settlement'" — which laid the foundations of the now globalized urban grid plan, Lefebvre reminds us — "were arranged under the three heads of discovery, settlement and pacification." "A social space of this kind" he observes "is generated out of a rationalized and theorized form serving as an instrument for the violation of an existing space."<sup>12</sup> Therein lies the inner connection, I argue, between colonialism and capitalism: "Geometrical urban space in Latin America," Lefebvre continues, "was intimately bound up with the extraction of wealth in Western Europe; it is almost as though the riches produced were riddled out through the gaps in the grid, the pre-existing space was destroyed from top to bottom."<sup>13</sup> In its investigations of the spaces and times of exploitation and in its theorization of their articulations, post-Western Marxism does not ignore this other "materialist telos" in human history: the reproduction of capitalist wealth and capitalist social relations of production is necessarily a "Herculean" class project of world-making, as Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker describe it in their magisterial history of the making of trans-Atlantic capitalism.<sup>14</sup> As such, the capitalist mode of socio-ecological reproduction, indeed its productivity gains through ever greater scales of social cooperation, understood as historical process (and not as a logic but rather as the witnessed ecological fate of the collective species-being of the human body) is nothing other than the repeated destruction of other



modes of socio-ecological reproduction, past and future, through the scalar expansion of its world-environments. But this also means that the distinction between settler colonialism and the colonialisms of exploitation is a schematic distinction at best which obscures rather than clarifies the geography and geometry of colonial power since land-grabbing has long been connected to environment-making for commodity production.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, modern colonialism cannot be understood historically nor resisted today without reference to the circuit of value of capital accumulation with its specifically violent spatial production. Otherwise the history of humanity is the history of settler colonialism which begins, not with the English re-conquest of Ireland, but when we descended from the trees and colonized the savannah.

I therefore want to contextualize Harvey's arguments by considering here a few other critical engagements with this enigmatic chapter from *Capital*. I hope to demonstrate here that together they provide a far more compelling account of exploitation and its links to domination and dispossession, theoretically and historically, than the standard arithmetic of exploitation based on the calculation of surplus labor time beyond average socially necessary labor time that usually stands at the center of our understanding of Marx's critique. Let me be clear, though: I am not suggesting that this received view is wrong or obsolete. Marx's comparison of the political and reproductive affordance of the wage to the productive and political power of cooperation proprietors of capital appropriate is pertinent as ever. The wage, however, is a social, ecological and historical institution, and not just a sum of money. Even when the fetishism of the value form is understood as social domination, capitalism's historical and contemporary colonizing imperative is given short shrift and the possibility that the subalternized counter-environments of this witnessed historical world environment-making process might hold critical lessons for the present is overlooked.<sup>16</sup> A qualitative account of exploitation, if I may put it that way, as accumulated violence and class war would, I argue here, take us further in the direction of the more properly post-Western Marxism that we urgently need today.

### **Wars of Exploitation**

I begin with Silvia Federici's classic intervention, *Caliban and the Witch*, which connects the violence of the European enclosures and witch-hunts to that of colonial conquest, outlining their integral role in modern-colonial state formation. Federici's work examines both how the modern nation-state colonizes women's fertility and sexuality and, in relegating women in the global social division of labor to the sphere of social reproduction, constitutes this subaltern counter-environment as the capitalist commons. Crucial for us here is Federici's interpretation of the European enclosures, the witch-hunts, and colonial conquest as a counter-offensive of landlords against the political struggles of cultivators seeking to dismantle feudal warlordism. The new capitalist-heteronormative-patriarchal-colonialist state with its world empires is the outcome of this class counter-offensive.<sup>17</sup> The reconstruction of patriarchal power

as a foundation of colonial-capitalist power, it is also worth noting, both historically precedes, logically underpins, and globally over-writes Foucault's Eurocentred theory of biopower. I will return to this point later as well, suffice to say for the moment that Federici's analyses of the persecutions and punishments of the witch hunts and its new normalcies — the crushing of female agrarian collective power and its incarceration in a nuclearized, heteronormative, private-housewife, bourgeois, panoptic sphere — leaves one astonished that the master theorist of disciplinary-capillary power could simply ignore all this.<sup>18</sup> But there are three other aspects of Federici's argument that I want to note here.

First of all, the segmentation of the social division of labor in terms of the unclear and indistinct opposition between the formal and informal sector is not nearly as new as Denning and Zamora assume (even though the concepts are). Rather than trying to theorize this segmentation through a comparison between Marx's discussion of England's surplus population of the proletariat in his day with the growth of precarity in Western Europe and the United States today, taking these postwar developments to be the key to history, a transformation of an alleged "classical model" of employment, as Zamora, Hardt and Negri, or the Endnotes collective do, things become clearer if we consider the history of the capitalist wage system itself in its actual context of a planetary scale social division of labor.<sup>19</sup> Federici's account of the class struggles over enclosure highlights the ways informalization was then and is now subalternization as feminization. In constituting women's fertility and sexuality as a new commons embedded in subsistence and domestic production and enabling capital accumulation, this domain of social reproduction at the heart of capitalist accumulation enables us to understand how exploitation in the waged formal sector rests upon a foundation of patriarchal heteronormative power. As Federici and other subsistence perspective and social reproduction feminists have argued, there is no reproduction of labor power without the reproduction of the household — however various, historically and culturally, this institution has been; and it is the household, properly speaking, that comes to any labor market to sell labor power.<sup>20</sup>

Secondly, this aspect of Federici's argument has been confirmed and elaborated in all kinds of new ways by the feminist scholarship on commodity chain mapping.<sup>21</sup> Such research has deepened our understanding of the multitude of ways production in the formal sector depends upon and externalizes costs to the heterogeneous domain of social reproduction. The frontier between the formal and informal sector is both a frontier of class struggle and its own contradiction. This is our first glimpse of what I am calling a subaltern multitude contradiction: The long histories of class struggle over the terms and conditions of wage labor is accompanied at a world scale by struggles over proletarianization and subalternization. But let me underscore two other implications of commodity chain mapping research.

We find here a paradigmatic instance of the dialectic of quantity and quality. Thus a penny saved anywhere in the global web of commodity chains trickles up to pool

in some quasi-monopoly space as the capitalist form of wealth only insofar as that saving externalizes a cost somewhere else in the network of commodity chains, in the form of super-exploitation, the breaking, burning, and poisoning of bodies as the capitalist form of poverty and its violence.

Then, regarding the body and its ecology, Federici's argument that the reproduction of labor power, understood materialistically, is the reproduction of the household has been recently recast by Jason Moore as his concept of the *oikeios*. For Moore, the concept of the *oikeios* enables us to grasp capitalism's dependence upon an ecological surplus of what he calls "historical nature" — modes of socio-ecological reproduction that include crucially at their core the Four Cheaps of food, energy, labor power and raw materials — which constitute the condition of possibility of various regimes of accumulation. In relation to the weak law he posits regarding the tendency of the ecological surplus to fall, Moore proposes a dialectic of the appropriation and capitalization of the ecological surplus.<sup>22</sup> Moore here deepens our understanding of Marx's theory of crises by drawing our attention to the role of underproduction crises in Marx's critique.

We cannot assume any "essentialist" harmony or balance to the mix of technology, energy sources and raw materials available to a historically given regime of accumulation to be indefinitely sustainable. Marx formulates the problem as one of the potential underproduction of energy and resources (circulating capital) in relation to the overproduction of technology (fixed capital). Moore therefore observes that the very success of strategies to reduce socially necessary labor time require not only ceaseless expansion of material throughput in manufacturing but also ceaseless expansion in energy and resource extraction and agriculture in such a way that "supply volumes must be relentlessly increased while supply prices must be constantly reduced."<sup>23</sup> To keep this expansion going, the share of capitalized work/energy rises relative to the share of unpaid work/energy in a given historical nature but now with declining labor productivity, as the Four Cheaps become costly, increasing socially necessary labor time to keep pace with the trajectory of expansion. Any search for a spatial-temporal fix for the resulting crisis brings into being a complex of historically various interlocking Herculean agencies of capital, science, and empire through which "women, nature and colonies" are actively cheapened so that a frontier of appropriation can be linked again to a frontier of capitalization.

The third reconsideration of Marx's critique of the fable of primitive accumulation I want to take up here is Aníbal Quijano's essay "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America." Quijano's essay is a useful point of reference insofar as its restaging of Marx's critique summarizes a wide range of research in the historical social sciences dedicated to deepening our understanding of the "path dependent" ways colonial history continues to shape the power struggles of contemporary capitalism's crises.

Quijano argues that the world history of colonialism remains the guiding thread to the workings of power in the following ways: Firstly, the violence of racism remains a

key strategy of labor control on a world scale. Drawing on Theodore Allen's histories of racism, Quijano argues that this regime of labor control was new in so far as earlier forms of labor control were now re-organized to produce commodities for the world market, and was ultimately globally articulated as a matrix of power. Secondly, the capitalist enterprise, the nuclear family, and ultimately the neocolonial nation-state, emerge as interdependent institutions controlling labor, sexuality, and authority, eventually on a planetary scale. Thirdly, there emerged, first in the twin inventions of America and Europe, and then through the racialization of all peoples of the world, eurocentrism as a global rationality controlling intersubjectivity, identity, and communicability. For Quijano, eurocentrism then does not mean all the knowledge of Europe or the knowledges of all Europeans, but rather a "specific rationality or perspective of knowledge that was made globally hegemonic."<sup>24</sup>

There are two key ideas I want to pull from Quijano's coloniality of power thesis in order to amplify and elaborate the argument about exploitation I have tried to assemble thus far. The first of these is another re-statement of one of Federici's central assertions. There has never been and there is not now "free wage labor" outside a colonial matrix of (abstract labor) power that includes free unwaged labor, unfree wage labor, and unfree unwaged labor. (See tables 1 and 2)

Historical examples of wage labor abound in the specialist literature. Reviewing the evidence from surviving papyrus documents studied by historians, Jairus Banaji points out that wage labor was well known in the ancient world where contemporaries viewed unskilled wage labor as a form of servitude. But in the historical record we also find instances of slaves not only rented out by masters but hiring themselves out for wages voluntarily. Indeed, wage labor embedded in other modes of socio-ecological reproduction where households had access to viable ecosystems and were not subject to frontier colonial violence brings a completely different kind of freedom than capitalist wage labor. This is why Marx's own references to the concept of "free wage labor" drip with irony. For Marx has at least two lessons regarding the capitalist wage for us. The wage mediates the household's consumer access to the fruits of world scale social cooperation and, insofar as proletarianization is a condition of separation from means of production, the capitalist wage also mediates the household's consumer access to enclosed and urbanized nature, including, of course, technology. This double mediation amounts to an abstract and anonymous system of domination regarding which Marx writes: "In reality, the worker belongs to capital before he has sold himself to the capitalist. His economic bondage is at once mediated through and concealed by, the periodic renewal of the act by which he sells himself, his change of masters, and the oscillations in the market price of his labor."<sup>25</sup> But this wage-caged freedom is only possible insofar as social reproduction depends, to this day, upon a social division of labor articulating unfree and unwaged labor as well.<sup>26</sup> Such a colonial matrix of abstract labor power, then, mediates the specificity of the concept of capital qua commodity form of value with regard to what Wallerstein

calls “historical capitalism.”<sup>27</sup>

**Table 1: COLONIAL MATRIX OF LABOR POWER**

Colonial Matrix of Labor Power <—>	Intermediation of state, market, kinship and culture
Free Wage Labor (use/exchange value)	Free unwaged Labor (use value)
Unfree Wage Labor (use/exchange value)	Unfree Unwaged Labor (use value)

**TABLE 2: INTERMEDIATIONS OF ACCUMULATED VIOLENCE**

Historical capitalism: colonial global social division of labor	Value form of gendered, racialized mediation	Labor system matrix
Mines, Plantations & Commercial Estates	Commodity	Unfree unwaged labor Unfree waged labor
Small scale craft-artisan & domestic subsistence social reproduction, small-holding agriculture	Male: visible Female: invisible  Commodity, subsistence and common goods	Free unwaged labor Free waged labor Unfree waged labor Unfree unwaged labor
Putting out system	Commodity	Unfree waged labor Unfree unwaged labor Free unwaged labor
Ship (sail)	Commodity	Unfree waged labor Unfree unwaged labor Free waged labor
Globalized informal sector	Commodity	All of the above
Industrial mass production	Commodity and public goods	All of the above
Post-industrial flexible production	Commodity and public goods	All of the above
Subalternized domain of social reproduction	Commodity and public goods	All of the above

The second point I want to draw out from Quijano's essay is its implication for the theory of intersecting oppressions and for the question of identity politics to which this theory is connected as some kind of "solution" and recuperation. The concept of intersectionality has been hailed for being "the most important theoretical contribution of women's studies" and roundly denounced as well for being ultimately unintelligible.<sup>28</sup> The criticisms tend to amount to the accusation that the metaphor of intersection only casts the shadow of the very reifications it opposes: analytic distinctions confused for real ones, as though there were some kind of pure racism or pure sexism prior to their intersection.<sup>29</sup> The problem is a severe one, since the problematic of intersectionality, on the one hand, responds to the dead ends of a feminist politics hegemonized by North American white heterosexual middle class agendas facing off against an "oppression Olympics," and, on the other, to the sheer facticity of social being wherein all identities are multiple and entangled which then threatens to bring into contradiction all political mythologies of unity and homogeneity. This is a Gordian knot that neither positivist social science, poststructuralist philosophy, nor deconstructive literary theory, despite all talk of "strategic essentialism," can cut since the conceptual elusiveness and fragility of the metaphor of intersection is not exactly an error. Rather, the unrepresentability of an anti-essentialist intersection of essences turns on a social contradiction specific to the gap or tension between theory and praxis. For the anti-essentialists are certainly correct in their insistence that all identities are historical inventions rather than primordial essences. Yet, when Slavoj Žižek, for example, admonishes us for moralizing politics by attempting to legitimize ourselves "as being some kind of (potential or actual) victim of power" in order to be heard, or, when Eve Mitchell denounces identity politics for focusing on our "one-sided existence and the forms of appearance of capitalism" instead of taking up "issues that put the particular and the form of appearance in conversation with the universal and the essence," the critique may be correct, if not dead on target regarding this or that empirically specific praxis, but for that reason misses the whole point about identity.<sup>30</sup> As it turns out with neofascism today, for instance, it is the Right that now claims to offer an economic agenda and Trumpism especially dispenses with any and all snowflake victim peddling. In this case, however, it is neither the communal essentialism nor the discursive anti-essentialism of identity nor its structural construction as ideological effect or epiphenomenon by some putatively more fundamental material base that gets to the heart of the matter. Rather, the politicization of identities seems to put at stake the very difference between a politics on the Left and that on the Right, between "social justice" and the "fascist lurking in us all". Why and how this might be so any adequate theorization of intersections would need to clarify.

It might then seem more promising to approach the problematic of intersectionality from the direction of the "interlocking oppressions" themselves, as George Sefa Dei and Sherene Razack argue, than with regard to the identities the oppressions



construct and violate. The problem then is one of locating politics in its historical situations rather than any abstract deconstruction or celebration of essentialism. Here Quijano's survey of contemporary critical research in the historical social sciences allows us to unpack "interlocking oppressions" in terms of the historical articulations of the institutions of the household, the market, the enterprise, the state and the symbolic order by strategies and tactics of power, indeed as the violent colonization of households and kinship by the enterprise, by the market in labor power and capital, by the state and by an Eurocentric symbolic order. Moreover, the problem of the irrepressible persistence of reification dogging the metaphor of intersection can then be grasped in a new light connected to the very proliferation of contemporary inequalities and oppressions that has been our point of departure. For racism, sexism, heteronormativity, ableism, and so all down the list depend on the continual production of individuals, demographic categories of governmentality, or, from the perspective of Dorothy Smith's Marxist-Feminism, of "abstractions of ruling relations" — economic migrants, refugees, temporary foreign workers, slum-dwellers, indigenous peoples, youth at risk, the development displaced, etc. — that can be further divided, shuffled, and recombined in all kinds of tactical ways. Moreover, as Partha Chatterjee observes, resistance to "governing most of the world" through such abstractions of ruling relations invariably involves various tactics that attempt "to give the empirical form of a population group the moral attributes of a community."<sup>31</sup> To operate as real abstractions, such categories, in other words, must be turned into identities, ranging from the national, ethnic, and professional to the subcultural and institution or policy specific, so the problematic of intersectional identity then returns with a vengeance.

This would then be the appropriate place to open a parenthesis on the terms power and violence that I have so far used both in coordination and sometimes interchangeably. It will be remembered that Foucault dismisses the question of violence because power does not always depend on physical violence.<sup>32</sup> Fanon, however, insisted that colonial society is violence, and I would rather follow Fanon here, not only because of another major lacuna in Foucault's thought.<sup>33</sup> For it will also be remembered that in the genealogy of the discourse of race presented in the lectures published as *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault examines its emergence during the English Civil War and tracks its transformation into European antisemitism and its persistence in the Soviet Union, while passing over in silence, quite amazingly, both trans-Atlantic slavery and modern colonialism. Feminist and anti-racist scholarship, however, draw attention to the link between power and violence in compelling ways, and have forged concepts of institutional and symbolic violence to do so. But, I want to insist on emphasizing the matter of violence in thinking about power for a far more important reason.

For Fanon's enduring lesson — both anticipated and repeated ever since by the poetry, literature, and art of the oppressed — is that identities are not all historically

constructed to be ontologically equivalent like signifiers qua signifier; the discursivists miss the obvious point that black identity, or indigenous identity, or immigrant identity, or feminist identity, as political identities, are not on the same plane as masculinity or with passing for white, or heterosexuality or ethnicity or national identity. On this issue, neither signifiers nor eurocentric models of power or desire are pertinent. But the specificities of colonizing capitalism, in all their diversity, are crucial. The racialized and colonized, as Fanon famously argues, are historically legislated and sentenced to a “zone of non-being” through appropriation, colonization, and racialization of the body “given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored.”<sup>34</sup> In affirming this being of non-being, Fanon’s “aporetic dialectic,” as Sekyi-Otu calls it, indeed “stretches” Marxist analyses by throwing new light on Marx’s own dialectic, which seeks to render critically intelligible the fetish character of the commodity form of value. For Marx, this is ultimately a story of class violence wherein proprietors run their networks of colonizing institutions in such a way that value as the representation of capitalist wealth does not represent the common wealth on which it depends and which Herculean capitalist class power both encloses and appropriates. Marx draws on the colonial discourse of the fetish, in formation ever since the Portuguese traded down the Gold Coast of Africa in the fifteenth century, for a figure for representing the violence with which the operations of markets in labor power and capital restructure, subordinate, and in this way, colonize the ritual “markets” of reciprocal exchange that constitutes the molecular media of material life.<sup>35</sup> In colonizing various life-worlds of political-ecological reproduction, Herculean class power, working through the institutions of “modern society” and normalizing homogeneous empty clock time, thereby transforms the content, context, and consequences of everyday reciprocal exchange, including their mediation of extant modes of domination, and so subalternizes these modern counter-environments of common being and “Hydra-headed revolt” into racialized, criminalized, misogynistically feminized non-being of “relationships between things” that thus form an abstract colonial value matrix of assets and instruments of capitalist accumulation.<sup>36</sup>

However, like Marx, Fanon’s dialectic also finds here the seeds of “sober senses” through which a counter-environmental universality that is radically different from that of the proprietors emerges as a real abstraction. So with Fanon, but also Adorno, I want to insist on the “utterly naked declivity,” the ultimate “primacy of the object,” on the historical, intersubjective, mediatory objectivity of accumulated violence through which the singular histories of subalternization interlock and with which the different oppressions are then stamped. The Eurocentric, Herculean sciences and humanities remain caught in their various racializing, exoticizing, Orientalizing idioms of repression and erasure. Nonetheless, the singular histories of subalternization are now manifestations of our common being and we can study and learn from them. But we can also now understand how and why identity politics is then the condition of possibility of class politics from below and cannot be simply

explained away as the legacy of post-war social movements from the Combahee River Collective onwards plus consumerism. Rather the discourses and practices of identity of the past half-century, in whatever ways they are unprecedented, are themselves popular cultural sites of hegemonic struggle and this conjunctural experience adds weight to Etienne Balibar's argument that there are no classes in themselves, only classes for themselves, no classes without active and organized class struggle.<sup>37</sup> Insofar as class politics from below is by definition then a matter of mass politics, a class politics on the Left begins not merely with vague demands for jobs, better working conditions, rights in production that the parliamentary Left restricts itself to (for the Right can fight for these too), but with an organized mass struggle for the regeneration of common being and the abolition of accumulated violence as the necessary condition of a just ecology of planetary reproduction.

The last engagement with the problematic of Marx's critique I now consider is Ranajit Guha's theorization of Company Rule in India as "dominance without hegemony." As Fanon insisted, one's belonging to colonial society was fundamentally mediated by violence. Guha's elaboration of this insight is to argue that this obtains not only with regard to the relationship between colonizer and colonized but between much else, as he puts it in his famous re-definition of subalternity, "as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way."<sup>38</sup> The intersection of these different systems of oppression Guha then formulates as deriving "in all their diversities and permutations... from a general relation of Dominance and Subordination."<sup>39</sup> These two terms imply each other and this allows Guha to propose a way to historicize power "in all its aspects as an interaction of Dominance and Subordination."<sup>40</sup> For each of these aspects of power, Guha argues, have their correlates: "Dominance" can take the forms of "Coercion" and "Persuasion," whereas "Subordination" can take the form of "Collaboration" and "Resistance." As Guha explains, the "mutuality of Dominance and Subordination is logical and universal... it obtains in all kinds of unequal power relations everywhere at all times."<sup>41</sup> But the specific mix of coercion, persuasion, collaboration and resistance is contingently variable in different historical situations. As Guha puts it "the organic composition" of power in any particular instance "depend on the relative weights of the elements Coercion and Persuasion in Dominance and of Resistance and Collaboration in Subordination."<sup>42</sup>

Guha's schema for subalternist historiography allows me to specify how accumulated violence is a dimension of the social fetish as real abstraction and what this implies for a specifically post-Western Marxist theoretical practice. I have been arguing that the social contradiction between capital and labor can only be meaningful insofar as we understand it to be mediated by what I have called subaltern multitude social contradictions. I can now render this argument more sharply. In mobilizing the concept of the multitude, Hardt and Negri tell us that they mean this to be a class

concept of the world proletariat, defined a concept of an “open and expansive logic of singularity-commonality.”<sup>43</sup> While this definition then attempts to acknowledge the social heterogeneity of wage dependency that has been our concern here, the main problem this concept presents, both in Hardt and Negri’s formulation and in the way it has largely taken up by their followers, is the vanguardism of its theorization with regard to what they call “immaterial labor”: the transformation of Fordist labor processes by scientific research, communicative work, and computerization. In claiming that immaterial labor performed by the multitude is the fate of our world, Hardt and Negri claim to be following Marx’s methodology outlined in the penultimate “historical tendency” chapter of *Capital*.<sup>44</sup> But Marx’s discussion there is about the crisis tendencies of capitalism, rather than some technological determinist methodology for plotting a linear trajectory of historical development. The reach of computerization throughout social life is without doubt massive, extensive and transformative, but it is neither uniform nor total. Their key thesis that the computerization of labor processes has given rise to the historical agency of the multitude embodying what Marx called the “General Intellect” does not itself account for interlocking oppressions nor contradictions through which different locations in the global social division of labor are connected. Indeed, exploitation works through the subalternizations that make up social heterogeneity. Let me offer one example from my research on the making of a software technology park in the suburbs of Kolkata, India. Both US and Indian transnational firms like IBM, Microsoft, Infosys, and Cognizant created job losses and precarity in the IT sector in North America by the outsourcing high wage immaterial work to Indian IT engineers who are cheaper only insofar as the social reproduction of such immaterial labor involves a myriad of informal sector services such female domestic service, food preparation, transportation, construction, etc. The possibility of any formal sector work connected to a relatively more robust set of political rights depends, for its conditions of possibility, upon a world scale social division of labor which is preponderantly made up of the low wage or subsistence informal sector. So the concept of multitude, in order for it to be adequate to its own definition, calls for the concept of the subaltern while the concept of the subaltern, in Guha’s re-definition, in turn calls for the concept of the multitude, if it is to now have any pertinence to contemporary South Asia or anywhere else.<sup>45</sup> The two concepts, multitude and subaltern, then call for each other without being reducible to each other, just as singularity and the common are not reducible to each other. In my usage of the terms here and elsewhere, each concept names the way the other is not identical to itself. Moreover, we have noted that subalternity names an identity only by virtue of its counter-environmental situation by accumulated violence. In this regard, subaltern and multitude are best understood as allegorical narrative characters of such counter-environmental chronotopes that are otherwise usually marginalized or erased by Herculean accounts of history written by or for the victors. Post-Western Marxist historiography, ethnography, and cultural studies intermedia

research then seeks to learn from such subaltern counter-environments. Indeed, the singular histories of subalternization and the intersectional theoretical practices of feminism, anti-racism, sexual politics, the Black radical tradition are as much necessary conditions of “revolutionary consciousness” of the “general intellect” as is science in the immaterial labor of cognitive capitalism.<sup>46</sup> The fetish’s “magical” power is thus also contradictory: on the one hand, it structurally limits and mystifies the Herculean sciences such that the history and consequences of colonizing capitalism eludes them. On the other hand, it also makes it possible for us to render the subaltern counter-environments of common-being communicable. But the “organic composition” of accumulated violence then presents for a specifically post-Western Marxist theoretical practice what Fredric Jameson calls a “narrative form problem”: how do we represent social contradictions, especially the intermediation of subaltern multitude contradictions by the contradiction of labor power and capital, when social contradictions — which are embodied, unfold as space over time, and can be as affective as they are prosthetic — cannot be reduced to logical contradictions?<sup>47</sup> For the question then of what the accumulated violence of our common being means to us — what singular subalternizations and suffering, what the “exhaustion of historical nature,” as Jason Moore calls it, means to us — becomes the decisive question to pose without which we cannot intervene in class politics at all. But at the same time, an interrogation of what the accumulated violence of our common being means to us also then demands some kind of utopian but practical-theoretical experimentation regarding the regeneration of common being beyond the reign of value, if theorization is to not let itself be colonized by its conditions of possibility in the accumulated violence of social practices. This question then also demands an investigation of the kinds of ecological “work,” in the non-dualist world ecological sense of this word — work qua the eco-systemic ways of our common being — that would not bring with it the fate of the planet’s and our exhaustion as historically specific capitalist labor does. Such new stories would become allegories of social contradictions. But they would also have to be stories of exploitation more specifically — at least if we are to theorize class politics dialectically, and so in terms of its non-identity with itself.

I have been arguing that the histories of colonialism are crucial to our understanding of exploitation. To this end, I have proposed the concept of accumulated violence in order to foreground the links between exploitation, domination, and dispossession, on the one hand, and as such, to argue that it is through the mediation of the accumulated violence of subalternization that the different systems of oppression interlock. I close this essay with one last observation about the way Marx tells his story of exploitation in order to bring to the foreground the centrality of colonialism to it. The ultimate force of Marx’s arithmetic of exploitation, it seems to me, is the critique of the nineteenth century’s contract ideology of the wage that he mounts through it. Not only is exchange at the labor market between wage dependents and proprietors of capital not between equals, nor freely entered into but it is not a fair exchange either. For the

key question Marx poses through his arithmetical demonstration of exploitation is this: If the wage is supposed to compensate labor power for its time in production, for the opportunity cost of being commanded in this specific process of production, rather than some other, then by what rights — that is to say, by the market of capital's own immanent rationality, by what rights? — does receipt of a wage extinguish all claims on the part of one class of production to title over surplus value as well? If the wage compensates for time, why should it compensate for the Lockean mixture as well? Why should surplus value be handed over to proprietors? At stake, of course, is the difference and contradiction between the production of capitalist wealth and the production of common wealth. Here, the deepest mystification that springs forth from the wage seems to me to derive from the temporality of the putting out system in which tools, materials, provisions, and even cash would be advanced to producers under a contract requiring pelts, slaves, fish, and now, software or even research, to be handed over to the merchant at a later time. Even at the heart of the exploitation of free wage labor, the colonial matrix of labor power remains a force of collective habit.



## Notes

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2. This essay derives from a talk presented at the Marxist Literary Group's Institute for Culture and Society held at Concordia University, Montreal June 25-29th, 2016. I want to thank Dr. Beverley Best for her invitation to make this presentation and the anonymous reviewers whose comments were very helpful to me in turning that talk into this essay. The missteps remain my own.
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42. "Gramsci in India" 292.
43. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* 225.
44. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* 141.
45. See Mookerjee, "Subaltern Biopolitics in the Networks of the Commonwealth" and "Epilogue: Through the Utopian Forest of Time."
46. See Virno, *A Grammar for the Multitude*.
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Sofia Cutler. "Small and Subaltern Cosmopolitanisms." *Mediations* 32.1 (Fall 2018) 115-122.  
www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/subaltern-cosmpolitanisms

*Cosmopolitanisms*

Edited by Paulo Lemos Horta and Bruce Robbins

New York: NYU Press, 2017

272 pp

US \$20.67

ISBN: 978-1479863235

## Small and Subaltern Cosmopolitanisms

Sofia Cutler

When interrogated about his origins, Diogenes the Cynic evaded the question by declaring himself a *kosmopolitês* or a "citizen of the world" instead of Sinope from which he had been banished in the fifth century B.C.E. This belching, badly-dressed eccentric, who promoted public sex and slept in a tub, would have a lasting legacy in Western history. His vision of cosmopolitanism — of a commitment to one's humanity rather than one's home — would inspire ancient Greek Stoicism, Alexander the Great's imperialism, Enlightenment humanism and humanitarianism after World War II.

Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta's edited collection *Cosmopolitanisms* (2018) opens up cosmopolitan history's Eurocentric purview to include the subaltern cultures at the margins of that history. It pushes cosmopolitanism beyond the realm of the jet-setting elite to include refugees, exiles, economic migrants, and peoples of the diaspora. As the title indicates, the book expands cosmopolitanism by pluralizing it. Rather than one "unhealthy skinny ethical abstraction," their cosmopolitanisms are abundant with "blooming, fleshed-out particulars" that make room for the vernacular, rooted, comparative, discrepant, and marginalized (1). Horta and Robbins's book is the latest contribution to a growing body of "new cosmopolitan" scholarship that emerged in the 1990s in an effort to decenter and diversify cosmopolitanism. From Derrida's work on hospitality to Balibar's seminal *Droit de cité: Culture et politique en démocratie* (1998) and Bruce Robbins and Pheng Cheah's volume *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (1998), this new batch of cosmopolitical theory preserves the old cosmopolitanism's ideal of global coexistence while eschewing its universalism and Eurocentrism.

Theories about cosmopolitanism are ultimately theories about globalization, and those advanced in *Cosmopolitanisms* depart significantly from orthodox Marxism. In the *Communist Manifesto*, for example, Marx and Engels define globalization as the expansion of the fundamental capitalist antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat to a global level. This understanding of globalization as a universalizing division has continued to define Marxist thought, from Leon Trotsky's theory of combined and uneven development to Frederic Jameson's notion of a "singular modernity" and Aijaz Ahmed's definition of globalization as "the emergence of a worldwide capitalist civilization, in which national, regional and local cultures are being organized as so many variants of that singular civilization" (103). Contributors to *Cosmopolitanisms* often resist the universalizing side of this Marxist dialectic. As Robbins and Horta write, they "do not assume that there is a single cosmopolitan idea, and they privilege multiple types of difference in formulating their ideas of cosmopolitanism" (10). Such a formulation, they claim, is better suited to encompass the "many possible modes of life, thought, and sensibility that are produced when commitments and loyalties are multiple and overlapping, no one of them necessarily trumping the others" (3). In doing so, they reflect much postcolonial theoretical production today, which often defines globalization through what Gayatri Spivak describes as the "logic of difference and excess" and Homi Bhaba celebrates as "the empowering condition of hybridity" and the "foreign element that reveals the interstitial."<sup>1</sup>

*Cosmopolitanisms'* dedication to difference is its strength. In its pages, readers will find a diverse array of nineteen contributors from north and south, including influential literary and cultural theorists, historians, lawyers, philosophers, and political scientists who often respond and debate with each other. These contributors rethink cosmopolitanism not just as Westernism's expansion into the peripheries but as an opening for subaltern cultures as well. Together, they examine and expand this new cosmopolitanism synchronically as well as diachronically. Thus, not only do they diversify cosmopolitanism to include those marginalized today, but they also excavate earlier instantiations of this new, subaltern cosmopolitanism, such as Afro-Brazilian culture in the nineteenth century Accra. Readers will not only learn about these new and unlikely forms of cosmopolitanism, but they will also get the chance to read fresh considerations of more traditional forms of cosmopolitanism such as ancient Greeks' stoicism, Richard Burton's Victorian adventures and Frederick Law Olmstead's urban projects.

While the contributors' attention to plurality, difference, and hybridity is both impressive and salutary, some do so at the expense of contradiction and antagonism. In light of the growing global gulf between the rich and poor in our era of relentless neoliberalism, this oversight will certainly frustrate some. Take Kwame Anthony Appiah's epilogue in which he reminisces about his nephew's wedding in Namibia. There, his Norwegian-Namibian nephew, the Moscow-born, South-Korean educated



bride, European vegetarians and Ovambo carnivores all unite in matrimonial celebration. He writes movingly about this moment as a shining example of a new modern family “connecting people from many nations into a network of relationships that will endure through generations” (271). In less than four pages, this essay distills the major points of his definitive *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006), which is frequently cited in books about cosmopolitanism, including Robbins and Horta’s collection. In *Cosmopolitanism*, he pushes beyond traditional humanist formulations of cosmopolitanism to argue for a universalism plus difference: “We value the variety of human forms of social and cultural life; we do not want everyone to become part of a homogeneous global culture.”<sup>2</sup> He beseeches his reader to learn from and share the world with those who have different backgrounds, religions, cultures and ethnicities. This does not mean giving up one’s own traditions, however. Instead, the ideal cosmopolite is receptive towards the other without attempting to annihilate the differences between them. As a result, she comes away from each encounter with difference with a deeper, more self-critical understanding of herself.

As many have pointed out, what is absent from so much of Appiah’s work (including this epilogue) are the economic differences exacerbated by the globalization he glorifies. In our post-1989 moment when capitalism has inherited the earth, he chooses to virtually ignore class and political economy. This oversight makes sense. After all, class cannot be folded so easily into his cosmopolitan vision of peaceful coexistence. While religious, ethnic, gender, and other cultural differences should certainly be celebrated, many would agree that class differences should not. When Appiah does raise the issue of economic redistribution he is usually dismissive. In *Cosmopolitanism*, for example, he critiques Peter Singer’s argument that cosmopolitanism should not just be about the acceptance of others but the active struggle for their material wellbeing. Singer’s *The Life You Can Save* (2009) urges his better-off readers to sacrifice some of their privileges and even donate at least five percent of their income to charitable agencies. But for Appiah, Singer goes too far. He writes, “If so many people in the world are not doing their share — and they clearly are not — it seems to me I cannot be required to derail my life to take up the slack.”<sup>3</sup>

Readers frustrated by such class evasions might appreciate Walter Benn Michaels’ contribution to this book. In his short and scathing piece, Michaels accuses today’s cosmopolites of being more concerned with “the difference between cultures than the difference between quintiles” (61). He directs his ire at NYU, which, like many elite universities, promotes itself as a cosmopolitan site of difference. But Michaels notes that while one may find the Asian American Women’s Alliance or the Iranian Jewish club on campus, one will be hard-pressed to find a poor kids’ club. As he puts it: “The difference between the poor and the rich does not offer an opportunity, much less an occasion, to celebrate difference” (64).

Unlike Michaels, however, many of *Cosmopolitanisms*’ contributors are actually interested in exploring what it would mean to celebrate the cosmopolitanism of the

poor. In his eponymous essay on the subject, “Cosmopolitanism of the Poor,” Silviano Santiago attempts to do just that. His piece expands cosmopolitanism from the realm of privileged jet-setters and cappuccino-sippers to include refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants. Although he concedes these peoples “had cosmopolitanism thrust upon them by traumatic histories of dislocation and dispossession,” he is ultimately more interested in the ways in which they manage to forge their own cosmopolitan cultures and cites the cultural closeness between Brazil and African nations in a global black resistance as one example of this (3).

The stakes of Silviano’s subaltern cosmopolitanism are particularly illuminated in this collection’s lively debates about Afropolitanism, which constitute one of *Cosmopolitanisms’* most important and exciting scholarly contributions. Afropolitanism, as Achille Mbembe defines it here, is an “aesthetic and a particular poetics of the world” practiced by a growing population of increasingly mobile and worldly Africans. Afropolitans often live outside Africa or in a different African country from their place of birth. Usually, they are artists who measure themselves “not against the village next door, but against the world at large” (107).

But as fellow-contributors Emma Dabiri and Ashleigh Harris warn, Afropolitanism can often reproduce “African-flavored versions of Western convention and form,” the fruits of which are often only enjoyed by the richest Africans (204). Both Dabiri and Harris importantly draw our attention to the ways in which Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism more generally are often just the superstructural shadows of imperialism and capitalism. Indeed, as they show, Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism are usually not equal exchanges between different cultures around the world but the expansion of Western, and specifically American, imperialism into the peripheries. In their arguments, Dabiri and Harris echo longstanding Marxist critiques of cosmopolitanism as a guise for imperialism and capitalism. In his *Prison Notebooks*, for example, Gramsci rails against the cosmopolitan intellectual. For him, the cosmopolite is lackey for the pernicious traditions of imperialism and the rise of a rootless managerial class. His words ring especially true today when supposedly cosmopolitan supranational institutions are either powerless (like the UN) or instruments for American imperialism (the World Bank and the IMF).

But while Gramsci urges us to nurture a national culture without nativism, Dabiri and Harris do not. Like Mbembe and many other cosmopolitan thinkers, they do not harken back to the traditional forms of anti-imperialist nationalism championed by African decolonization.<sup>4</sup> Instead, both find great promise in the long history of transnationalism in the Global South. Indeed, as they argue, pre-colonial Africa was never a collection of self-contained tribal identities but a constant exchange of cultures, religions and commodities. For them, this proves that cosmopolitanism need not only be imposed by the US and other imperial centers but can also be an equal exchange between peripheral cultures. Ato Quayson reiterates this key point in his own contribution about the return of Afro-Brazilians to Accra in the nineteenth

century.

The forms of cosmopolitan resistance Mbembe, Santiago, Quayson, Dabiri, and Harris advance do not go so far as to call for the expropriation of the bourgeoisie nor do they make claims upon the state. But, as Santiago insists, “although their subversive mode is soft, their political stock may be strong and little influenced by the festivities generated by the governmental machine” (36). While some might criticize this as an instance of what Walter Benn Michaels bemoans as cosmopolitanism’s focus on culture over economics, it cannot be dismissed so easily. After all, this cosmopolitanism from below is a testament to the endurance and vibrancy of subaltern cultural exchange against imperialism’s odds. In doing so, it draws our attention to the subversive spaces within the apparently smooth circuit of capitalism and empire.

But one is often left wondering how and whether these subversive spaces could ever cohere into a viable force for challenging the powers that be. Contributor Leela Gandhi adamantly answers these questions in the negative. In her piece “Utonal Life,” she uses utonal music and the difference between minor and major in musical theory to illustrate the role of minor anti-imperial struggles against dominant globalization. For her, anti-imperialism must be engaged in a form of minor politics built on “myriad subjective, nonconformist, immature, inconsequential, heretical, and minor practices” (65). She thus resists the major’s normative and institutional politics, while refusing to overturn them. Instead of a grand utopian project, her minor politics strives to open up new heterotopian cultures that offer alternative ways of being. These subversive spaces are not meant to add up to anything or cohere into a collective resistance that would overtake the dominant order. Rather, “its sole interest is to make dissensual coexistence manifest whenever shared life is at risk of monopolization by a major mode” (66, emphasis added).

Gandhi’s minor politics and its anarchist principles of decentralization, horizontality, and spontaneity reiterate much of the anti-imperialist thought advanced in postmodern political theory today. In their much-discussed volume *Multitude*, for example, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri urge their readers to abandon the category of “the people” for the “multitude,” a composition of “innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity.”<sup>5</sup> Unlike the centralized organizations such as Internationals or parties, the multitude is a global network of local anti-imperial struggles that refuse to make claims on the state or being reduced to a singular party form.

This sort of minor politics is often understood as the historically appropriate mode of struggle against neoliberalism’s rhizomatic structures. As Hardt and Negri write, “it takes a network to fight a network.”<sup>6</sup> In this context, neo-anarchism’s growing popularity in the west—from the alter-globalization movement to Occupy Wall Street—might be understood as the proper mode of resistance in our era of relentless neoliberalism and its attack on more traditional form of organizing such as labor unions and political parties oriented around and through the state. Furthermore,

this sort of minor politics might also offer a solution to what David Hollinger, in his contribution to this book, calls the “problem of solidarity” in the face of the plethora of different ethnicities, cultures, and religions globalization confronts us with.

In their celebration of the local, the spontaneous and the decentralized, however, Gandhi and others can sometimes confuse a liability imposed upon the left with a freely-chosen opportunity. Their fixation on autonomy and spontaneity at the expense of large-scale, emancipatory institutions of collective organizing, such as the political party, can even mirror neoliberalism’s own commanded individualism and flexibility. (In *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski even go so far as to argue that that the ’68 autonomists’ demands “to live, to express oneself, to be free” actually inspired neoliberalism’s own ethos of flexibility.)<sup>7</sup>

While Gandhi’s quotidian form of resistance “widen the ambit of shared truth,” it becomes problematic when it forecloses any engagement with the nation-state. Despite contemporary cultural studies’ continuous proclamations otherwise, the nation-state remains an intractable instrument for capital accumulation, resource extraction and the enforced inequality. As Timothy Brennan writes, “Nation-states are not only, as we customarily hear today, imagined communities: they are also, and no less fundamentally, manageable communities.”<sup>8</sup> Today, even multi-national corporations continue to rely on domestic state measures such as tariffs, political trade bans on problematic nations, highly policed free-market zones and subsidizing. As Homi Bhabha points out in his own contribution to *Cosmopolitanisms*, 90% of all world-wide trade policies of tariffs are still controlled by nations rather than interregional bodies.

Ignoring this not only cedes the nation-state’s power to capitalists and the right, it also elides the nation-state’s crucial function as a tool for indigenous and subaltern peoples to assert their sovereignty and to petition the state through a shared cultural identity. Cosmopolitan theory today often succumbs to this in its frequent dismissals socialist nationalism as “institutionalized” and “ossified” — to use Mbembe’s words. In doing so, it ignores the many socialist movements of the last few years that have organized through or around the nation-state in the Global South, including India, Nepal, Peru, and the Philippines, to name a few.

Unlike Mbembe and others, Bruce Robbins is the only contributor to think about the nation-state as a tool for progressive change. To do so, he draws on Orwell’s writing during World War II when Britain was undergoing rationing to defeat the Nazis. For Robbins, this sacrifice proves that nationalism can be used not just for reactionary ends but as means of stretching people beyond themselves to some greater collective good. While Robbins acknowledges the transnational urgency of climate change, he, like the other contributors to this volume, insists that one cannot immediately jump from the particular to the universal. Instead, one must understand the universal through one’s particularities, including one’s nationality. Without ever answering this question, Robbins ponders how nationalism can be put in the service

of cosmopolitanism for global projects for ecological justice or against nuclear war.

While Robbins recognizes the nation-state's double-nature as both a product of imperialism and a necessary, though temporary, tool for justice, he and the other contributors in this collection curiously never mention internationalism (i.e. the global cooperation of anti-capitalist, state projects). This shows, if anything, the need to explore the relationship between cosmopolitanism and internationalism. Must these two forms be in opposition? Or can we pursue a more heterodox approach that draws on both? How, for example, can transnational subaltern cultures in the Global South and cosmopolitanism institutions of human rights and humanitarianism also engage with anti-colonial struggles for sovereignty in Palestine, Catalonia, Northern Ireland, Ukraine, and First Nations, as well as state-socialist projects in Venezuela and Cuba, and the rise of democratic socialism in the United States and England where leftists are increasing working through the institutions of the state and parliamentary democracy? Although readers will not find answers to these questions, let alone calls for an international proletariat to break free from their chains, they will find some of the sharpest, contemporary takes from the most influential cosmopolitical theorists to think alongside and against. The book offers a broad set of fascinating considerations readers should be very invested in addressing and answering.

**Notes**

1. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 80; Homi Bhaba, "Beyond the Pale: Art in the Age of Multicultural Translation" in *1993 Biennial Exhibition* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art/Abrams, 1993) 227.
2. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006) 94.
3. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* 165.
4. For more on contemporary cosmopolitanism's dismissal of decolonization projects see Timothy Brennan's *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (2006).
5. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004) xiv.
6. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* 58.
7. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2005) 170.
8. Timothy Brennan, "Cosmopolitanism and Internationalism," *New Left Review* 7 (2001) 82.



*The Financial Imaginary: Economic Mystification and the Limits of Realist Fiction*

Alison Shonkwiler

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017

200 pp

US \$28.00

ISBN: 978-1517901523

## The Financial Imaginary of the American Middle Class?

Myka Tucker-Abramson

We live in a moment where capital is primarily financial and not productive, and this new (or more fully realized) form of capitalism has created representational challenges for the novel. This is the central claim of Alison Shonkwiler's *The Financial Imaginary*.<sup>1</sup> Shonkwiler's argument is based on two premises. First, that as capitalism shifts from production to finance, its processes become increasingly abstract, virtual, less tangible, and mystified. Second, that all previous novelistic forms — though most notably realism and postmodernism — are unable to grapple with this new fully financialised system: realism because its narrative strategies have been outpaced by capitalism, and postmodernism because finance "seems perfectly capable of realizing itself on postmodern terms" (xiii, emphasis in original). Thus, the question Shonkwiler asks is if there is a contemporary novelistic form that is able to "penetrate late capitalism's abstractions or to forge an adequate representation of a postmodern and global context" (xi-xii).

At the center of Shonkwiler's book, then, is the question of the aesthetic and political potential of novels to narrate, map, and critique finance: whether the contemporary novel is able to "grasp" this new moment in which "the seeming realities of the economy are reconceived as phenomena of virtuality and representation" and thus to counter finance's reifying, abstracting power (ix). The term abstraction is a weighty one, but Shonkwiler offers a useful definition, namely the process through which finance "*conceals* the social origins of wealth", making it "difficult to identify how and where value is created, how and where we as individuals are situated in a field of economic relations, where the agency of the system is located, and what change

could possibly be effected" (xiv) Shonkwiler's questions reflect many of the questions that are often asked within the art and autonomy debates: can the contemporary novel help provide a cognitive map of capitalism? Can the contemporary novel help destabilise financial capitalism? Or, is the contemporary novel either inadequate to the challenge or fully subsumed within the logic of financial capitalism? The answer (spoiler alert) is: it's complicated.

Complicated, but not impossible. And while Shonkwiler expresses strong reservations about the contemporary novel's ability to either resolve the structural tensions that finance's abstractive power places on narrative models or fully confront and dissolve finance's own narrative structures, she nonetheless argues for the contemporary novel's importance as "a site at which social and aesthetic imaginaries continue to be constructed — and thus, in theory, can be unconstructed" (xxvi). More specifically, Shonkwiler wagers that the most promising site to find such a novelistic resource is in a new form realism that Shonkwiler tentatively terms "economic realism."

The reasons for this are as much formal as they are historical. Drawing on Giovanni Arrighi's argument that capitalism develops, not linearly, but through a spiralling periodicity, Shonkwiler argues that while these processes of the present — the freeing of finance from the shackles of production, the increasing virtualization and globalization of the economy, and the obfuscation of social relations — are unprecedented in their intensity, they are not entirely new. Rather, she argues, our current age echoes the Gilded Age and thus just as the Gilded Age gave birth to the "classic realisms" of authors such as William Dean Howells, Henry James, Theodore Dreiser, and Frank Norris, all of whom were also locked in a struggle "to define the real against the ephemerality of capitalism," so our contemporary era (Gilded Age prime perhaps?) has given birth to a new iteration of realist authors that draw on and refigure the aspects of classical realisms: realist novels' investment in character; realism's appropriation of other genres such as the epic, bildungsroman, or self-help manual; realism's "oscillation around structural tensions between synchronic and diachronic, global and local, subject and object," and realism's horizon of the totality, all of which she argues recur in our current moment (xvii, xvi).

To show both the pressures that financialization and its logic of abstraction places on contemporary realisms and the response of various iterations of new economic realisms, Shonkwiler turns to a series of novels all written roughly around the belle époque of US hegemony (around the turn of the twenty-first century) that attempt to narrate this new iteration of financialization. Each chapter tackles both an aspect of finance and a problem that finance holds for narrative, and especially realist fiction: chapter one looks at Jane Smiley's *Good Faith* (2001), the S&L crisis, and the problem of character; chapter two looks at Richard Powers's *Gain*, the rise of the transnational corporation, and the question of totality; chapter three looks at Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, the increasingly virtual nature of finance, and the question of

the sublime; and chapter five looks at Teddy Wayne's *Kapitoil* and Moshin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, the globalization of uneven development, and the problem of mediation.

Shonkwiler is at her best in her attention to, and movement between, concrete historical context, literary formalism, and textual analysis. For instance, in her reading of *Good Faith*, Shonkwiler masterfully shows how Smiley's attempt to critique the deregulated S&L system ultimately falters on the question of character. In Shonkwiler's reading, Smiley is unable to critique the financial system at play except by turning to a character, the huckster-villain Marcus who ultimately "flees the country as a fugitive" (*The Financial Imaginary* 50). Shonkwiler's point is that contemporary realism, somehow, can't think about conflicting interests but reverts to a melodramatic figure of villainy. Similarly, in her analysis of Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, Shonkwiler reconfigures common-sense approaches to Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* as being about finance, to instead being about the ability for the novel form to "represent" the specific abstractions of capitalism (98). In these chapters, as throughout, Shonkwiler expertly refigures novels that seem to be simple discussions of finance to be complex mediations on what it means to represent a globalised, financialised system.

And yet, for all of the book's focus on novels' self-conscious representation and theorization, there is a crucial element in which Shonkwiler lacks a self-consciousness about the horizons of her own representations and interpretation: namely the book's US-focus. As its archive suggests, *The Financial Imaginary* is a book of American literary studies. Its primary term "economic realism" is a term developed by US theorists to describe US novels, and she herself uses the term economic realism to analyze almost entirely contemporary US novels.<sup>2</sup> But this Americanness is never taken into account in the book, which means that *Financial Imaginary* implicitly treats one experience of financialization and one quite narrow iteration of contemporary US fiction as synonymous with the processes of financialization and the novel (or at least the realist novel) respectively.

This raises some fundamental questions with regards to the book's premises: are the forms of abstraction described in this book global or just that of a particularly middle class, US experience? And does this problem of abstraction pose the same issue for all novels or just US novels or just certain US novels? These questions matter because so many of the ambitious claims that Shonkwiler makes are rooted in the claim that the novels she chooses are symptomatic of the realist novel (and often even the contemporary novel or even just "the novel") writ large. To give just a few examples: she reads Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* as symptomatic of "contemporary fiction's" still nascent attempt to "assess... the abstractions of capital in our own time" (98). At another, she argues "that the main characters of Smiley's *Good Faith* and Powers's *Gain* are both real-estate agents underscores the ways that the 'production' has been displaced into an asset-based economy" (xix). But this creates a somewhat

tautological premise. Shonkwiler has chosen to look at novels that are about the spaces and subjects typically associated with finance: stock markets and real estate, oil and land speculation instead of financialised factories, agriculture, or war. And, these are all novels about those “risk capable” entrepreneurial subjects, those who in Nerefeti Tadiar’s helpful formulation, are the “potential players” in the “game of competition” underwriting neoliberal financialization as opposed to those “at-risk populations, warehoused, disposable people, urban excess (planet of the slums),” who are barred from the game. This means that Shonkwiler’s argument seems to be that when novels describe finance on its own terms they end up using the narrative abstractions of finance. (24). While interesting, that is a fundamentally different argument from the one that Shonkwiler claims to be making, which is about the novel, or at least the realist novel writ large.

At stake, then, in Shonkwiler’s book are two fundamental questions: one about form and one about scale: first, what is the relationship between the experiential world of the novel and the actual world? And second, can DeLillo (or indeed any one or any one cluster of novels) stand in for *the* novel anymore now that we exist in an era of globalization or, what Franco Moretti has called a “world literary system.”<sup>3</sup> As we’ll see, these are ultimately interconnected. These questions are not Shonkwiler’s alone, but recur across the field of contemporary literary criticism, and especially within the burgeoning field of critical finance studies. And the site, or perhaps ideologeme, through which this problem is often worked out is abstraction. This focus on abstraction has its origins in Fredric Jameson’s “Culture and Finance Capital” and continues into the work of critics like Benjamin Lee and Edward Lipuma and Randy Martin. Jameson, in this essay, argues that when capitalism enters the stage of financialization, money becomes to “a second degree abstract” and becomes “free-floating,” “tak[ing] flight” from both production and the nation-state.<sup>4</sup> Within this context, and because of this double-abstraction, Jameson insists, the complex effects of finance must be grasped through cultural expression: “Any comprehensive new theory of finance capitalism will need to reach out into the expanded realm of cultural production to map its effects.”<sup>5</sup>

Shonkwiler too forefronts the centrality of abstraction to her book, opening with the claim that her “purpose is not to question whether the processes of abstractification associated with financialization are ‘really’ happening or not — the consensus that they exist is widespread” (ix). However, while there may be a consensus that these processes are really happening, there is certainly not a consensus that abstraction is the most important facet of finance, as opposed to, for instance: finance’s conjoined relationship with primitive accumulation or “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey; Federici); its necessary role in the reproduction of capitalism (Harvey; Arrighi); its role as one strategy of many in “re-constitut[ing] the material base of American empire” in the 1970s (Panitch and Ginden); its role as an “instrument” of the “capitalist class” to maintain the “domination they exercise over the entire economy” (Dumenil

and Levy); or its role as a strategy of neoliberalism for reorganising human and non-human natures in order to carry out a project of upward distribution (Moore).<sup>6</sup>

It seems worth asking then why so many scholars in the humanities focus primarily on abstraction when analyzing finance: is it because abstraction really is finance's most important facet or is it convenient for those of us in the humanities? One thing that a focus on the abstract or fictive nature of finance does is provide one solution to what is often termed the "crisis of the humanities" in that it provides a concrete answer to the question what can the humanities do? After all, if financialization's power is largely narrative — "the power of the financial system depends greatly on its power to produce the categories through which it is grasped... including those of risk, volatility, capital, and the derivative," Lipuma and Lee write in an oft-quoted passage — than surely the novel and those of us who study narrative, and the humanities departments in which we're housed, are necessary and useful.

But there are clear risks in this strategy, which Shonkwiler is very much aware of: namely that the frame of abstraction (as Shonkwiler herself worries) can lead to a reinscribing of finance's reifying power instead of demystifying its violent, brutal, and all-too material processes. Or, as Laura Finch incisively puts it, we end up confusing finance's "appearance of abstraction with an ontology" of abstraction.<sup>8</sup> This is the problem that Jordana Rosenberg and Britt Russert beautifully tackle when they argue that finance "is itself a fiction, not only in the sense that finance is, as Marx argued, a 'fictitious' form of capital, but also in the sense that 'finance' becomes a narrative unto itself, designed to explain or stand in as a simplified rationale for the composite of forces at play during periods of economic transition and upheaval."<sup>9</sup> Instead, they argue, we must turn away from the fiction of finance to "consider the linked concepts of dispossession, enclosure, and resistance as indispensable to studies of the history of finance."<sup>11</sup> And indeed while Jameson's essays on finance begin with abstraction, they too are often tethered to or at least haunted by far less abstracted visions of finance capital: we can think of his recent essay on *Neuromancer*, which moves from the fantasy of the "abstract[ed] and disembodied state" of cyberspace that Case inhabits to the "dead meat" of Case's body (which recalls Richard Godden's argument that finance is continually tethered to the "cheapened, robbed, and abused bodies of [poor nations'] labouring populations body."<sup>12</sup> We can also think about the placement of his essay on the abstractions of *Neuromancer* right before his article on *The Wire* in which the "view" from Baltimore constitutes a very different epistemological and formal account of the processes of financialization, one rooted neither in abstraction, postmodernism, nor a revanchist realism.

Shonkwiler's book is very much aware of this tension. And for every claim she makes about the abstracting power of finance, there is also a focus on its concretization. Shonkwiler knows her dialectic. Thus, she warns that a focus on abstraction risks us "equat[ing] everything with the fictitious," thus ultimately erasing the material effects and violences of finance capital (xxv). Indeed, her introduction concludes



that “financialization specializes in putting distance between these concrete effects and the structural violence of an abstract value that is measured by nothing but the stock market” (xxv). And this concern is born out within the book; indeed, one way to chart the book’s arc is from the abstract to the concrete aspects of a financialised, global economy, a process that occurs alongside a shift from core to semi-periphery. Thus perhaps it is unsurprising that the chapter in which the tension between the abstract and the concrete is most clearly staged comes in her readings of the more *seemingly* (I’ll return to this) peripheral texts, Hamid’s *How to Get Filthy Rich in Asia*, and especially in *Kapitoil*.

*Kapitoil* is about a Qatar immigrant, Karim Issar, who gains success at his investment bank by writing a program that can predict vacillations in oil prices by, as Shonkwiler explains it “searching the daily *New York Times* for keywords predictive of outbreaks of political violence in stories about oil-producing countries of the middle East [... which] looks beyond obvious keywords such as ‘terrorism,’ ‘attack,’ or ‘gunfire’... to also search] for keywords such as ‘bitter,’ ‘weary’ or ‘resigned’” (101). It is obviously an excellent choice for Shonkwiler as its premise deals precisely with the problem of financialization’s abstraction of, and capitalization on, very material processes of commodity production, geopolitical insecurity, and dispossession. And in this chapter Shonkwiler quite brilliantly rereads *Kapitoil*’s engagement with finance’s processes of abstraction. But she also makes the surprising and quite compelling point, against dominant readings of the novel as being about a struggle between first-world and third-world global subjects or their experience of finance capitalism, that the novel ultimately is less about political identity than it is about the “position of the artist” and of art in the age of financial capitalism (107). Specifically, she argues that *Kapitoil* presents Issar’s program as an essentially “literary work” and that the novel is really about a “romantic” fantasy about the “independent creator who autonomously creates and retains full legal control of his work” (107).

I want to pause, however, at the way she makes this argument. “The political problem that the novel runs into,” Shonkwiler writes:

is not that it inadequately attends to the violence inherent in the control of global oil resources, or that it only glancingly represents the impact of financial neo-colonialism on “peripheral” economies. Instead the problem lies in its own representation of the financier as a creative worker [that aligns...] the abstractions of finance and the abstractions of the aesthetic (107).

I think Shonkwiler is absolutely right in her claim that the novel focuses less on geopolitics than on the work of art, but I want to draw attention to the peculiar way that Shonkwiler needs to make her argument: namely, by cleaving apart the aesthetic problem of abstraction from the political problem of violence. Can these really be



separated? Isn't it precisely the novel's refusal to attend to these "violences" that in turn allows the novel to narrow its focus, and become a novel whose horizons and sympathies are limited to a "copyright-holding and thus rent-extracting class" (108)? Isn't it the novel's refusal or inability to follow financial speculation to its spigot that at least partially explains the novel's limitations? Why insist on these problems as separate?

I suspect that one reason for this is that Shonkwiler rightfully wants to treat finance as a formal problem for literature, and that is an important and necessary project. But Shonkwiler does so, both here and throughout her book, at the expense of the experiential and the political aspects of these novels: thus *Kapitoil* becomes about the abstractions of the aesthetics not the experience of neocolonialism; *Gain* becomes about the dangers of totality and not the cancer-ridden, wasted body at its centre, which is in turn linked to the story of American capitalist expansion, invasion, and dispossession; and *Good Faith* become a novel about character and not land enclosure.

In other words, Shonkwiler runs into the very problem she argues the novel confronts: an inability to think the concrete or experiential and the abstract or formal together. And it turns out this formal problem too is really a matter of scale because regardless of how we want to frame the limitations of *Kapitoil*, can we really claim that the short comings or tension in a novel by Don DeLillo or Teddy Wayne are symptomatic of realism writ large (108)? Of a certain realist or post-postmodern tradition, or even a certain tradition of American literature, perhaps, but to claim this is a crisis for contemporary fiction on a global scale is a much tougher claim to make. Indeed, throughout this book I wondered whether similar claims about problems of character, totality, or mediation could hold with the work of authors whose relationship to, or at least depictions of, finance is far less abstract. What might it mean to think about problems of abstraction, character, unevenness, or mediation in texts like Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, Patrice Chamoiseau's *Texaco*, the short stories of Pauline Melville, Chris Krauss' *Summer of Hate*, or the science fiction novels of Samuel Delany, Kim Stanley Robinson, or Larissa Lai, all of which register finance's abstraction, but also the decidedly less abstract or immaterial experiences of mass incarceration, enforced labour in maquiladoras, border violence, unemployment, ecological devastation, slumification, and urban violence.

One answer to this might be that none of these texts are (neo)realist – in fact, I think it's fair to say that what makes these texts such an important archive for thinking about finance is precisely that they fall outside of the realism/postmodernism binary that shapes so much work on finance and novels. But this leads to another important assumption, which underlies Shonkwiler's book, but is never examined: namely, the definition of realism. Starting with Jameson's claim in *The Antinomies of Realism* that "the function of nineteenth-century literary realism is 'the demystification and cancellation of illusions,'" Shonkwiler argues that contemporary realism "revives the premodernist interest in demystification," and draws on many of its narrative

strategies albeit in “ambivalent and selective ways,” that, in turn, reflect the increasing abstraction of the economy and the new formal challenges such abstraction reflects (xv, xvi). Her understanding of realism also draws on an oft-repeated periodization of literature, also Jamesonian, in which aesthetic movements map onto stages of capitalism: realism and industrial capitalism, modernism and imperialist capitalism, postmodernism and late capitalism, and now a new realism.

But the question of what realism is, is a more knotty one than Shonkwiler acknowledges and her use of Jameson evades two of the main interventions that Jameson makes in *Antinomies of Realism*. First, he challenges the realism/modernism (and realism/postmodernism) binary. Second, though related, he argues that realism isn't an object with fixed attributes that one can be for/against but is rather constituted by a central contradiction or internal struggle between plot and scene, destiny against the eternal present, narration versus sensation or affect. One result of his reconfiguration of realism is his claim that with the victory of scene, the eternal present, and affect (what is often called modernism), realism takes flight and ceases to be found in the “realistic novel” or existential novels that proliferate among high and mass culture alike. Instead, he argues, these realistic novels become realism's “ultimate adversary,” and we end up with “endless pages of pseudo-realistic narratives classifiable by way of a return to the old genres and sub-genres that realism itself had attempted to dislodge (and had succeeded, but at the cost of its own destruction.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, much of Jameson's work seems to suggest that if realism still exists, it does so in science fiction, which perhaps explains why critics like Amy Bahng and Rosenberg and Britt (among others) have been turning to science fiction as a useful resource to map financialization. Jameson's claim raises a grave challenge to Shonkwiler's project, because if we take Jameson's definition seriously, we need to ask whether what she calls realism — and indeed what gets called “capitalist realism” in the hugely generative volume she co-edited with Leigh Clare LaBerge — should really be considered “realism” at all as opposed to the reified realistic novels that Jameson argues are actually antithetical to realism?

There is also a second intervention into contemporary realism studies that is central to thinking through the problem of realism underpinning *Financial Imaginary*, and that is the Colleen Lye and Jed Etsy's *MLQ* issue on “Peripheral Realisms.” Their introduction to the issue also challenges the realism/modernism divide, but does so by demonstrating how realist impulses have remained central to, and been transformed and updated by, novels coming out of the peripheries and semi-peripheries of the world-system. For Lye and Etsy, peripheral realisms reject the modernist (and especially postmodernist) tendency to “stylize, even heroicize, its baked-in failure to map the global system” and are instead able to “approach the world-system as partially, potentially describable in its concrete reality.”<sup>14</sup>

This question of peripheral realisms is explicitly discussed by Shonkwiler who ends her chapter on Hamid and Wayne by suggestions that “literary forms'... efforts to

resist capitalism's narrowings of realism appear to require going beyond the analytical resources of postmodernism or those of "peripheral realism" (121, emphasis added). But there is never an explanation of why financialization goes beyond peripheral realism or even why her texts are exemplary of failed peripheral realisms. Again, surely the political or aesthetic failings of one New York novelist writing from the perspective of a Qatari immigrant and a cosmopolitan Pakistani-born, US-educated writer (and brand consultant) can't stand in for the capacities and potentialities of peripheral realism (or the works of all semi-peripheral authors) in toto.

The question then becomes, if what Shonkwiler has identified in her book is not the limits of realism or the novel writ large, what is it? In *Antinomies*, Jameson argues that we read naturalism's "trajectory of decline and failure" not as a narrative truth, but rather as giving voice to "the perspective of the bourgeoisie and its vision of the other (lower) classes," which is really an expression of its own "anxiety of immanent decadence and decline."<sup>15</sup> This isn't the first time Jameson has turned a formal problem into a problem of perspective. And it is perhaps worth remembering that there is a kind of unofficial companion essay for Jameson's work on finance and postmodernism, notably his "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." In this essay, Jameson draws our attention to the fact that the view of multinational (or financial) capitalism often looks very different from other parts of the globe and warns that, "the view from the top [America] is epistemologically crippling."<sup>16</sup>

One wonders if this is ultimately what Shonkwiler has found: not so much the limits of the novel or realism per se to track or map or grapple with financialised capitalism, but rather the limits of a certain specifically national literary genre (one that seems to bear some relation to the postmodernized, existential, or realistic novel) to grapple with, the "blood, torture, death and terror" of American imperialist domination (to borrow from another of Jameson's famous formulation) that underpins both the increasing financialization of global capitalism and the cultural forms of postmodernism and post-postmodern realism that emerge from it.<sup>17</sup>

*The Financial Imaginary* is an ambitious and exciting book, and the challenge it raises to literary scholars, and particularly scholars of finance, to take seriously how financialization shapes, changes, and perhaps limits what the novel can do is an important one. As a critique of the current state of what is often studied as contemporary fiction — and which often means predominantly white, Anglo-American realistic literature — it offers smart and incisive critiques. But to mistake this field for the novel as a whole is to miss the ways in which the narratives of finance are themselves geopolitical situated and grounded. To read them in terms of finance's global imaginary is to obfuscate the much more uneven and global terrain in which finance and cultures of finance operates: the very concrete world that Shonkwiler herself aims to unearth.

### Notes

1. Deepest thanks to Nicole Aschoff and Mike Niblett for their feedback and the many conversations about finance and culture.
2. Shonkwiler identifies the critics who coin this term as Left-wing, though neither of the critics she references, either Claude Reherd Flory nor Walter Fuller Taylor belong to any cannon of 1930s or 1940s Left-wing critics I'm aware of. And part of me wonders, what would happen if Shonkwiler actually turned to the myriad of socialist and communist literary critics theorising US fiction at the time in magazines like *New Masses*?
3. Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (2000) 56.
4. Fredric Jameson, "Culture and Finance Capital" *Critical Inquiry* 24.1 (1997) 251. See also Benjamin Lee and Edward Lipuma, *Financial Derivatives and the Globalization of Risk* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
5. Jameson, "Culture and Finance Capital" 252.
6. For "accumulation by dispossession" see David Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. (Autonotomedia: 2017); for its necessary role in the reproduction of capitalism see Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (New York: Verso, 1982) and Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (New York: Verso, 1994); for its role as one strategy of many in "re-constitut[ing] the material base of American empire" in the 1970s see Leo Panitch and Sam Ginden, *The Making of Global Capitalism: The Political Economy of American Empire* (New York: Verso, 2012) 192; for its role as an "instrument" of the "capitalist class" to maintain the "domination they exercise over the entire economy" see Gérard Dumenil and Dominique Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013) 57; for its role as a strategy of neoliberalism for reorganising human and non-human natures in order to carry out a project of upward distribution see Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015).
7. Lee and Lipuma, *Financial Derivatives and the Globalization of Risk* 29.
8. Laura Finch, "The Un-real Deal: Financial Fiction, Fictional Finance, and the Financial Crisis," *Journal of American Studies* 49.4 (2015) 736.
9. Jordana Rosenberg and Britt Russert, "Framing Finance Rebellion, Dispossession, and the Geopolitics of Enclosure in Samuel Delany's Neveryon Series," *Radical History Review* 118 (2014) 66.
10. Rosenberg and Russert, "Framing Finance Rebellion, Dispossession, and the Geopolitics of Enclosure" 66. Similar arguments are made by Annie McLanahan, who insists on the need to "attend not to the immateriality, autonomy, and fictitiousness of finance capital, but rather to the violent political force, scarce natural resources, and brutalized working (or not-working) bodies that underwrite its apparent abstraction." McLanahan, "Financialization" in *American Literature in Transition: 2000-2010*, ed. Rachel Greenwald Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 252. See also Mike Niblett "Time's Carcase: Waste, Labour and Finance Capital in the Atlantic World-Ecology," *Atlantic Studies* (in press) where he emphasizes the connections between financialization and "commodity frontiers" (10), and the Warwick Research Collective who argue that "The appearance and growth of fictitious capital, the most virtual or immaterial form of capitalisation, and primitive accumulation,

the most bloody and material, are interlinked. The two forms depend on each other. One cannot separate the history of credit from the wider history of capitalist imperialism." *Combined and Uneven Development: Toward a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015) 70.

12. Jameson, *The Ancients and the Postmoderns: On the Historicity of Forms* (New York: Verso, 2017) 226; Richard Godden, "Labor, Language, and Finance Capital," *PMLA* 126.2 (2011) 421.
13. Jameson, *Antinomies of Realism* (New York: Verso, 2103) 162, 187. See also Aimee Bahng, *Migrant Futures: Decolonizing Speculation in Financial Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
14. Colleen Lye and Jed Esty, "Periperal Realisms," *MLQ* 73.3 (2012) 285.
15. Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* 149.
16. Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 1992) 86.
17. We can see the intellectual and political danger of mistaking a specific genre or cluster of texts for global culture more generally in Mitchum Huehls' half-manifesto, half-review of Shonkwiler's book, "Four Theses on Economic Totality," where he announces, with peculiar gleefulness, that "economic totality" means that "geographical distinctions [are] increasingly irrelevant for contemporary cultural analysis." (*American Literary History*, 30.4, 1 November 2018, 839) He makes this claim, however, by drawing on an almost exclusively US-authored, US-focused, English speaking archive, thus completely erasing any possibility that culture produced in other parts of the world might offer a different or important vision of this totality. Adopting the position that "dynamic global interconnection" and "unevenness" are no longer useful categories of analysis, amounts to an unapologetic refusal to read or think beyond the bunker of American exceptionalism at the exact moment that American exceptionalism has grown even more dangerous.





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