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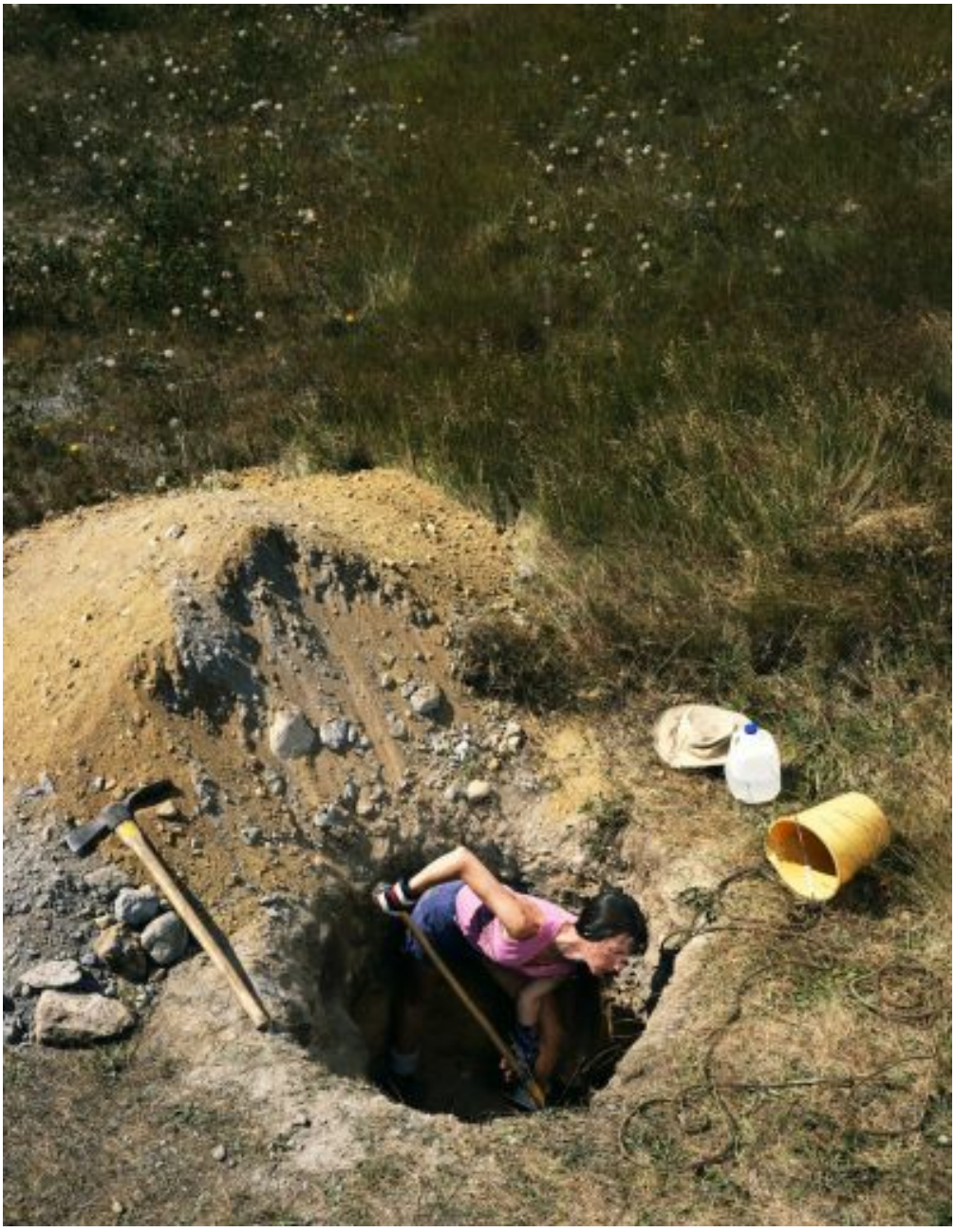

Jeff Wall, *The Well*, 1989, transparency in lightbox, 229 x 179 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

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GOING BACK TO CLASS:
WHY WE NEED TO MAKE UNIVERSITY FREE, AND HOW WE CAN DO IT

SAMIR SONTI

In 1969, celebrated management theorist Peter Drucker wrote, with respect to the GI Bill of Rights, the passage of which he would years later characterize as perhaps the most significant event of the twentieth century, "We need acceptance of the principle that higher education for every youngster is paid for out of taxes."[1] Hardly a political progressive, this early cheerleader for privatization and pioneer of modern management science here demonstrated that rationality peculiar to the more sophisticated elements of the ruling-class during periods of social unrest. To Drucker, the GI Bill, which by covering tuition costs and living expenses opened the door to higher education for a generation of veterans, signaled the beginning of the "knowledge economy," the defining feature of late-twentieth century America. Embracing and expanding upon this legacy, he suggested, was a prerequisite for future prosperity.

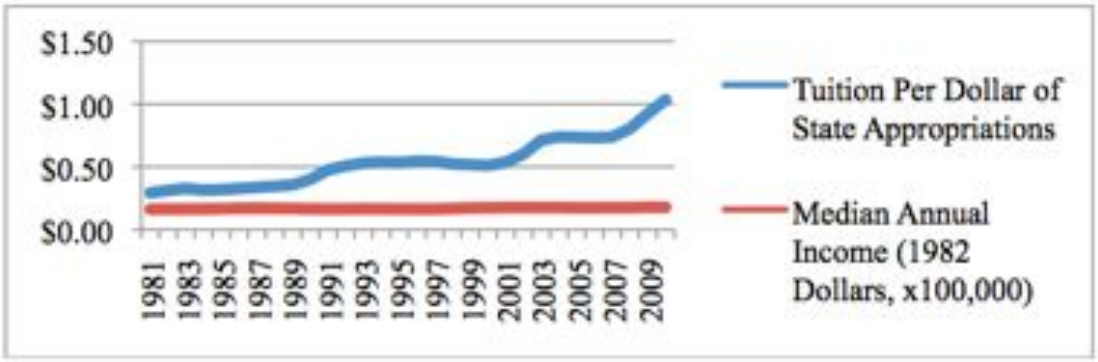
Sam Durant, Strike, 2003, vinyl text on electric sign, 62 x 48 x 11 inches, Edition of 3. Image courtesy of the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.

To those of us distressed by the state of public higher education—where the life expectancy of colleges and universities as we've known them is very much unclear—words from someone like Drucker provide no solace. Indeed, they shouldn't, since he was at bottom a reactionary whose endorsement of inclusive post-secondary education grew out of a fetishization of human capital more than from any egalitarian aspirations. On the other hand, registering this ostensibly progressive stance from someone whose profession was practicality, even if he came of age in another era and around an altogether different balance of class forces, might help us broaden our understanding of the politically possible. The point, in any case, is that if Peter Drucker thought the state ought to pay for everyone to go to college, why don't we?

***

After a three-decade free fall in state funding levels, US public higher education is approaching a terminal crisis. Whereas in 1980 state governments shouldered the vast majority of the burden, on average contributing close to 80% of the cost of instruction, today

students bear more than half of the total expense, a trend that the simultaneous stagnation in real household income has only exacerbated. Indeed, reflecting the same market logic that has worked to naturalize the dramatic upward redistribution of income and wealth in recent decades, the increasing cost of college has been implicitly validated by a shift in how an education itself is understood. No longer conceived of as a social good, it is increasingly viewed as just another commodity whose value is best measured by the fluid laws of exchange. More significant, however, is the other side of the coin, the ways in which the increasing cost of higher education has impelled its commodification.



Sources: Trends in College Pricing, 2012 (College Board); Digest of Education Statistics, 2011 (Department of Education); Current Population Survey (Bureau of Labor Statistics and Census Bureau).[2]

Given the mortgage-sized investment required to finance a college education, students' fixation on their expected rate-of-return is understandable. The stunning magnitude and rate of growth of student debt—which, now hovering around $1 trillion, has surpassed aggregate credit card liabilities[3]—throws into sharp relief the material forces pushing students to approach an undergraduate education as little more than a market transaction. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's *Quarterly Report on Household Debt and Credit* released in August 2012, after total household debt reached its high water mark in the third quarter of 2008, student debt has grown by more than $300 billion while all other obligations have plummeted by $1.6 trillion.[4] As of the spring of 2011, two-thirds of college seniors graduated with student loans, and those that did owed an average of $26,500.[5] Assuming an interest rate of 6.8%—the fixed rate for unsubsidized and, beginning on July 1, 2013, subsidized federal Stafford loans[6]—this typical student debt-holder must shell out $150 per month on interest alone to avoid watching his or her liability inch upwards. Needless to say, given that the class of 2011 was welcomed to a real world with an unemployment rate above nine percent, job opportunities that might allow graduates to begin making a dent in the principal were few and

far between.[7] Familiarity with the draconian nature of state budgetary politics along with a realistic assessment of the likely trend in household income in a persistently slack labor market should indicate the direction in which this student loan crisis is headed.

The deleterious effects these skyrocketing costs have had on the intellectual atmosphere, working conditions, and general quality of life on campus couldn't be clearer. Part and parcel of the corporatization of the university, the expense has helped to rationalize the now ubiquitous administrative assaults on academic departments and programs deemed unprofitable, an offensive that bears most acutely on the humanities. However much their passions and intellectual curiosities might draw them to it, most students understand that studying poetry won't help them make that $150 monthly payment, though a degree in finance or petroleum engineering just might. These pressures, moreover, are most intense at the bottom of the academic food chain, as community colleges and non-flagship state institutions struggling to stay afloat feel compelled to compete with the predatory private for-profits (University of Phoenix and their ilk)—who are intent on tapping the same "student market"—by shifting resources toward "marketable" vocational programs.[8]

Reinforcing this dynamic are those claims, which reek of a condescending class privilege, that college, as we've known it, may not be for everyone, as if there's little to be gained—insufficient value-added, perhaps—from offering everyone the opportunity to develop their critical faculties, to encounter new and challenging ideas and individuals, and to learn for the sake of learning. Tragically, however, this reasoning has gained currency as more and more students find an education in the liberal arts a luxury good they simply can't afford.

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The crisis we're facing is thus, above all, a class issue. While most undergraduates today accumulate hordes of debt and all the anxieties that accompany it, experience material pressures to narrow their intellectual pursuits, and work one or more jobs on top of their studies to make ends meet, the prospect of such a financial burden forecloses even the hope of attending college for countless others.[9] Attempts to respond the crisis, then, need to recognize that the distressing situation on campus is just one expression of a deeper affliction: the remarkable increase in economic inequality over the past third of a century.

These economic and educational crises intersect at a rather cruel irony. As inequality has intensified in recent decades, so too has the argument that an education is its panacea. This is true to an extent, as the empirical record leaves no question that a post-secondary degree enhances one's lifetime earning potential (though the Great Recession seems to have chipped away at this college "premium").[10] For more and more people, however, inequality remains the chief impediment to achieving that credential. People aren't poor, as the reasoning so

often proceeds, because they lack a college education; they lack a college education because they're poor. Moreover, as Walter Benn Michaels has argued in this venue, the claim that a college education is economically advantageous only makes sense if access to it is limited, which—according to the "education solves inequality" thesis—must then imply perpetual inequality.[11] If we're really concerned about how inaccessible public higher education has become, then, we need to be even more concerned about the inequality that keeps it that way.

Literature scholar John Marsh recently presented this case in his suggestively titled book, Class Dismissed, arguing that, "appeals to education have displaced the debate about social class and economic power that Americans need to have if we are to understand the causes of and the cure for sustained poverty and increasing inequality."[12] Providing a rich historical account of "the eclipse, by education, of other ways Americans once imagined they might get ahead," and its corollary, "the eclipse, by economics, of other purposes Americans once imagined for education," Marsh concludes that our best shot at combating inequality, and by extension its pernicious impact on our educational system, lies not in the class-room but in working-class organization. In concrete terms, he suggests that what we really need is a revitalized trade union movement.

To be sure, at first glance Marsh's proposal seems out of place, not least because trade union membership is now at a century long nadir. According to the most recent figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, less than twelve percent of the national workforce—and fewer than seven percent of private sector workers—now belong to unions.[13] These figures alone tell a grim tale, and they go a long way toward explaining the astounding concentration of income and wealth—and the deepening plight of the American working-class—that has occurred over the past thirty years. A recent study demonstrated that, between 1973 and 2007, private sector unionization plummeted by 75% while economic inequality rose by 40%.[14] Bleak statistics notwithstanding, as Chris Maisano has perceptively argued, the impulse to fetishize union density tends to obscure the simple fact that, continuing to represent more than fourteen million workers, "American labor unions still have a mass membership base that few other institutions can match."[15] The very zeal with which the Republican Party continues to attack organized labor's right to exist testifies to their corporate backers' opinion that, far from being irrelevant, trade unions still pose a real—redistributive—threat.

Marsh's argument represents a refreshing departure from the fundamentally bootstrap discourse on inequality so common in liberal circles, and those of us who believe an education ought to be a basic social right, a liberating experience that everyone is entitled to—rather than a means for enhancing "human capital" or employability—can profit from considering its strategic implications. First, it calls for orienting our higher education politics along a working-class axis, recognizing that the increasing cost, decreasing accessibility, and

deteriorating labor conditions on campus are class issues. Second, it involves highlighting the common denominator in the increase in economic inequality and educational inaccessibility: the neoliberal assault on the public sector. It's no coincidence, of course, that the public sector also happens to be the last bastion of trade union power.

The struggle for the future of higher education, then, as with the fight for organized labor's survival, needs to lead us toward a broad-based movement that stresses the important role the public sector can play in alleviating the inequalities that capitalism invariably produces. Doing so requires parting with the defensive posture—resisting a tuition hike here, a departmental closure there—that has characterized campus politics in recent years, rear-guard struggles that in practice always reduce to negotiating the best possible terms of a defeat we've implicitly conceded. We urgently need, instead, to take the offensive by advancing ambitious campaigns around the specific concerns ordinary people hold. A perfect way to start is by proposing and organizing around what even Peter Drucker recognized as the only real solution to the crisis in our colleges and universities: free public higher education for all, funded by the federal government.

***

Though it runs against the grain of our austerity induced pocketbook fiscal politics, it would in fact be laughably inexpensive for the federal government to make public higher education free for all. The total sum of state appropriations and student tuition and fees annually spent on two and four year public colleges and universities nationwide is approximately $165 billion. This amounts to roughly 4% of the federal budget, and less than a quarter of military expenditures. The student component, $84 billion, which would comprise the only new public expense, is just over 2% of the federal budget and close to 10% of defense outlays, little more than a rounding error on the federal balance sheet. According to the State Higher Education Executive Officers fiscal year 2010 report, the average state devotes 6.6% of its budget to higher education. That is, as a percentage of its budget, the average state currently spends half again as much as what it would cost the federal government to pay every student's tuition and fees and to assume every state's entire higher education expense. In other words, the federal government could make public two and four year colleges and universities free for everyone and relieve every state of all higher education related expenditures at a lower cost, relative to its budget, than what the average state is *already* spending. [16]

This argument rests on the belief that access to higher education should be a basic social right, an ideal that can only be realized through its complete de-commodification but one that also, as the history of the Jim Crow south should always remind us, demands a strong

federal role. Even more immediate material and political realities, however, point to why higher education politics must be conducted at the federal level.[17] The ubiquitous state and municipal fiscal crises propelling the assault on public higher education show no signs of easing, and the assumption, whether or not it's articulated as such, that we need to wage fifty isolated campaigns to limit our losses is politically as defeatist as it is misguided. Most individual states are indeed broke, and while their insolvencies could be rectified through, say, more progressive taxation, achieving those structural changes fifty times over is impossible. Only the federal government has the capacity to do the necessary pump priming and if for only that reason it must be our target. The inability of such revered public institutions as the University of California and the City University of New York to maintain their historic commitments to tuition-free college education in the face of fiscal shortfalls and right-wing offensives, two sides of the same coin, underscores the need for a federal solution to the deepening crisis in post-secondary education.

As management guru Peter Drucker famously celebrated, the federal government has a history of experimenting with free higher education: the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, widely known as the GI Bill of Rights. One of the most popular pieces of legislation in modern US history, the GI Bill provided access to higher education for eight million veterans returning from World War II by paying all tuition costs and providing a stipend to cover living expenses. More than 40% of recipients indicated that they would not have attended college were it not for this program, and a report issued by the Congressional Joint Economic Committee nearly half a century after its passage demonstrated that for every $1 spent implementing the GI Bill the federal government reaped almost $7 in tax revenue through the income and productivity gains it helped to generate.[18] The program also had a far-reaching economic ripple effect: the robust postwar growth in student enrollment triggered a campus construction boom, allowed for the hiring of thousands faculty and staff members, and stimulated commercial development around campuses across the country. Beyond its democratizing and emancipatory social impact, free higher education would be a job creator!

***

The real question, of course, is how to build a movement around a major social program in an age of austerity. We can start by recognizing that, as long as we live under capitalism, all politics are class politics and that, moreover, for more than three decades the scale has tilted further and further away from working people. The liberal instinct to legislate, then, clearly isn't an option. Reasonable ideas and smart policy memos don't initiate progressive change, only social movements do. In a strange way, actually, recognizing our utter powerlessness in the short-term can be liberating, for since there's no reason to concern ourselves with

technocratic matters we stand no chance at influencing we might as well think creatively and strategically about how to fashion a new politics on our own terms.

Seriously challenging the crisis in public higher education will require a looking beyond the electoral realm and adopting a longer-term, organizing approach to politics, one animated by working peoples' concerns. For two reasons, this brings us back to the labor movement. First, weakened though they may be, and with all the limitations of their often sedentary bureaucracies, trade unions—with their fourteen million members—remain the only organizations with the capacity to sustain such an ambitious movement. Second, though critics, from the left as much as the right, are generally too eager to blast trade unions for their allegedly myopic concern for members' interests—they are, after all, membership organizations—it is obvious that the labor movement is in desperate need of revitalization. An organized labor campaign for free college could help to start that process, committing it to an ambitious working-class vision unlike anything its been connected to in the concessionary climate engendered by neoliberalism and appealing to a generational cohort entirely unaware of the labor movement's progressive potential.

Though you wouldn't know it from President Obama's recent State of the Union address, trade unions have played a role in virtually every progressive achievement worth mentioning since industrial capitalism emerged in this country, a historical record that leaves little reason to believe we can win anything substantial without them. Labor organizations, indeed, were among the first advocates for universal primary education, with the late 1820s and early 1830s Workingmen's Parties in New York and Pennsylvania placing high-quality public education atop their political agenda. An 1830 report on the subject published in their organ, *Working Man's Advocate*, noted that

> When the committees contemplate their own condition, and that of the great mass of their fellow laborers; when they look around on the glaring inequality of society, they are constrained to believe, that until the means of equal instruction shall be equally secured to all, liberty is but an unmeaning word, and equality an empty shadow, whose substance to be realized must first be planted by an equal education. [19]

These mid-nineteenth century labor struggles for public education preceded and informed the more familiar campaigns by the Knights of Labor and later the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations for such taken-for-granted rights as the eight-hour workday, prohibition of child labor, occupational safety and health, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, a historical track-record that underscores the political leadership organized

workers in this country have long provided. Even that most iconic of social movements, the mid-twentieth century quest for civil rights, was inextricably bound with progressive trade unions. Unmentioned in most grade school lore on the subject, which proffers a liberal, individualistic narrative of heroic figures leading the benighted masses, the struggle for racial justice grew out of a deeply rooted organizational apparatus that had been constructed through decades of labor and community organizing. Rosa Parks was a seasoned activist who had been trained at the famed leftist organizing academy, the Highlander Folk School, and Martin Luther King Jr. owed his beginnings to Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters leader E.D. Nixon and other veteran trade unionists who recruited him. It's possible, in fact, that no one would have heard about King's dream at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom were it not for the audio equipment provided by the United Auto Workers. [20]

Winning free public higher education will require a movement of that order, and it's only possible with robust support from working people across the country, and their unions. We have no blueprint, but a few recent events have provided clues as to what it might look like. The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), in their successful strike last September, demonstrated what a well organized and forward-looking union is capable of. [21] In the face of a state and municipal fiscal crisis, a hostile mayor, and a vicious corporate campaign aimed at demonizing teachers and breaking their unions, CTU leaders managed not only to secure near unanimous support among its membership, but also to win over most of the public and a vast majority of parents. [22] They were able to do so because they left no question as to what the strike was about. "Let's be clear," CTU President Karen Lewis announced at the outset, "this fight is for the very soul of public education, not only in Chicago but everywhere." [23]

Impressive as Lewis was throughout the strike, one person didn't spearhead this struggle and it wasn't built overnight (though it didn't take an eternity, either). For close to five years, a disciplined group of Chicago teachers devoted themselves to building a movement inside their union, efforts they consolidated in 2010 when their organization, the Caucus of Rank-and-Rile Educators (CORE), won power in the local's election. [24] For more than a year before the strike, the new CTU leadership invested substantial resources in educating their membership on the roots of the crisis in public education and cultivating relationships with parents and community members across the city, grassroots organizing at its finest. In addition to fighting for the bread and butter issues of interest to rank-and-file teachers, the strikers foregrounded the issues threatening the "soul of public education," class size and school closures, for instance, an emphasis that goes a long way toward explaining why the strike met such strong working-class support. [25]

As teachers were taking to the streets in Chicago, north of the border students in Quebec and their allies in the labor movement completed a remarkable fight for the future of higher education in that province, one that ought to serve as an inspiration to those of us in the United States. In December 2011, student activists formed the Coalition Large de l'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante (Classe) to resist a proposal by the Quebec Cabinet to raise tuition by some $1,600 over five years. To the average student in the US, mired in debt fifteen times that sum, the increase surely seems modest, but Classe perceptively understood that the concession itself, whatever its magnitude, would be a loss, that giving in once leaves the door open to future attacks. In that spirit, their demand wasn't simply a defensive plea for the fee to be canceled. They took the opportunity to initiate a conversation about how higher education should be a fundamental social right, and as such ought to be free of charge, an ambitious stance that found support from trade unions across Canada. As Richard Seymour argued in *The Guardian*,

> Theirs was a class issue…and Classe called for a 'social strike' of both students and workers. They consciously sought alliances with Rio Tinto workers locked out of their jobs, public sector workers facing cuts, campaigns against increased fees for healthcare, and local resistance to the government's attempts to turn over northern resources to the mining industry. [26]

In the first week of September, after six grinding months on strike, four of which followed the government's passage of the punitive Bill 78 that sought to legally forbid the students from engaging in any disruptive activity, Classe emerged victorious when the provincial government retracted the tuition proposal. While it is unclear how the students intend to build upon this tremendous success, it is safe to say that their ambitious approach, not merely defending what they had but pursuing much more, was an educational experience in collective action, and one that has shifted the center-of-gravity in higher education politics in that province for the foreseeable future.

***

Far from spelling the end of neoliberalism, the economic crisis now marching into its fifth year has intensified it, proof that this increasingly dystopian order will not collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. Its fate depends, above all, on the balance of class forces in this country, and tilting that in our favor requires diligent organization and capacity building. In that spirit, the CTU and Classe have provided a model to aspire toward as we begin to think practically about how to advance the struggle. Perhaps most importantly, they have demonstrated that effective organizing must begin with a clear and ambitious objective, one

that can appeal to all those working people we need but who may not necessarily agree with us from the outset. In the process of engaging ordinary people around a tangible goal—free public higher education, for instance—a more expansive political vision is sure to emerge.

Higher education as we know it hasn't existed forever, and if current trends continue it won't survive much longer. The once revered American public college and university system was born in the turbulent milieu of class struggle in the immediate post-World War II period, and was spurred materially by immense federal spending on such programs as the GI Bill. By the 1980s, after only a few short decades on its feet, it was under attack, and reflecting on how grim conditions have become in just a generation makes it chilling to think of where we'll be in another absent a radical change of course. Needless to say, the urgent need for a serious movement, one anchored to a coherent demand but that also serves to valorize the public sector—to demonstrate that it shouldn't be a site for ever more perverse forms of capital accumulation but, instead, one that mitigates the effects of that destructive process—couldn't be clearer.[27] A national campaign for free public higher education is a perfect way to start, and it's one we can win.

NOTES

1. Peter Drucker, *The Age of Discontinuity* (New York, 1992), 363.

2. This ratio is a national average, as appropriations per student vary from state to state. Total state appropriations from 1981 to 2010 are gathered from Figure 12B of *Trends in College Pricing 2012*, "State Appropriations for Higher Education: Total Appropriations in 2011 Dollars," available at: http://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/total-and-fte-student-state-appropriations-and
public-enrollment-over-time; Tuition and fee data is gathered from Table 2 of *Trends in College Pricing, 2012*, "Average Published Tuition and Fees and Room and Board Charges, 1971-71 to 2012-13" in 2012 dollars for public two and four year institutions. The data is broken down between "Tuition and Fees," which I used, and "Tuition, Fees, Room and Board," available at: http://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/tuition-and-fee-and-room-and-board-charges-over-time; Enrollment figures are gathered from *Digest of Education Statistics, 2011*, Table 199, "Total Fall Enrollment in Degree Granting Institutions, by Control and Level of Institution," available at: http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2012001. Using historical enrollment and tuition and fee data one can calculate the amount spent on two and four year public institutions for the period 1981-2010, and their sum provides the total amount spent by students on public higher education during that period. Dividing this sum by the total amount of state appropriations during the period provides the student contribution per dollar of state funding. Note that the state appropriation figures include the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds. Without this one-time stimulus program in 2009 the graph would look even steeper. Historical income data was collected from the *Current Population Survey by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Census Bureau*, available at: http://www.census.gov/cps/.

3. New York Bank of the Federal Reserve, *Quarterly Report on Household Debt and Credit*, August 2012. Available at: http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/national_economy/householdcredit/DistrictReport_Q22012.pdf.

4. New York Bank of the Federal Reserve, *Quarterly Report on Household Debt and Credit*, August 2012.

5. Tamar Lewin, "Student-Loan Borrowers Average $26,500 in debt," *New York Times*, October 18, 2012. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/18/education/report-says-average-student-loan-debt-is-up-to-26500.html?src=recg.

6. Interest rate data gathered from National Student Loan Data System, available at: http://www.nslds.ed.gov/nslds_SA/SaEcTour.do?page=SaEcRyl2. Note that this is a conservative estimate, Plus Loans range from 7.9%-8.5%.

7. Unemployment rates are published monthly by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and are available at: http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14000000. Note that the official unemployment rate, which fails to account for underemployment, is a conservative estimate of joblessness. A more accurate figure is the BLS's U-6 rate, included in Table A-15, which measures: "Total unemployed, plus all marginally attached workers plus total employed part time for economic reasons, as a percent of all civilian labor force plus all marginally attached workers." In June 2011 this *real* unemployment and underemployment rate (Table A-15, Figure U-6) was 16.2%.

8. For a scathing indictment of the for-profit higher education industry, see US Senate, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Report, *For Profit Higher Education: The Failure to Safeguard the Federal Investment and Ensure Student Success*. Available at: http://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/for_profit_report/Contents.pdf.

9. Laura Perna, "Understanding the Working College Student," *Academe* (July-August 2010).

10. Allie Bidwell, "Millions of College Graduates Hold Jobs That Don't Require a College Degree," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 28, 2013. Accessed at: http://chronicle.com/article/Millions-of-Graduates-Hold/136879/.

11. Walter Benn Michaels, "Dude, Where's My Job?" *Nonsite.org*, January 5, 2013.

12. John Marsh, *Class Dismissed: Why We Cannot Teach or Learn Our Way Out of Inequality* (New York, 2011), 18-19.

13. Union affiliation of employed wage and salary workers by selected characteristics http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t01.htm.

14. Bruce Western and Jake Rosenfeld, "Unions, Norms, and the Rise in US Wage Inequality," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (August 2011), 513-537.

15. Chris Maisano, "Doing More With Less," *Jacobin*, February 7, 2013, http://jacobinmag.com/2013/02/doing-more-with-less/.

16. The cost estimates were derived through the same method outlined in note ii. Using historical data on student enrollment in two and four year public institutions, tuition and fees in two and four year public institutions, and state appropriations, one can calculate the total amount spent by students and states on public higher education over time. Data on current state higher education appropriations as a percentage of state budgets is gathered from, *State Higher Education*

Officers, State Higher Education Finance Fiscal Year 2010 Report, p. 47. Available at: http://www.sheeo.org/finance/shef_fy10.pdf.

17. Peter Frase and Bhaskar Sunkara offer a similar argument for why the federal government ought to be the left's principal target. Peter Frase and Bhaskar Sunkara, "The Welfare State of America," *In These Times*, October 22, 2012. Available at: http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/13998/the_welfare_state_of_america/.

18. Subcommittee on Education and Health of the Joint Economic Committee, "A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Government in Postsecondary Education Under the World War II GI Bill," December 14, 1988.

19. http://www.history.umd.edu/Gompers/workies%201828%20education.htm.

20. See William Jones, "The Unknown Origins of the March on Washington: Civil Rights Politics and the Black Working Class," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 7 (Fall 2010), 33-52.

21. Norine Gutekanst, "How Chicago Teachers Got Organized to Strike," *Labor Notes*, November 12, 2012. Available at: http://labornotes.org/2012/10/how-chicago-teachers-got-organized-strike. Gutekanst is the CTU Organizing Director. Also see Theresa Moran's extensive reporting on CTU and the strike in Labor Notes.

22. Laura Clawson, "Deal May Be Near for Chicago Teachers; Poll Finds Majority Support for Teachers," *Daily Kos*, September 13, 2012. Available at: http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/09/13/1131306/-Deal-may-be-near-in-Chicago-teachers-strike-poll-finds-majority-support-for-teachers.

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ACADEMIC LABOR, THE AESTHETICS OF MANAGEMENT, AND THE PROMISE OF AUTONOMOUS WORK

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Amongst the features of neoliberal ideology that universities have tested and legitimated is the notion that creativity is the work of flexible, self-managing individuals trained to turn an innate capacity for "innovation" into saleable properties. The corollaries of this conception of creative activity have been widely noted. For example, even as universities praise results that lead to saleable intellectual properties or have economically instrumental applications, they show little interest in evaluating the social ramifications of a given innovation. They also attempt to control the intellectual property rights of researchers and students, imagine education as first and foremost a kind of workplace training, and protect an elite roster of scholars from tasks that might impede their "real work," which usually means the hard work of intellectual property creation that is blocked by menial tasks related to teaching classes and running the university.

Sam Durant, This is Freedom?, 2008, Electric sign with vinyl text, 63 1/2 x 84 1/2 x 9 1/8 inches Edition of 3. Image courtesy of the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.

Universities have at the same time promoted project-based or "participatory" inquiry in which the flexible individual moves through temporary networks. This means group research in fields accustomed to the solo scholar, and transformation of the classroom into an ostensibly collaborative space in which instructors and students devote themselves to co-creation. Take for instance the university's vanguard incubation of the management practice of "open innovation," which assumes that knowledge is "common rather than scarce, widely rather than narrowly distributed in the population, and mobile in ways that even the most powerful corporations cannot control."[1] As incubators of open innovation processes, universities have encouraged researchers to work in teams across institutions and in the community, in the hopes that the significant value potential in those networked moments will be realized and returned to them. Open innovation attempts to source creativity in networks of temporary and flexible workers who are supposedly averse to stable work patterns, and as such, it is the apotheosis of neoliberal management ideology.

These two emphases—on the saleable output of the flexible creative individual and on collaborative project-based models of inquiry—might appear contradictory, but in fact they complement one another. The promotion of the collaborative classroom has tended to delink research expertise from teaching. The collaborative or "decentered" classroom can be run by the students themselves, or managed by adjunct workers with little capacity to conduct research and bring it to bear on their teaching. A roster of elite academics are thereby given time to focus on the business of innovating new ideas. Moreover, though the decentered classroom-cum-network may be premised upon a democratic desire to unsettle the presumption of the individual's singular authority, this unsettling poses no real threat to the primacy of the individual's property. The individual's temporary existence within the network is rather compatible with the valorization of her innovations. She needs unquestioned authority much less than she needs the appearance of identity—that is, of a portable set of traits that are adapted to each new network's terms, and become more solid only for the purposes of personal branding or IP capture. Indeed insofar as authority is a matter of grounded and unshakable support for particular ideas or values, it is quite undesirable, because it poses a threat to one's ability move seamlessly from project to project, network to network.

If, then, a more participatory or collaborative model of work is so clearly not the solution to the problem of the sanctification of self-managing individuals assumed and supported by neoliberalism, what is? I suggest in what follows that in answering this question we revive what might seem a nostalgic concern: the problem of aesthetic autonomy. Autonomization, defined as the struggle to develop and secure the means for articulations of creativity that are separable from capital in some authentic measure, is an urgent concern for the university today. It is urgent precisely because neoliberal ideologies and practices draw so much from the history of thought about aesthetic acts and the motives behind them.

Stefano Harney has recently outlined two aspects of the entanglement of aesthetics and economics that are particularly relevant to the university. One is the movement of the language of economics and management into the arts, which creative-economy discourses and frameworks exemplify. The other is the reverse movement of aesthetics into management practice, evident in the idea that management is itself a form of artistic expression that results from an individual leader's progressive self-development and commitment to post-materialist goals.[2] These circumstances have been rightly lamented in a variety of tones. Scholars charge that a once autonomous realm of artistic and cultural expression has been reduced to economic instrumentality; that neoliberal economic rationality is averse to the goals of collective human development that the idea of the aesthetic protects; that there will not be a realm of free aesthetic expression so long as capitalism persists; and so on. I emphasize, however, that our own expert knowledge of the aesthetic terminologies and

priorities absorbed by capitalist management also means that scholars are now uniquely placed to reveal the limitations of capitalist markets and to imagine and orchestrate the formation of alternatives.

Neoliberal Aesthetics at Work

As I have already begun to suggest, the creative economy and the university intersect on several levels. The university is a site of production, circulation, and valorization of the intellectual properties that are the creative economy's core matter. The university also produces and authorizes the policy analysts and social scientists who are willing to take the existence of a vibrant creative economy for granted, to assess its scope and importance, and to make recommendations to government about how to foster and develop it. Less obvious perhaps are the shared formulations of hierarchized labor that the university and the creative industries rely upon and perpetuate. By some accounts there is no distinction to be made: academics are simply members of the creative class. Others interpret creative labor more narrowly, as the work of producing arts and culture, and they do not count most of the research and teaching that take place within the university as forms of this work. What seems indisputable is that the creative worker and the academic equally confront a rhetoric celebrating the self-managing, flexible personality as the engine of economic growth. They tend to be also similarly invested in the idea that they should be committed heart and soul to their work. As scholars have often noted, our faith that our work offers non-material rewards, and is more integral to our identity than a "regular" job would be, makes us ideal employees when the goal of management is to extract our labor's maximum value at minimum cost. Indeed Marc Bousquet suggests that managers everywhere want to learn how to emulate higher education "in moving from simple exploitation to the vast harvest of bounty represented by super-exploitation."[3] In the case of academics, according to Bousquet, this super-exploitation means the donation of quantities of free labor under the auspices of committed professionalism. Think of the adjunct who works endless hours to attempt to maintain a viable professional research profile while teaching hundreds of students for little pay. Others, such as Andrew Ross and Angela McRobbie, have read the artist, rather than the academic, as the premier model of the ideally flexible worker. Sanitized images of artists at work, highlighting their purported resistance to the constraints of the regimented work day, serve those keen to foster the kind of work that "never ends in space or time […] for which leisure and self-expression are not the antidote but the fuel."[4] In sum, to those who celebrate creative labor, the history of autonomous artistic practice is simply evidence that insecure employment in temporary networks is the key to groundbreaking innovation.

Choose your poison. Whether we are talking about academics or artists, idealized conceptions of their blissful work—work opposed to all things mundane and routine, but in search of the next saleable idea—belong to a longstanding and august romance with mental labor. This romance imagines that knowledge workers will achieve control over the power of their own labor because in owning their own minds they own the means of production. There is a venerable tradition of economic and management thought supporting this belief, encompassing even Karl Marx's claim that the development of the "general intellect" could produce the conditions for the flourishing of leisured human communities after capitalism. While there is no reason to abandon all features of this romance, it is necessary to stress the great distance between its current terms and the reality of the rise of a contingent workforce of adjunct faculty and the larger permanent underclass of low-level "cognitariat" of which they are part. Christopher Newfield has recently echoed André Gorz's argument that capitalism attempts to make knowledge, which is definitively proliferating, abundant, and common, a scarce resource. He argues for the university's strong role here, as enclosure of the knowledge commons by the establishment of proprietary knowledge now appears to be its main drive.[5] The academic labor hierarchy performs the crucial function of discouraging the more powerful class of privileged workers from doing anything that might jeopardize an elite status that they know to be protecting them from serious hardships. The academic star system is, in this light, an instance of the broader way in which knowledge management will separate "employees with proprietary knowledge" from "the vast majority of knowledge workers," and will then set about undermining the majority's "independence and social protections."[6] It is only the star producers, those who do create appropriately saleable proprietary knowledge, who enable the university or firm to seek rents, so it is only they who are "retained, supported, cultivated, and lavishly paid."[7] Hence while the conditions of the star producers' work may indeed be quite desirable, these conditions require the relative destitution of others.

Meanwhile, as the worker has been imagined in definitively aesthetic terms, management thought has also become particularly attentive to the aesthetic as a means of addressing the problem of creating the conditions for good work. For decades now, of course, businesses have looked to the arts and culture for a variety of expedient services. Prestige art collections are a good investment; the presence of art and artists in the workplace can foster a contented company culture; and aesthetic experiences can help restore the working self to health and productivity. But the links between business culture and arts culture have become even more intimate in recent years. Management theory will now speak of the experience of work as, just like art, a good *in and of itself* that can be delinked from any profitmaking enterprise. Work within the firm must of course result in a valuable innovation at some point. Yet before that point is reached, being at work may produce other kinds of non-instrumental value. It may provide the employee with some transcendent pleasure, for example, or allow some insight

into her own experiences and desires. Both regular employees and upper ranks of managers are now often asked to perceive these kinds of non-material rewards as more important than the prerogatives imposed by a distant corporate parent for whom profit generation is vital. Indeed, it is precisely when profit generation is not the employee's first priority, when it is made secondary to the employee's search for paths to self-expression, self-development, and self-realization, that she is thought to produce the genuine innovations in which the employer is ultimately interested.[8]

The rise of the Art of Management and Organization group at the University of Essex, with its attendant journal *Aesthesis* and six international conferences to date is a telling sign of the convergence of management and aesthetics. Here the idea of aesthetic experience is imagined to exist in complex and contradictory relation to the goals of the firm. Affiliated scholars have for instance outlined how to build a leadership workshop around the making of an art object. In one case, participants construct what are called "poem houses," described as "three-dimensional artefacts combining and representing visual interpretation with poetic text, holding special significance for the maker." The idea is that making these poem houses might provide a "visual narrative of individual and organizational experiences of leadership," and thus allow people to reflect on what it means to be a leader and develop their own ideas about how to unlock employees' creativity.[9] In this and many other instances, encountering the aesthetic is at once an end in and of itself and a means of effectively managing workers who need to arrive at ways to innovative products or systems. The result is that a terminology that we might associate with academic inquiry when it is opposed to management—for instance, emphasizing embodied experience versus broad-stroke metanarratives, the inner life of depth, meaning and personal experience versus the outer pressures of corporate enterprise—enters the corporate firm in the image of the artist-manager. The artist-manager is interested in bringing aesthetic experiences to bear on the workplace as an encouragement to introspection, both because introspection is an inherent good and because it is where innovations originate.

A recent *Business Strategy Review* article, devoted to the seemingly banal task of uncovering "how managers can unleash bold new ideas," takes German artist Joseph Beuys as its guru precisely because of his "radical" conception of creativity. His words provide the epigraph for the piece: "Only from art can a new concept of economics be formed, in terms of human need, not in the sense of use and consumption, politics and property, but above all in terms of the production of spiritual goods."[10] Accordingly, we are meant to assume that what follows will take spiritual goods, not corporate profits, as the motivation behind strategic recommendations to corporations. Beuys' famous insistence that "every human being is an artist" is now a mantra for creative-economy enthusiasts like Richard Florida, so

it is not surprising that he has been made a poster boy by those interested in "mobilizing everyone's latent creative abilities—engaging one's creative thoughts, words and actions and expressing this creativity in meaningful ways wherever it is needed."[11] What is remarkable is how such recognition is positioned in opposition to old school managerial thought, which is said to be insufficiently humane in its commitment to quantification and analytical metrics. The article's authors imagine their break with the past as a matter of transcendence over the materialistic motivations behind conventional market rationalities. They insist that it is, ultimately, "inspiration, intuition and imagination" that need to be the focus of today's business culture.[12] Aspects of this focus aren't strictly new. Rather, the history of management theory, since Frederick Winslow Taylor's stop-watch anyway, has evolved in response to internal critiques of managers' limited access to the deepest human needs and motivations. It has entailed a complicated and shifting interplay between adaptation to workers' demands and efforts to construct and shape their needs and motivations so that they will be maximally amenable to management.

A talk given at the 2011 Art of Management and Organization conference presents this interplay as integral to a progressive management style. J. Brian Woodward and Colin Frank begin by describing the contemporary business environment as increasingly complex, ambiguous and uncertain, and suggest that in such a context what effective leaders need is a means to devise persuasive narratives that will help their employees make sense of the world. They perceive this process of meaning-making as definitively aesthetic. Like writers, leaders need to devise "conscious works of fiction that are plausible enough to act as a basis for confident judgment and action by generating aesthetic knowledge and integrating it with empirical and cultural knowledge."[13] They claim that an engagement with aesthetic experiences is a means of confronting the difficulty of having to deal with "dramatically fluid conditions."[14] They thus recommend a "hermeneutic approach," in which leading is viewed as "largely meaning making": "An artist-leader, then, can be viewed as a *Hermenaut* […] a seeker, a questioner and crafter of meaning."[15]

Woodward and Frank mention that in 1987 Victor Dégot argued observation of day-to-day management revealed a set of practices that were more "like" an artistic activity than a routine, regulated, rationalistic science, yet he stopped far short of simply stating that management is fundamentally artistic in nature. Writing twenty years later, David Atkinson made the bolder claim that "managing and leading can produce works of art," if art is understood as the result of pre- or anti-purposive human exploration and innovation.[16] In his 2007 study on the art of management Atkinson presents himself as "stepping into Heidegger's shoes," by embracing and advancing the legacy of conceiving of the aesthetic as inherently unlike and superior to everything it is not—as, in essence, the realm of the human poised against

cold rationality. Atkinson advises business managers to develop their aesthetic sensibilities by exploring the "sensual territories" unmediated by rational knowledge. Their minds must be "not bound by what is already known" in order to be "capable of producing original insights and even new concepts."[17] They must call on "internal capacities, and on qualities of character" to undertake that "exploration of the inner self" that is essential in an artist-leader's development.[18] He suggests, for example, that because managers must deal with the matter "of movement of an organisation and its people from one place-in-time to an 'other' place in-time in the achievement of some 'end' of economic and/or social value," their work should be conceived as a form of dance.[19]

Woodward and Frank embrace Atkinson's insights, and place aesthetic encounter at the beginning of any attempt to generate new working practices and new products. Little is said about what such an encounter might entail. Instead they outline the vaguest of processes, beginning with the artist-leader being "offered an object (mask, art form, sound, image, activity, etc.) with which there is engagement through a perceptual modality or multiple modalities (sight, hearing, kinetic, etc.)." What is specified is that this encounter should be "disconcerting, enlivening, energizing and enigmatic all at once," thus generating a "pre-articulated understanding" that will form the basis for construction of a narrative that will eventually inform her work and inspire her team.[20] Perhaps they would approve of the way Danish firms are now employing poets to consult with workers and produce poems that might help the company self-reflect and develop. The director of the BG Bank explained that his company's "bank-poet" wrote a weekly uncensored post for the company intranet, noting that "consultants come from the same environment that we come from, so now we try to bring in the literature instead."[21] He hopes that literature might instigate the kind of penetrating insight that traditional consultants can no longer provide.

In Woodward and Frank's account, management is dignified and humanized when it is grounded in aesthetic experiences. What the artist-leader does is more important than the work of producing the conditions in which the firm accrues capital. Instead, the process of aesthetic leadership is valuable on its own terms. Artist-leaders "craft their actions through reflective thought and deep self-understanding."[22] The artist-leader seeks something greater than the firm's fiscal success: she pursues "personal meaning and expression, the capacity to imagine, invent, conceptualize and reflect internally and the opportunity to act thoughtfully on the world."[23] She is a "hero" on a journey toward self-discovery, and her encounter with an aesthetic experience—an art form, sound, image, et cetera—will be ideally disconcerting, enlivening, energizing, because it encourages pre-articulated understanding and a suspension of reason; it is "pre-symbolic, pre-thematic, pre-ontological and so is very powerful."[24]

The complicated introversion of work that is recommended here, in which workplace demands are in some measure inseparable from the self, is a defining feature of neoliberal labor ideology, as it blurs the boundaries between command and self-governance, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, authenticity and work performance. The flight of aesthetic fancy must inevitably return to earth and encourage the artist-manager's necessary provision of something more concrete, an "inviting yet defined container for the emergence of creative thought and action."[25] This particular dyad—"inviting yet defined"—is perhaps the telling feature of management theory's invocation of the aesthetic as a model of activity. Work needs somehow to transcend its own goals—its contribution to the firm's profits—in order to realize those goals optimally. This dyad is certainly at work within the university, in which the idea that the academic is on a journey involving her inner life and deeper motivations has clear force. University work is "inviting," in that it allows for a degree of freedom to manage one's own time, and involves pursuits inseparable from our deepest values. Yet it is also "defined," in that our dedication joins us to projects and goals—"containers"—to which we may object, or to which we may accede ambivalently, reluctantly, under some strain. Bousquet argues, similarly, that "a delicate balancing act" defines the university, because "management continuously tries to seize control of institutional mission [sic] without killing the academic goose laying its golden eggs." This balancing act should be conceived as a struggle, because the administration is "pushing to see just how partial or inauthentic it can make the autonomy, integrity, and dignity of academic endeavor without inducing the faculty to fall out of love with their work."[26] Those of us who work within the university system often do so because we believe that our work is important, not because we want to contribute to the university's valorization. Yet it is in turn hard to perceive how our work would have any kind of significance in the absence of the university system, a system we often oppose precisely because it undermines our ability to value our own labor truly or authentically, but that we operate within because it allows us to turn our objections into opportunities to work.

In sum, the language of "individual creativity, expression, and opinion," a language that continues to be rampant within the university even as it marches toward rationalized capture of knowledge-for-profit, is scarcely incompatible with the language of business. The opposite appears to be true. Individual expressivity and meaning-making are integral to entrepreneurial innovation in the current marketplace, and may be at present even more relevant to corporations than they are to the humanities curriculum. Hence Harney's argument that the idea of the creative industries serves to reassure management that insofar as corporations are creative they are also laudable. In particular, he claims, the creative-industries concept assures scholars within the business school—those whom common sense tells us are most beholden to industry—that their work too is not just work, but rather an expression of deeper and more authentic drives. It seems that nobody wants to be "just working," and, ironically, this

negative desire is welcome by administrations turning from the language of excellence to that of entrepreneurship. To "just work" is utterly routine, whereas to innovate entrepreneurial ideas is to be authentically incomparable. Excellence is about measure. Entrepreneurship is about the "truly unfamiliar, surprising, said to be unique, unrepeatable, even uncomfortable."[27] It is about uncovering the authentic difference required by IP law. In this context, for the purposes of management, arts and culture, however codified by their positioning within creative-industries frameworks, are first and foremost potential instigators of the pre-cognitive discomforts, the shaking up of one's routine ways of thinking, from which true innovations and new forms of value are understood to flow.

Weak Subject/Strong Consumer

Another way of saying this is that aesthetic traditions that have been of such concern to artists, and to scholars of arts and culture, are now used to constitute and legitimate conceptions of the self that are transforming our working lives: conceptions emphasizing a self-referencing interiority and creativity, self-expression and self-invention, freedom from constraint of any kind, and the ideal of autonomous artwork, expressive of individual genius and innovation, that has proven so useful to neoliberal capital. In these conditions, in which humanistic critiques of the market are so integral to the market's functioning, it may be foolish to suggest that the humanities necessarily provide a privileged vantage from which to critique the incursion of market logic into the university system.

Indeed, it may even be true that currents within the study of arts and culture have quite directly encouraged the development of neoliberal conceptions of creativity, while discouraging effective critique of the privatization of higher education. Newfield argues that, by not sufficiently cultivating "nonmarket understandings of the value and mode of life," arts and culture scholars have missed an important opportunity to stress the history of "anti-determinist" thought in their own fields. When after WWII a university education became a possibility for more people, there was a sense of promise that a liberal curriculum pivoting on exposure to the arts would produce a new class, the professional managerial class, whose work would unfold within a marketplace that it would also actively shape. Newfield remarks that this class was meant to "*manage* markets with its expertise" in order to effect "society's general development," and his work is largely a lament that this promise was never realized.[28] Scholars are now most likely to disavow the very idea that they should be involved in attempting to create or delimit markets, even when the markets in questions are academic ones in which they are directly involved. Instead, the extensive literature describing the privatization of the university appears to have encouraged a kind of market fatalism in which what dominates is the necessity of meeting existing conditions rather than attempting to change them.[29] In short, Newfield claims, in looking at the world of business—especially as it

impinges upon the work of the universities—the lesson that scholars of arts and culture took away was that they had to adapt to its terms.

What they seem to have observed insufficiently, in turn, was just how much energy corporations devote to efforts to determine the nature and extent of demand. This, then, is another way in which a rationale for the study of culture—a respect for its shaping force in the world, or for its existence as a series of agential acts of assertion of how things should and could be—is realized more in the business world than in the arts and culture faculties. We have seen that corporate firms imagine themselves as sites for the production of art, and that they accommodate research findings that might seem at odds with a "bottom-line orientation."[30] Firms also assume it is possible to use culture to influence consumers and create the conditions for the flourishing of their own products. They assume they can understand people well enough to tap into their hidden desires, create demand, and adapt the market to what one thinks should be valorized. Scholars of arts and culture, on the other hand, acknowledged the pressures of commercialism but, for the most part, prove reluctant to try to influence them. What, we might ask, produces this stance? Two processes, discussed at greater length below, appear particularly relevant and worrying

First is the way that we have come to inhabit what Newfield calls a "weak subjectivity," produced by a steady erosion of any sense that there is such a thing as significant and legitimate autonomy, autonomy that might serve as the basis for evaluative judgments of cultural objects and market realities alike. It is important to note that this erosion leaves intact the self as the key site of human capital development, as an engine generating plausible copyrightable theories, as the "you" celebrated by consumer culture. The weak subject, insistent on the impossibility and even the undesirability of attaining any authority, unconvinced that autonomy from the market is even a worthwhile goal, is entirely compatible with the neoliberal self that is outlined above—the self as engine of production of intellectual properties, as brand manager of one's own human capital, as committed to self-realization through work. What has been undermined, rather, is desire for and faith in collective attempts to form, manage and shape the institutions within which our creativity unfolds. Threatened in turn is the foundation of academic freedom in the idea that the prerogatives of market and government should not determine how the knowledge arising from scholarly inquiry is valued. Part of what needs to be questioned, then, is the idea that the claim to accurate knowledge is itself too universalizing or imperialistic a gesture—an imposition of a normative stance that is insufficiently attuned to the heterogeneity of voices and micro-narratives. Timothy Brennan has suggested that in the face of neoliberal capitalism humanities scholars have in effect positioned themselves as the subalterns whose powerlessness postcolonial scholars once eloquently explored. Effective resistance now tends to be imagined as necessarily "a

perpetually splintered, ineffective, heroic, invisible, desperate plenitude," while "any larger ambition than the self"—the ambition to establish models for the nonmarket valuation of creativity, for instance—"risks an imposition on others, a transgression on alterity itself." [31]

Second is the attendant move toward celebration of the consumer as the central agent in the production of value. In "resisting" the inauthentic and oppressive culture of producers, primarily through cognitive acts, this consumer contributes to the creation and circulation of the object's (albeit recoded) value. The history of study of cultural production is particularly telling here, because so much of the scholarship in this tradition has been interested in the relationship between culture and economics, and in the possibility and delimitation of an aesthetic realm of autonomous production. I can only touch upon a few moments below. My goal in highlighting them is not to suggest that scholars have somehow orchestrated—or at least permitted—a wholesale concession to neoliberal reason. I want rather to suggest that certain limited currents within the tradition of the study of cultural production, tending to affirm the agency of consumers and deny the authority and autonomy of producers, have been mainstreamed just as neoliberal policies have become dominant. I suggest that privileging this focus of inquiry on consumer power has partially displaced the historical materialist emphases that characterized cultural studies' first moments. There is within the tradition of cultural studies a recurring, countering insistence on the power held by those in a position to produce mainstream culture, and thus on the necessity of acting to regulate and shape that production. This countervailing tradition draws upon legacies of thinking about the dialectical interplay of economy and culture, structure and agency, and has room not only for consumers who appropriate objects, but for relatively autonomous cultural producers who work to intervene within and shape the capitalist conditions for the production of culture.

We can consider, to start with, the tradition of study of the political economy of culture, which aimed to demonstrate how the ownership and financing of cultural production, supported by government (de)regulation of markets and business conduct, both impact the diversity of what is communicated to the public and structure how audiences are able to access and use what is available. The political economy of culture was a combative response to the growth, consolidation and global expansion of the industries of cultural production, which it claimed to have begun in the early twentieth century under market capitalism, leading by the 1970s to a situation in which a handful of powerful corporations controlled cultural commodity production and circulation. Scholars suggested that this domination limited the range of cultural options available to the public, and affected artists who were asked to accede to the prerogatives of cultural management if they wished to be successful. Frankfurt School theory—in particular, the work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer on the "culture industry"—was, of course, a significant precursor to the political economy of

culture in this respect. It argued that, with the expansion and consolidation of large cultural corporations, the drive to secure profits had led to rationalization procedures and thus to the standardization of cultural output, and had encouraged a "pseudo individuality" in which people were enjoined to express their ostensibly unique identities and values through their utterly routine consumer practices. Horkheimer and Adorno saw these practices as signs of a desire to escape from trying circumstances— circumstances that would never be altered via consumption of mass culture. At the same time, Adorno maintained a vision of the possibility that culture could be something better; indeed, the culture industries thesis involves an historical argument that there had once been an authentically avant-garde culture more genuinely separable from the market economy and capable of some critical purchase on it. It had been subsumed within the culture industry, however, and was threatened by its operations. Adorno argued that true art-work needed to resist these operations by refusing to be readily and passively consumed.

The work of the Frankfurt School was a polemical contribution to a broader debate about the coming of mass culture. It imagined that the relationship between base and superstructure was shifting rather than fixed, and that with the rise of the culture industry the relative autonomy of the superstructure was being threatened by the dynamism of the base. These claims resonated with political economists of cultural production who, in the 1970s and 80s, feared that if a corporation oligopoly manufactured and distributed cultural products, and owned the rights to the profits that resulted, then standardized generic forms and homogenous content would be inevitable. Indeed scholars like Herb Schiller and Nicholas Garnham, and organizations like UNESCO, claimed that corporate domination was already jeopardizing the diversity of human culture, along with the critical thinking that results from exposure to a variety of perspectives, while the concentration of mass media conglomerates in the Western world was undermining the ability of non-Western people to tell their own stories and see their experiences expressed in cultural form. I am reprising these well-known details in order to stress the emphasis that political economy approaches—which tended to have a Marxist cast—placed on the production side of the equation. Their approach to culture was more or less epiphenomenal: they saw it as a by-product of the base, or as subsumed within objective and observable economic relations. What matters, then, is that while this approach was viable in the 1970s and 1980s, it was already at times at odds with scholarship emphasizing culture's constitutive or mediating role and its relative power to overcome and exceed the conditions that determine its emergence.

The fate of Raymond Williams's work, which was so formative for British cultural studies, has been perhaps most influential in this respect. Friendly to Marxism but eager to critique its terms, Williams defined his own practice of "cultural materialism" as "a theory of the

specificities of material cultural and literary production within historical materialism."[32] He came to assert that culture can in fact shape how history unfolds as it achieves some modicum of separation from material forces in order to reflect upon those forces and influence their future constitution. He tended to present his work as more attentive to Marx's own impulses than to much of what claimed a Marxist pedigree. What he saw in Marx was an avowedly social emphasis on the worker as his own "productive force": he is not produced as a worker, as a deterministic theory might hold, but rather retains an integral freedom to produce himself as a radical subject and to join up with other people producing themselves as the collective agents of social change. If there is a "base" in Williams' theory, it is not what appears in what he calls "degenerate" arguments about "primary production within the terms of capitalist economic relationships."[33] It is, rather, harkening back to Marx's "social being," all of those practices that make up the production and reproduction of society itself.

Williams thus claims that those interested in cultural production must emphasize that it does not simply result from an existing social order, but is rather an element in the constitution of that order. As the whole "signifying system through which a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored," culture cannot but be taken as constitutive or fixed.[34] Cultural production is a set of social practices and social relations that also mediates those practices and relations. Culture thus does more than reproduce a particular ideology; instead, it is dynamic and conflictual, not only instantiating determinations but also tensions and conflicts, innovation and change.[35] Williams's influential theory about the co-existence within a given social situation of residual, dominant, and emergent cultural forms complements his insistence on the possibility of authentic conflict. No single cultural dominant truly "exhausts human practice, human energy, human intention"; historical change occurs because humanly willed emergent forms arrive to unsettle things.[36]

Williams's work contributes in these terms to an emerging focus, strongly identified with the birth of cultural studies, on the ability of the individual to use culture to intervene actively within her social situation rather than passively reproducing its values. For some scholars, this kind of materialism is so insufficiently interested in the extent to which the economy plays a determining role that it should probably not be deemed materialist at all. Malcolm Daly reads Williams, for example, as working in a post-Marxist tradition because he appears to deny any "sense of priority in determination."[37] The base/superstructure model, despite all its faults, at least tries to understand and to question a hierarchy of determination, and even the more dialectical materialisms accept the basic fact of hierarchy while permitting "elements of the superstructure a reciprocal (though often weak) effect."[38] According to Daly Williams's materialism, in contrast, seems to entirely collapse any sense of hierarchy, and to reject the

necessity of establishing a theory of determination, a necessity Daly sees as integral to any materialist treatment of culture.

Daly's critique is more accurately applied to the next generation of cultural studies scholars who picked up Williams work. Williams claimed that his focus on culture was a necessary corrective to the failure of the base/superstructure model to account for the constitutive role that ostensibly superstructural elements, like legal systems and prevalent ideologies, play in maintaining a particular class's domination. In a sense, then, studying the constitutive potential of the superstructure was for him another way of critiquing the power of the base to which it was beholden. In his later years, Williams was attracted to Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony as a replacement for base/superstructure formulae for this reason. The notion of hegemony seemed to get at the reality of social experience more effectively. It accounted at once for the lived experience of power and the delimitation of common sense by a dominant order. This order was infused in culture and economics, self and society, but it was not a totality impervious to critique. Instead, it could be reformed by the productive force of its subjects.

In any case, Williams's interest in culture's highly delimited—but nevertheless viable—protagonism proved useful to those keen to argue for the ability of the average person to "recode" dominant messages, and eventually fed into an abandonment of any substantial emphasis on the determinative force of the economy. This occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s, just as many were observing culture's increasing importance to the "advanced" economies. Production was shifting from manufacture of material goods to the creation of immaterial content, and even the most resolutely non-cultural economic sectors were falling under the influence of sign systems like advertising and marketing. The cultural industries were evidently rich and growing and increasingly global in scope, and marketers were turning all products into cultural artefacts by associating their consumption with desirable values and aspirations. These changes belong to a broader shift from Fordist to post-Fordist production, or from an industrial to a knowledge economy. Whereas production had once been dominated by mass production techniques, with assembly lines mass-producing commodities in hugely capitalized plants, it was now becoming flexible, driven by a digital automation that allowed for the specialization in small-batch production to serve niche interests. The technical possibility of flexible specialization and the culturalization of products are mutually constitutive. Under post-Fordist conditions, featuring "customized production for customized markets,"[39] industry is ever more attuned to the minute cultural distinctions between niche consumer groups, and increasingly invested in the culturalization or aestheticization of all consumer products and acts of consumption. Post-Fordist production thus encouraged a marked aestheticization of identity, a focus on the individual as

a productive consumer of available media materials who was able to assemble a unique self from the various possibilities on offer. Meanwhile, identity politics displaced what was now perceived as an outmoded class struggle over material resources, insisting that real change could be negotiated in and through cultural representation and the performance of the self.

It is not surprising, then, that it became exceedingly difficult to maintain any strict divide between culture and its determining contexts. The economic and the cultural appeared rather as hybrids interpenetrating one another in a variety of important ways. It is hard not to read the shift in cultural production scholarship away from a sense of the economy's determining force and toward an emphasis on culture's mediating power as a response to these large-scale changes. What came to dominate—though not without challenge, of course—was a new focus on the politics of consumption, and a tendency to treat the aesthetic not as the space in which artists yearn for freedom from economic rationalities but, instead, as the process of stylizing one's life in a way that intervenes in and engages with the dominant order. The fate of reference to the culture industry is telling: gradually divorced from its Frankfurt School origins, it began to appear most often in social science and policy work that claimed a neutral interest in studying the growth of the cultural sector of the economy. Before it was displaced by reference to the creative industries, it was also turned into the plural form—"the cultural industries"—a grammatical shift that aptly symbolized the rejection of an all-encompassing culture-industry thesis as insufficiently interested in the sheer variety of industrial cultural production and reception by diverse and interactive audiences.

These developments motivated some scholars to debate whether the economy was itself becoming, as Jean Baudrillard would have it, just another sign system, another semi-autonomous "superstructural discourse" with no material base worth studying, or whether in fact the superstructure was being "invaded by the base," such that the apparent power and autonomy of culture should be read as a structural feature of its functioning within market capitalism.[40] If the distinction between base and superstructure was breaking down, which was collapsing into which? Or did this particular manner of discourse simply need to be abandoned? Scott Lash and Celia Lury claim that, at one time, the language of base and superstructure did make sense. It was a fine way of thinking about the relative homogeneity of Fordist cultural production. However, they argue, this era has been displaced by a post-Fordist age built on a "design-intensive production of difference" that spans the globe.[41] According to their analysis, culture is now so rich, diverse, and ubiquitous that, on a global scale, it "seeps out of the superstructure and comes to infiltrate, and then take over, the infrastructure,"[42] or "collapses into" the material base, as "goods become informational, work becomes affective, property becomes intellectual and the economy more generally becomes cultural."[43] Recall that Adorno and Horkheimer saw the one-time heterogeneity

of the cultural superstructure reduced to the deeply troubling capitalist rationalities of the base. For Lash and Lury that trend is now reversed by a shift from identity to difference: from the production of homogenous objects with fixed meanings to the circulation of indeterminate objects defined by the heterogeneous ways in which they are used; from standardized commodity goods whose value is determined by commercial exchange to diverse brand properties which acquire their value through mediated events; from culture as something to be isolated and interpreted to culture as something to be used selectively and interchangeably as one fashions oneself.

Though they claim as their subject the "global culture industry," Lash and Lury offer this analysis not in a spirit of Frankfurt School critique, but instead as a neutral description of the services that cultural objects render to knowing consumers. Their claims thus seem a perfect instance of the shift in focus in cultural production work from production's determining priority to the agential force of the ubiquitously cultural—a shift that at once reflects and takes up a broader movement of the advanced economies toward post-Fordist production models. Yet it also must be noted that in recent years the realities that interest Lash and Lury have also prompted a return to political economy approaches, particularly evident in studies of labor. Political economists have argued, for instance, that whereas at one time television producers would work to cultivate mass audiences for mass-produced goods, now they work to build "programs that create customized audiences," and, in the case of "reality" shows for instance, they use those audiences to reduce their own costs by replacing paid unionized labor with audience performers.[44] Moreover, just as a skilled, professional, developed-world workforce demands higher wages and more creative control, their tasks are shipped overseas while, as in the case of film special effects and animation, development of the technological content of programming reduces labor costs even more.[45]

These kinds of tactics can be seen as the latest in a long history of attempts to manage the risks inherent to an industry dependent on the most notoriously recalcitrant kind of worker: the artist. In the early 1980s, political-economic studies complicated their own habitual focus on the determinative priority of productive forces by stressing the particularity of cultural work and cultural products. Bill Ryan notably challenged the Frankfurt School theory of the standardization of production by arguing that what structured the corporate management of culture was precisely the uniqueness of the things from which it attempted to extract profits. Ryan pointed out that, while capitalist relations are defined by a distinctive form of anonymous labor, the artist is historically constituted as a named individual with talent and a claim to original creativity. For these reasons "the artist […] represents a valorisation problem in the capitalist labor process,"[46] and certain structures within the cultural industries can be explained as a response to the situation of the artist's unusual work. For example,

Ryan argues that as corporations have struggled to realize culture's potential value, they have made recourse to formatting (emphasizing generic links between products), as well as to marketing, in their attempts to overcome the inherent risks that come with the attempt to valorize so many diverse and distinct products. The production of the cultural commodity is thus structured around the simple assumption of the artist's autonomous labor; many cultural products—but literary works are a primary example—circulate within the market on the grounds that they are attached to a unique individual irreducible to her own capitalist valorization.

This kind of argument from culture's particularity has proven useful to the more recent scholarship I draw upon earlier in this essay, which addresses the transformation of workers' sense of their own distinction into an asset for managers. Corporations and universities benefit from the artistic surplus—the extra engagement and effort of those with a passion for their work—and easily correlate the artist's desire for uniqueness with the market demand for non-replicable cultural expressions and experiences. In a situation in which more and more work appears to resemble cultural work, because it is meant to be done out of passion and conviction, and as an expression of one's real self and personal development, scholars have considered how exactly the artist's oppositional impulse has come to support what it once seemed—sometimes still seems—to oppose. In addition to studies of the mainstream appropriation of artistic conceptions of work, there has been an important extension of political economy's concept of the cultural producer to include the users of culture, users who are increasingly asked to contribute their own free labor to the production of cultural commodities. While a participatory culture's "prosumers" appear to have a notable power to influence the culture they receive, scholars have studied the shifts in corporate structure that reflect and encourage the contribution that users of products and services will make to marketing and development. In both of these cases—the study of culture-sector producers as ideal flexible workers, and the study of use of cultural consumers as a ready pool of free labor—emphasis is placed on the affective investments that people make in culture because they believe it offers them something other than economic reward. They thus reveal to us the continuing relevance of the tension between culture and capital, freedom and constraint, superstructure and base.

The realities of digital cultural production have perhaps most occasioned a renewed interest in thinking about cultural production as a political-economic matter of power and domination. Expansion of the web in the 1990s, decreased costs of media capture and playback, and the growing consumer economies of countries entering the neoliberal order after the 1990s have all lead to the proliferation of online, user-generated content. Our creative writing, photos, videos, music, tweets and more sustained musings occasioned—and are now surely

occasioned by—the web 2.0 companies that capitalize by hosting all of this "content" (Twitter, MySpace, Facebook, Flickr, and YouTube amongst them). It matters a great deal that the dominant mainstream scholarship on digital culture, best represented by Henry Jenkins's work, celebrates the productive consumer as its premier agent, and indeed works with corporations to find ways to turn her tendencies into new wealth. It is the individual who is understood as co-producing culture, whether because she actively processes and reimages what she consumes or because she creates her own content and posts it online. The mass consumption of commercial culture is said to have been cheerfully replaced, most notably with the help of user-generated digital content, by the mass production of cultural objects by users.

For those in the political economy of culture tradition, however, these developments are evidence of a further consolidation of the power of the corporate cultural industries. That the internet is an immaterial medium free from constraint is of course a myth. It is regulated and owned, and the hardware behind it is made by workers in industrial factories whose scope Henry Ford could scarcely have imagined, though their numbing assembly lines owe as much to his models as they do to any flexible just-in-time techniques. The imaginations of digital culture consumers might appear, moreover, to have been colonized by the commercial entertainment industries, as these consumers "make their own cultural products that follow the templates established by the professionals and/or rely on professional content."[47] Companies are designed with this active consumer in mind, and "have developed strategies that mimic people's tactics of bricolage, reassembly, and remix," which means that the subcultures that themselves appropriate and remix commercial culture find their practices turned into corporate strategy. Hence as the internet unleashed a "collective potential for creative expression"[48]—the platform for consolidation of the new "multitude" poised against capital—it was rapidly apparent that the forms of expression that resulted were quite immediately valorized and captured by the mainstream corporate cultural commodity producers.

In a recent take on the relation between neoliberal ideologies and the history of cultural studies, Stefano Harney makes the familiar point that "populations today are more deeply involved in creativity, judgment, opinion, aesthetics, and social and cultural re-evaluation that at any time in history," that "there is a massive daily register of judgment, critique, attention, and taste" to which cultural studies responds.[49] However he departs from existing analyses in claiming that, as a discipline, cultural studies in turn serves to bring into focus the forms of cultural value essential to the creative industries. The habitual focus by cultural studies scholars on "matters of circulation, consumption and distribution," on consumption as a site of struggle in which cultural commodities are appropriated or recoded, proves the latent value

in cultural production, and identifies new sites of valorization in "communities, clubs, homes, and subcultures (and away from workplaces, schools, factories and offices that had occupied their predecessors in Marxist literary studies or industrial sociology)."[50] Thus, the ambition of cultural studies to find resistance everywhere is for him a symptom of a "new condition of value" or a "new kind of labor process characterized by the unfinished quality and condition of the cultural commodity that is the object and objective of this labor process."[51] This labor takes place in the social factory, a concept posited by Italian Marxists but "first felt, explored, lived by British cultural studies."[52] It is the labor of the freely consuming user that changes the commodity, adds to it, and develops its value along with "the value of its own laboring subjectivity."[53] He concludes, thus, that the creative industries are—if anything coherent at all—a sinister means of turning society itself, "in all its morals, tastes, attentions and opinions," into "the site not only of control but of direct expropriation."[54]

Harney's position echoes a venerable claim about capital's need to channel and subdue some of culture's most unique features. It is hardly the case that only the artist, conventionally defined, has an interest in autonomy and creativity. Cultural production—and the story goes that, by now, all production has been culturalized as the innovative result of ever new forms of "creative destruction"—requires the maintenance of spaces in which creativity is able to flourish; this includes, now, internet platforms in which collective creativity is called forth and developed. But when people are given opportunity and means to actually engage in creative acts, together or alone, it is impossible to ensure that what they come up with will be something from which a profit can be drawn. Instead, their creativity has to be managed into some kind of consumable commodity form, and the work of making it so is uncertain and open to challenge. I have been suggesting that is in light of this process, which is made particularly perceptible by digital cultural production, that scholars in the historical materialist, political-economic tradition have been re-imaging the productive work of the "user" as well. In Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's well-known argument about the possibility of a rising "multitude," the user is less the heroic agent of productive self-making, and more a carrier of the supremely constrained—but nonetheless potentially transformative—universal creativity that can never be reduced to sales. Their celebration of the multitude is nothing short of an assertion, once again, that there is such a thing as culture whose apparent autonomy from capital deserves crucial and repeated emphasis. Even as we ask what forms of material relation have made it possible, have mediated it, and have even sometimes determined it, this appearance of autonomy is palpably real to many people, which means that the desires that it represents are evidently not being met by capitalist cultural production.

The Neoliberal Aesthetic and the Return to Autonomy

At the close of his book, *Unmaking the Public University*, Christopher Newfield indicates some ways that the study of arts and culture can counter neoliberalism:

> To the disregard of experience of abstract economic and political discourse, the liberal arts have offered detailed descriptions of people's everyday lives. To the constant endangerment of good work in neoliberal economies, the humanities have displayed the innovation that comes from the self-managed craft labor we call art, and the spillover effects that always exceed their market value. [55]

My own sense is that the businessperson will now reference everyday life, art, and craft labor as quickly as the academic. The point, then, is not to state that as scholars we know that all the values associated with the rise of neoliberal work are perverse or wrong, but rather that neoliberal ideology uses a terminology quite familiar to us, a terminology whose historical promises it fails to meet every day. It is probably safe to say that most scholars of the arts and culture would prefer to be conceived less as originators of intellectual property, and facilitators of their student-customers' consumer transactions, and more as artist-leaders charged with forming and disseminating a new common sense against neoliberal ideologies. Yet, since so many corporate managers would express related preferences, there seems to be some need first to reclaim from corporate application terms integral to our disciplines' own histories.

Amongst these terms are creativity and its close associate, autonomy, which I have been highlighting here. We need to stress that neoliberal investment in the ideal of autonomous labor is integrally limited by the valorization of intellectual property as the necessary end of all acts of creation. The history of cultural production studies suggests that the idea of autonomy should be retained not under the sign of personal freedom to invent, but rather as a measure of a persistent consciousness of the limits of capitalist markets and of the contradictory ways in which opposition to capital can be useful to it. Autonomy has a fundamentally contradictory resonance, because investment in autonomy, both affective and practical, is at once an integral feature of capitalist cultural production and an expression of the desire to be free from its constraints. The ideal of autonomy is built into attempts to imagine new working arrangements as the fruit of post-materialist values, and into the assumption that high-level cultural producers are able to transcend the marketplace upon which they rely. Conditioned by a sense of the importance of autonomy, we confront with unease our lack of substantive independence, our incorporation into economic projects and vocabularies. In Mark Banks's terms, "[w]orkers routinely fail to demonstrate […] a clear commitment to capitalist norms such as profit maximization, disinterested exchange or wealth accumulation." [56] All the same, when this failure serves as inspiration to their ongoing cultural production, and is a means

by which their work is sold as the product of their authentic inner selves, it is at once an opportunity and a problem. Hence, as Banks claims, the autonomy that cultural workers experience is best read as something "socially embedded, compromised or 'negotiated'" as they engage the "quotidian 'struggle within' to try to mediate, manage or reconcile the varied opportunities and constraints of the art-commerce relation." [57]

Recognition of the ideal of aesthetic autonomy as an ongoing locus of struggle seems especially necessary today precisely because faith in a cultural realm liberated from the constraints of the capitalist market has merged with the new vocabulary of creativity and its political and economic uses. The artist's vaunted ability to contest bureaucratic management and other forms of regimentation is no longer at all unique. They may be "disaffected and morally unhappy," "sell[ing] their minds to people they don't like for purposes they don't feel at home with," [61] but in this they are now more like than unlike other kinds of workers. There is a widespread embrace of aesthetic conceptions of the working self as a work in progress, searching for meaning as an imperative internal quest and as a means to tap into and augment one's inherent potential in the service of career development. Ceaseless self-scrutiny has become a general management protocol, a marker of one's commitment to one's work, as a spirit of opposition to assigned roles and an openness to change have become crucial facets of the ability to labor successfully. As Bousquet argues, "choosing as much integrity and dignity as our circumstances permit over the false rationality of the highest possible price for our labor-time," and "giving up wages to 'do what we love'," are markers of a broader refusal of capitalist inhumanity that unites us with countless others. [62]

Thus, if artists *are* useful models here, it is not because they prove that precarious labor leads to innovation, but because they—like many other workers now—often see themselves as part of an embattled and precarious workforce poised against an instrumentality that can turn even art's legacies of "negation, disruption and antagonism" to its own purposes. [63] It is against this very backdrop of the marketable anti-market gesture—of recognition of the service art can provide to what it wants to contest—that the ideal of aesthetic autonomy becomes not a dead issue, not a mere relic of an outmoded modernism, but rather, as Nicholas Brown has claimed, a vital concern for cultural producers all over again. [64] In other words, it is precisely when people and their activities are reduced to mere utility that insisting upon the "uselessness of the aesthetic," what Imre Szeman has called a "Kantian counterpoint to the brute utilitarian insistence of every other mode of cognition and social interaction," becomes all the more necessary. [65] This revitalized interest in the contradictory ideal of autonomous aesthetic action and experience is important to the university as a site of study—an activity which is so often non-purposive, open-ended, and in which students and teachers are equally engaged. The history I have drawn upon here, the history of thought about the tensions

and accommodations between culture and its material production, suggests the value in emphasizing not study without ends, but rather study premised upon the knowledge that not all ends are capitalist ends. The point is not to promote a limitless realm of free inquiry, but rather to abandon the habit of weak subjectivity to embrace the challenge of forming institutions. This challenge is being taken up now by groups like the Edufactory collective, the KLF (the Knowledge Liberation Front), and Universidad Nomada.[66] An insistence on autonomy, here, is not about continuing to valorize the self as a site of all meaning and value. The opposite is true. Autonomization is a fundamentally social process. It is a matter of vigorously and loudly arguing for the necessary existence of modes of inquiry, styles of life, and ways of organizing creative and scholarly activity that reveal the limitations of the neoliberal market as an arbiter of what is valuable to know and do.

NOTES

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1. Christopher Newfield, "The structure and silence of cognitariat," *EduFactory webjournal* 0 (January 2010), p. 16.

2. Stefano Harney, "The Creative Industries Debate," *Cultural Studies* 24.3 (2010): p. 434.

3. Marc Bousquet, "We Work," Minnesota Review ns 71-72 (Winter/Spring 2009): p. 149.

4. Stefano Harney, "In the business school," *EduFactory webjournal* 0 (January 2010), p. 60.

5. Newfield, "The structure and silence of cognitariat," p. 11.

6. Ibid., 14.

7. Ibid., 13.

8. See, for example, the work of Harvard management scholar Teresa Amabile. Her most recent book, *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement and Creativity at Work* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011), aims to teach managers how to instill "great inner work lives" in their employees.

9. Conference proceedings, "Creativity and Critique: the Sixth Art of Management and Organization Conference," p. 15.

10. Jörg Reckhenrich, Martin Kupp, and Jamie Anderson, "The Manager as Artist," *Business Strategy Review*, summer 2009, p. 69.

11. Ibid., p. 70.

12. Ibid.

13. J. Brian Woodward, and Colin Frank, "Developing the Artist Leader," <ftp://ftp.banffcentre.ca/LD/CSPS-Developing_the_Artist_Leader.pdf>, p. 4.

14. Ibid., p. 3.

15. Ibid., p. 5.

16. Ibid., p. 3.

17. Cited in ibid., p. 4.

18. Cited in ibid., p. 6.

19. David Atkinson, "Dancing 'the management': on social presence, rhythm and finding common purpose," *Management Decision* 46.7 (2008): 1081.

20. Ibid., 8.

21. Conference proceedings, "Creativity and Critique: the Sixth Art of Management and Organization Conference," p. 17.

22. Ibid., p. 7.

23. Ibid., p. 6.

24. Ibid., p. 8; the authors are citing here David Maclagan, *Psychological Aesthetics: Painting, Feeling, and Making Sense* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001).

25. Ibid, p. 3.

26. Bousquet, "We Work," p. 149.

27. Harney, "In the business school," p. 58.

28. Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), pp. 144-5.

29. Ibid., p. 146.

30. Ibid., p. 152.

31. Timothy Brennan, *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 17, p. 25; see also Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 186.

32. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 5.

33. Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," *New Left Review* I/82 (November-December 1973): p. 6.

34. Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981), p. 13.

35. Ibid., p. 29.

36. Williams, "Base and Superstructure," p. 12.

37. Malcolm Daly, "Cultural Materialism," in *The encyclopedia of literary and cultural theory*, ed. Michael Ryan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2011), p. 1007.

38. Ibid.

39. Vincent Mosco, "The political economy of cultural production," in *Handbook of Cultural Sociology*, ed. John R. Hall et al. (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 571.

40. Garnham, "Contribution to a political economy of mass-communication," *Media Culture Society* 1 (1979): p. 130.

41. Scott Lash and Celia Lury, *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things* (London: Polity, 2007), p. 5.

42. Ibid., p. 4.

43. Ibid., p. 7.

44. Mosco, "The political economy of cultural production," p. 573.

45. Ibid., p. 574.

46. Bill Ryan, *Making capital from culture: the corporate form of capitalism cultural production* (London: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), p. 25.

47. Lev Manovitch, "The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production?" *Critical Inquiry* 35.2 (2009): p. 321.

48. Ibid., 324.

49. Harney, "The Creative Industries Debate," p. 436.

50. Ibid., 438.

51. Ibid., 440. Reference to a "new condition of value" is on p. 438.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., 439.

54. Ibid., 443.

55. Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University*, p. 274.

56. Mark Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work* (London: Palgrave, 2007), p. 184.

57. Mark Banks, "Autonomy Guaranteed? Cultural Work and the 'Art-Commerce Relation,'" *Journal for Cultural Research* 14.3 (2010): p. 252, p. 262.

58. I am citing Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 9, p. 368, a summation of his earlier work, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

59. Eagleton, *Idea of Culture*, p. 9.

60. Stewart Martin, "The absolute artwork meets the absolute commodity," *Radical Philosophy* 146 (Nov/Dec 2007): p. 17.

61. This was C. Wright Mills's take on intellectuals' agonized and antagonistic relationship to the white-collar workplace. Qtd. in Kevin Mattson, *Intellectuals in Action: The Origins of the New Left and Radical Liberalism, 1945-1970* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), p. 55.

62. Bousquet, "We Work," p. 149.

63. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 189.

64. Nicholas Brown, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Real Subsumption under Capital," *nonsite.org*, March 13, 2012, http://nonsite.org/editorial/the-work-of-art-in-the-age-of-its-real-subsumption-under-capital, par. 28.

65. Imre Szeman, "Manhattanism and Future Cities: Some Provocations on Art and New Urban Forms," in *Transnationalism, Activism, Art*, eds. Kit Dobson and Aine McGlynn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 25.

66. For more on these movements see Mike Neary, "Teaching Politically: Policy, Pedagogy and the New European University," <http://www.edu-factory.org/wp/teaching-politically/ >.

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BARTLEBY'S OCCUPATION: "PASSIVE RESISTANCE" THEN AND NOW

JONATHAN POORE

When the narrator of Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street" remarks, "nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance," the reader cannot help but think of Henry David Thoreau.[1] And indeed, one line of "Bartleby" criticism, beginning with a 1945 essay by Egbert Oliver and extending to contemporary critics like Michael Rogin and Brook Thomas, without claiming categorically that Melville had read Thoreau's "Resistance to Civil Government," nonetheless regards the short story as an extension of or, alternatively, a parody of the anti-authoritarian argument of the essay.[2] What these (otherwise very different) critical interpretations have in common is that they ultimately regard Bartleby and Thoreau as resisting a version of the same thing, described variously as "society," "social institutions" or "the social system." In my view, however, these terms collapse an important distinction between two kinds of social "institution"—the market and the state—that is fundamental to understanding the nature of Bartleby's resistance and its difference from Thoreau's.

Jeff Wall, Milk, 1984, transparency in lightbox, 187 x 229 cm.

The distinction has more than literary-critical significance, given the fact that "Bartleby" has achieved a new notoriety, beyond its perennial presence in college survey courses and literary journals—though, properly speaking, this newfound notoriety should be attributed to the enigmatic individual at the heart of Melville's text rather than to the text itself. Bartleby has arguably become the avatar for leftist political resistance—to both market *and* state—in recent years. I refer here to the dual phenomena of political theorists like Agamben, Hardt and Negri and Žižek invoking Bartleby as a figure for a radical politics, and Occupy Wall Street's adoption of Bartleby (the original "occupier") as an unofficial mascot.[3] Indeed, these phenomena are not unrelated, since the event known as "Occupy Wall Street" cannot be separated from its various interpretations—which is to say on the one hand that the question of what it meant is at least as important as the question of what it did, and on the other that, as the Occupy movement continues to evolve, the question of what it does seems increasingly to reflect an account of what it means supplied in part by Hardt and Negri and Žižek.

I begin with the literary-critical argument, however. To put that argument in its bluntest possible form, while Thoreau resists the state in the name of the market, Bartleby resists the market in the name of the state. More precisely, the society Thoreau describes and to which his resistance is directed is imagined very differently from the society described in "Bartleby": the former is a society dominated by the state, the latter is a society dominated by the market. One implication of this interpretation is that it becomes problematic to describe Bartleby's resistance as civil disobedience. This is not only because his resistance is directed at a private employer rather than at the state. I want to suggest that, in the market-dominated social world described in "Bartleby," the notion of political resistance, and perhaps even of the "political" itself, starts to look tenuous. For Thoreau, political resistance does at least have a clear object—the state—and a clear justification—the individual's sovereign authority. Somewhat paradoxically, then, imprisonment in the Concord jail for Thoreau does not represent a curtailment of his liberty, but its more perfect realization: "The proper place to-day, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for her freer and less desponding spirits, is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have already put themselves out by their principles."[4] To stand inside the prison, for Thoreau, is to stand outside the state. The market world Bartleby inhabits, on the other hand, is one in which preferences rather than principles are what matter; thus Bartleby resists by mobilizing the language—the only available one—of preference to subvert that world from the inside. Ultimately, I will argue, this subversion is motivated by a desire for the kind of society (one with a strong state) that Thoreau assumes already exists—a society that, in "Bartleby," is represented by the prison itself.

What I mean by a "strong state" here is what we might call an interventionist state, a concept that only makes sense if one assumes the existence of a discrete realm of reality in which the state can intervene. Michel Foucault situates the emergence of *laissez-faire* liberalism within the history of what he calls governmentality: the attempt to coordinate state power, the economic management of the population, and individual self-discipline as elements of a total "art of government."[5] According to Foucault, *laissez-faire* emerged as a reaction to the philosophy of *raison d'état*, which assumed that the scope of governmental intervention in the life of the population was essentially unlimited, and therefore required the development of ever more intricate and intimate mechanisms of administrative and police power. Liberal political economy's answer to this progressive expansion of state power was to define a zone that was off-limits—both in a descriptive and normative sense—to the state: namely, the market.[6]

It is a striking but often overlooked fact that, running through Thoreau's "Resistance to Civil Government"—which many would consider to be the most comprehensive and direct statement of his political principles—is a defense of economic liberalism. Perhaps this is due

to the ironic tone of Thoreau's references to free trade; it is important to note, however, that the irony is not directed at the idea of *laissez-faire* as such, but rather at the fact that *laissez-faire* does not go far enough. On the other hand, the essay contains several unambiguous statements of Thoreau's commitment to this philosophy: there is perhaps a hint of hyperbole but no irony in the statement that government is "at best but an expedient," but is at its "most expedient" when "the governed are most let alone by it." [7]

Yet, at the same time, it seems difficult to square this Thoreau with the Thoreau of Walden, the Thoreau who coins aphorisms like "the thoughtful man becomes a hermit in the thoroughfares of the marketplace" [8]—the Thoreau, in short, who sounds a lot like Bartleby, retiring to his "hermitage" to escape the corruptions of Wall Street. Certainly, one could attribute the difficulty of pinning down Thoreau's political views to the author's semantic playfulness, a characteristic that has attracted interest and praise from post-structuralist critics in the past few decades. I want to suggest, however, that this ambiguity is not simply amorphousness but has a determinate structure, and moreover, that this is also true of Melville's tale, which has been similarly celebrated in post-structuralist circles for its apparent refusal of meaning. In Thoreau's case, the ambiguity results from what might be described as a critique of capitalism as a mode of production, combined inextricably with an affirmation of its legitimating ideology. In Melville's case, the ambiguity results from the question of what, exactly, Bartleby is resisting. Economic criticism of the text has tended to go in two directions: either Bartleby is an alienated worker taking a stand against oppression, or he is, as Gillian Brown puts it, an agoraphobic, in the literal meaning of the term as "fear of the marketplace." [9] These two alternatives might not look like alternatives at all, and indeed, some critics (like Michael Gilmore) have elided the distinction between the two, treating resistance to capitalism and resistance to the market as essentially equivalent. [10] I want to suggest, however, that firstly, they are not equivalent, and secondly, with regard to Melville's story, both readings are right, but they can't both be right at the same time. The ambiguity of "Bartleby," in fact, has the same structure as that of Thoreau's work: it derives from the gap—what Žižek would call the "parallax view"—between the point of view of labor and the point of view of the commodity, between production and "the market" ("the market" being an ideological formation within capitalism, the story that capitalism tells itself about itself).

This "parallax gap" is inscribed in the very structure of a story Melville penned shortly after "Bartleby." Consisting of two juxtaposed sketches, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" contrasts the life of leisure and refinement enjoyed by lawyers in London's Temple Bar with the body- and soul-destroying drudgery endured by female workers in a New England paper mill. The narrator intuits some connection—an "inverted similitude"—between the two scenes, but struggles to reconcile them: "Though the two

objects did by no means completely correspond, yet this partial inadequacy but served to tinge the similitude not less with the vividness than the disorder of a dream."[11] The bipartite structure of the tale itself (as well as its title, which suggests that no "marriage" of the sketches' imaginative visions is possible) emphasizes this irreconcilability. It is important to note, however, that the irreconcilability does not arise simply from the contrast between wealth and poverty, or even between capital and labor: the relationship between the lawyers and mill workers is not one of capitalist and worker. Indeed, the lawyers in the first sketch are depicted primarily as consumers, insofar as they are depicted as agents at all; anticipating Marx's description of the commodity-form in Capital, Melville endows the commodities the lawyers consume with a life of their own (the various courses of the dinner the narrator attends are imagined as military maneuvers, with the proffered delicacies—rather than the would-be "Knights Templars"—acting as the troops). Ultimately, then, the narrator's—and Melville's—difficulty in reconciling the two scenes stems not from the social division between labor and capital as such, but, once again, from the gap (a kind of blind spot) between the point of view of production and the point of view of the market. Appropriately, the commodity that the mill workers produce and that the lawyers consume, which therefore provides a tenuous link between the two sketches, is blank paper.

Similarly, to view Bartleby simply as a victim of capitalist exploitation is to diminish the structural ambiguity at the heart of Melville's story of Wall Street. To be sure, Melville invites such a reading—not only, as numerous critics have suggested, in his depiction of the lawyer's rationalization of capitalist social relations, but also in subtle references to the contemporaneous critique of "wage slavery" originating from Jacksonian Democrats, labor activists and Southern defenders of the (supposedly more humane) institution of chattel slavery.[12] The ambiguous socio-economic position of the white Northern wage worker is signaled by the office's location between two walls, one the "white wall of the interior of a spacious sky-light shaft," the other "black by age and everlasting shade";[13] other allusions to slavery are the narrator's reference to prosperous crowds "sailing down the Mississippi of Broadway" and his description of Bartleby as a "bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic."[14] And while a scrivener is not the most obvious choice as a representative of "wage slavery," adherents of the Bartleby-as-exploited-worker thesis point out that the nature of his work—monotonous, non-creative, even potentially injurious—provides as much cause for discontent as any factory job.[15]

To make Bartleby a representative of "labor" in general, however, is to miss the importance of Bartleby's status as not only a white but a *white-collar* employee. Structurally, Bartleby is a member of the proletariat, but culturally, he might be regarded as a representative neither of labor or capital but of an emergent "middle class": a term that was just beginning to come

into popular usage around the time of Bartleby's publication.[16] Though Melville does not use the term, it is striking that it seems to have entered the cultural lexicon at almost the same moment as the discourse of class antagonism exemplified by the protests against wage slavery (which, despite their too-easy conflation of wage labor and chattel slavery, were often quite sophisticated in their analysis of the relation between labor and capital). One might say that, as economic inequality and, with it, class antagonism became more apparent in the Northern states, the appeal of the idea of the middle class was that it redescribed class as merely a differential (rather than an antagonistic) relation, thus segregating its "economic" from its "political" content. Furthermore, as Stuart Blumin notes, the slipperiness of the notion of the middle class (and thus the difficulty it presents for historians who, like Blumin himself, attempt to investigate its existence) stems from the fact that what gives the "class" its unity is as much a set of cultural values as a socio-economic position, and, moreover, that those values include an attachment to an atomistic worldview that precludes the very notion of class.[17]

Viewed from this perspective—which is to say, from the perspective of the parallax view that separates the structural notion of class from its self-negation as a culture of individual enterprise—Bartleby's occupation seems far from accidental. The tale begins with the narrator expressing a literary interest in Bartleby's professional demographic, "an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom as yet nothing that I know of has ever been written:—I mean the law-copyists or scriveners."[18] Bartleby is essentially a clerk, and as several historians have recently noted, clerks played a unique social and economic role in the "market revolution" of the nineteenth-century US.[19] As Michael Zakim puts it: "it was the clerk who effectively administered all the new markets in the new market society."[20] The description is certainly appropriate to Bartleby's occupation: though the title of *legal* clerk might suggest a non-commercial function, it is clear that the lawyer's (and by extension, Bartleby's) "business" as a "conveyancer and title hunter" consists precisely in the circulation of property.[21] Furthermore, as Zakim notes, clerks not only administered, but *embodied* this circulation: the desire for social mobility that characterized these ambitious young men meant that "[their] very impermanence mimicked the perpetuum mobile of the commodity exchange they had come to the city to administer."[22] Clerks recognized that the most valuable commodity they could trade in the marketplace (their labor) resided in themselves—was, in fact, inseparable from the self. They therefore subscribed to an ethos of self-determination and self-perfection exemplified in the popular literature directed toward enterprising young men: a genre that included such edifying guides to moral conduct as Franklin's autobiography and Henry Ward Beecher's *Lectures to Young Men*, as well as more functional guides to business success such as *Hints to Young Tradesmen, and Maxims for Merchants*.[23] The personal diaries of clerks from the period display a similar concern with this project of self-cultivation in the

name of social and economic advancement: the young men whose diaries are the subject of Thomas Augst's *The Clerk's Tale* "accounted for their personal experience as a kind of capital, a means of owning the self in a fluid social world." [24]

These texts present a vision of the self with which Thoreau, of course, might very well have sympathized. While condemning the accumulation of property as a threat to political virtue (and as an unstable possession, liable to seizure by the state), Thoreau praises property in self as the basis of moral economy: "You must live within yourself, and depend upon yourself, always tucked up and ready for a start, and not have many affairs." [25] Bartleby's self-reliance is of a rather different nature, however. Social mobility was the watchword of the ambitious clerk: as one clerk put it, "there is no such thing as a stationary point in human endeavor." [26] Bartleby is the antithesis of this entrepreneurial ethos. In a social world that places a premium on mobility and impermanence—on "*extra vagance*" (sic), to use one of Thoreau's favored expressions [27]—and as a member of a professional class that, more than any other, embodies those values, Bartleby is resolutely stationary.

This, of course, makes his arrest for vagrancy doubly ironic. And not incidentally, this is the point at which the state inserts itself into the narrative economy of Bartleby. As I have suggested, Melville would not have had to search hard for anti-capitalist arguments. [28] As I have also suggested, however, Bartleby's resistance takes the form not of a protest against the injustices of capitalism but of a withdrawal from the instabilities of the market. If resistance to capitalism and resistance to the market are not the same thing, where, then, could Melville find a model of the latter? My suggestion is that he found this model in the prison reform literature of the period.

As historian David Rothman has demonstrated, this reformist discourse was largely motivated by anxieties about the shift away from a stable, hierarchical social order to a society characterized by fluid social and economic relations. The emergence of the "institution" (the penitentiary, the almshouse, the asylum and so forth) can therefore be understood as a response to the instabilities of a market-driven society—instabilities that were regarded as producing various forms of "deviancy," including crime, pauperism and insanity. The institution was imagined as an artificial environment that would serve both to reform its inmates by insulating them from the dangers and allurements of the world outside its walls and to provide a kind of model of ideal social organization. Nostalgic for the social stability of the colonial past, but adopting distinctly "modern" disciplinary methods borrowed from the military barracks and the factory, the designers of the nineteenth-century institution of reform aimed to reconstitute "a social order in which men knew their place." [29]

Central to the program of penal reform was the idea that inmates had to be isolated from pernicious influences originating both inside and outside the prison walls. Thus prisons like New York State's Sing-Sing were constructed with separate cells for each prisoner, while inmates' contact with friends and family members was severely limited.[30] As one Sing-Sing chaplain put it, "[t]he prisoner was taught to consider himself dead to all without the prison walls," while the warden assured new arrivals that they were to be "literally buried from the world."[31] Despite its nickname, the Tombs (the New York City prison where Bartleby is confined), as Melville was no doubt aware, was quite unlike Sing-Sing in this regard: the prison was well known for its overcrowded cells, frequent escapes, and generally lax discipline.[32] For penal reformers, therefore, the Tombs was an example of the deficiencies of the prison system rather than a model institution: Dorothea Dix described it as "that most corrupting city-prison…where hundreds congregate, and communicate and receive evil influences continually."[33] Certainly, Melville's depiction of the Tombs is hardly suggestive of the quasi-militaristic discipline characteristic of Sing-Sing, but neither is it the mob scene portrayed by Dix. Rather, the narrator encounters Bartleby in a setting characterized by silence and isolation, and sealed off from the world outside its walls: "The yard was entirely quiet. It was not accessible to the common prisoners. The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them."[34] Melville's Tombs, so it would appear, does indeed live up to its sobriquet (even before Bartleby's death makes the name a literal description).

For Bartleby, then, imprisonment represents a welcome respite from the perpetual motion of the market (in prison, immobility is a virtue). Here Bartleby knows where he stands: "I know where I am," he tells the lawyer.[35] In this respect, however, it is necessary to distinguish Bartleby, the character, from "Bartleby," the text, which reveals the former's optimism to be naïve. His naïveté is exposed with the appearance of the entrepreneurial "grub-man," who makes a profit by providing superior fare to those prisoners whose friends can afford to pay for it. Even the sanctified space of the prison, it would appear, cannot escape the contagion of market forces (an impression reinforced by the pun in the grub-man's observation that the infamous criminal Monroe Edwards "died of consumption at Sing-Sing"[36]). Melville's point is borne out historically not only by the fact that (as Rothman notes) such abuses did indeed take place in even the most advanced nineteenth-century prisons, but also, in a more recent context, by the increasing privatization of prisons and their re-conception as profit-making ventures. From this perspective, we could say that, while Bartleby looks forward—optimistically—to the invention of the "providential" state, "Bartleby" looks forward—pessimistically—to the advent of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism reverses the relationship of state and market that mid-nineteenth century prison reformers imagined and that would eventually take shape in progressivist and welfare state versions of

interventionism: as Foucault puts it, neoliberalism envisions "a state under the supervision of the market rather than a market supervised by the state." [37]

Thoreau, on the other hand, anticipates another central aspect of the neoliberal worldview. Something like Thoreau's vision of the self-governing individual is a necessary supplement to the diminished role of government that neoliberals imagine. As Foucault notes, US neoliberalism challenged conventional economic analyses (both Smith's and Marx's) of labor with its redescription of the worker in terms of "human capital." The nineteenth-century perception of labor as a form of saleable "property" was given a new twist: this property was redescribed as a form of capital, defined as "everything that in one way or another can be a source of future income." As labor is redescribed as a form of capital, the laborer is redescribed as an investor. As Foucault summarizes, "from the worker's point of view [these economists argue,] labor comprises a capital, that is to say, it is an ability, a skill…it is a 'machine.'" [38] Neoliberalism regards the individual's life as a "permanent and multiple enterprise" in which the individual acts as "entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings." [39]

In this sense, neoliberal principles resonate with the ambitions of nineteenth-century clerks, as well as with Thoreau's transcendental individualism. Thoreau may have criticized the conversion of the "laboring man" into a "machine," [40] but the force of the criticism depends on his definition of the "laboring man" as one who labors for others (whether employers or customers) rather than one who labors *on* himself, *for* himself. As Zakim puts it, "[For Thoreau,] man himself would be the end—and no longer just the means—of labor. The modern production project, that is to say, would be devoted to producing one's self, which now accordingly became the most important form of property in a liberal regime, namely, property in oneself, or self-possession." [41] For Thoreau, then, as for the neoliberal theorists of human capital, the art of government is primarily an art of self-government: the most efficient political economy is ultimately an "economy of living," [42] an economy of the self.

At the same time, however, the notion of "resistance to civil government" becomes problematic with the advent of neoliberalism. For, when the neoliberal state has been absorbed by the market, how is it possible to resist it? Or, to put the question in a simpler form, how does one "resist" the market (essentially, the question posed by "Bartleby")? Neoliberalism, of course, has no interest in answering this question; its account of political resistance is not resistance to the market, but resistance in the market. In other words, resistance itself essentially becomes privatized, as political principles find their primary expression in market preferences. Concerned about the environment? Buy a hybrid car. Don't approve of NAFTA? Buy your t-shirts at American Apparel. This logic of privatization

also extends to governmental policy itself: take, for example, the recent healthcare reforms (Obamacare, formerly Romneycare), which seek to guarantee "universal healthcare" by requiring individuals to purchase their own health insurance. The implication is that principles—in this case, that the state should guarantee universal healthcare—can only be converted into effective policies by being redescribed as preferences: the redistribution of responsibility from the state to the individual this "redescription" entails is obvious enough.[43] The management of what Jacques Donzelot calls "social risk" is imagined not as the province of the providential state but of the individual: governmental policy becomes a policy of self-government.[44] In the age of neoliberalism, then, both the functions of government and acts of political resistance (which perhaps can no longer be plausibly described as acts of resistance to "the government") are increasingly privatized. Bartleby sought to express a principled opposition to the market in the form of a statement of preference, but his resistance remains a "dead letter" because to convert principles into preferences is merely to mirror the action of the market itself. Ultimately, then, rather than imagining the state as an effective mechanism of resistance to the market, "Bartleby" dramatizes the pervasiveness of the market (or properly speaking, market ideology), its ability to absorb resistance into itself.

Regarded in this light, Bartleby's current vogue among anti-capitalist activists and theorists should be regarded as peculiar, but also telling. Beyond the minor ironies of Bartleby becoming a countercultural "brand" (one OWS participant's blog describes her joy at finding a shopping bag emblazoned with the slogan "I would prefer not to"), the invocations of Bartleby as a figure for resistance to capitalist hegemony on the part of left intellectuals like Hardt and Negri and Žižek also fail to supply a convincing alternative to market ideology. Hardt and Negri's reference to Bartleby (itself heavily influenced by Agamben's account of Melville's tale) as a figure for ontological resistance to Empire is particularly relevant here in the sense that—like Bartleby himself—it produces a model of resistance that ultimately only mirrors what it seeks to resist. This is not, of course, an oversight on Hardt and Negri's part: the claim that the potential resistance of the multitude is embedded within Empire, that the former inevitably reflects the "network" form of the latter, is central to their argument. Nevertheless—viewed in reverse, as it were—Hardt and Negri's critique of Empire could be regarded as reproducing the ideological assumptions that authorize capitalist hegemony. This is not merely to say that "networks" of various kinds that might appear to be outside of or even opposed to the "system" of capitalist exploitation are always susceptible to co-optation: a point that Hardt and Negri would undoubtedly concede. It is, rather, to say that the concept of the network itself—as a way of conceiving both power and liberation from power—is merely an extension of market ideology (thus the proliferation of economic analyses and business manuals testifying to what Yochai Benkler calls "the wealth of networks").[45] What the network structure—like the market structure—conceals is class antagonism.

Marx, of course, formulated class antagonism as a binary opposition of bourgeoisie and proletariat: an over-simplification no doubt (even in the mid-nineteenth century), but nonetheless a necessary one. It is in this spirit that we should defend Occupy Wall Street's slogan "we are the 99%" against the conventional criticism that it reveals the movement's lack of a coherent agenda. Certainly, the various individuals and factions that stand as representatives of "the 99%" have diverse political agendas and different socio-economic positions. Yet this is precisely why the slogan represents something of a triumph—albeit a rather modest one from a Marxist standpoint—as a rallying cry for class antagonism. Lack of a uniform political "subjectivity" (a term which I borrow from Hardt and Negri with reluctance, since it implies a necessary relation between socio-economic position and political belief) need not preclude a coherent political message. Moreover, when protestors hold up graphs demonstrating the indisputable fact that the household income of the top 1% has risen out of all proportion with that of the rest of the US population, it hardly seems fair to accuse them of a lack of rhetorical specificity.[46]

For critics like Hardt and Negri, on the other hand, the lack of coherence which skeptics on the left and opponents on the right deride as a weakness of the Occupy movement should be celebrated as its strength. This is precisely because, for these thinkers, the form of protest is more significant than its content: what matters is not the movement's political message or agenda but its "horizontal network structure."[47] Unsurprisingly, then, Hardt and Negri claim that Occupy Wall Street has "deep roots in the globalization protest movements that stretched at least from Seattle in 1999 to Genoa in 2001."[48] And indeed, their celebration of the Seattle protests in *Multitude* emphasizes, again, the form or structure of the movement as its unifying element ("Social forums, affinity groups, and other forms of democratic decision-making are the basis of the movements") while insisting that the importance of this network structure is that it preserves rather than "subordinates or sets aside [the protestors'] differences."[49] It is this commitment to preserving difference that ultimately reveals the limitations of the network structure as a way of conceiving liberatory class struggle, however: a point that becomes clearer if we return to the theorists' account of Bartleby.

Following Agamben, Hardt and Negri invoke Bartleby as a figure of pure potentiality rather than positive ontology: as Žižek puts it, "for HN, Bartleby's 'I would prefer not to' is interpreted as merely the first move of, as it were, clearing the table, of acquiring a distance toward the existing social universe; what is then needed is a move toward the painstaking work of constructing a new community."[50] Again, however, we could read (and indeed, given the internal logic of Hardt and Negri's work, its constant movement away from "constituted" reality and toward ontological possibility—*should* read) this process in reverse. Bartleby's gesture is not the beginning but the endpoint of a politics of pure refusal, the point at

which difference cancels itself out in the general ontology of "being against." It is important to note, however, that this canceling out of difference is quite distinct from that which is entailed by the concept of the proletariat, which, as Lukács points out, is "totalizing" not in the sense that it reduces its various elements to "an undifferentiated uniformity" but in the sense that it provides the perspective from which to understand the relations between those elements—that is, the perspective of a central, organizing antagonism.[51] Hardt and Negri's concept of the "multitude", on the other hand, can actively seek to preserve rather than merely explain difference, precisely because all differences are equal in the "horizontal" structure of the network: the determinate differences among the multitude resolve themselves into Bartleby's indifferent refusal.

This is the point at which Hardt and Negri's and Žižek's ostensibly divergent accounts of "Bartleby" overlap. Žižek's criticism of the former is that, in imagining Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" as merely a preparatory stage in the work of social reconstruction, Hardt and Negri remain committed to "the politics of 'resistance' or 'protestation,' which parasitizes upon what it negates."[52] This criticism is justified to the extent that, as I have suggested, Hardt and Negri's celebration of the "network" as the site of resistance not only borrows its conceptual apparatus from market ideology but also empties the notion of resistance of any substantive content. Indeed, the Occupy movement's latest incarnation as Occupy Sandy, admirable and necessary though its work may be, testifies to the extent to which the movement itself has taken this account of its "real significance"—as an organizational structure rather than as the bearer of an alternative ideology—to heart (one must assume that this is a thoroughly regretful transformation from the point of view of Žižek, for whom "humanitarian" organizations, by definition, fail to pose a challenge to the capitalist world order). Yet Žižek's own reading of "Bartleby"—and his answer to Hardt and Negri—takes us even further in the direction of ontological (in)difference and thus away from the "concrete demands" that would supposedly undermine the authenticity of the protest: "[Bartleby's] refusal is not so much the refusal of a determinate content as, rather, the formal gesture of refusal as such…There is no violent *quality* in it; the violence pertains to its very immobile, inert, insistent, impassive *being*."[53]

The charge that Occupy Wall Street lacked a coherent political message is ultimately less convincing than the charge that it lacked a strategy for converting that political message into a practical program, either by constituting a new party or by exerting its influence in the existing party structure. Again, from the point of view of both Hardt and Negri and Žižek, this could only be a good thing: any attempt to work within existing democratic mechanisms would be a capitulation to the hegemonic capitalist order and thus a betrayal of the movement's revolutionary potential. In response to Žižek's claim that "[t]he difficulty of imagining the

New is the difficulty of imagining Bartleby in power,"[54] however, one should object on both literary-critical and political grounds: the basis of the objection in either case is the omission of an account of the state as a potential organ of resistance to capital.

In the tradition of the "what if?" school of criticism to which "Bartleby" seems to have given rise (What if Bartleby were a woman? An anorexic? A factory worker?), one could say that Bartleby is not a radical, but *if he were*, his radicalism would be exercised through the state. From this point of view, both Hardt and Negri and Žižek's account of the tale are simply more theoretically sophisticated versions of the literary critical arguments that make Bartleby a Thoreauvian figure resisting "the system" (an argument that, as I have argued, misrepresents the nature of the resistance in either case). In fact, Bartleby's commitment to the state means that he is not so much anti-capitalist as anti-neoliberal. And in this respect, he is the antithesis of Thoreau.

Of course, it seems rather absurd to approach neoliberal ideology through the prism of two mid-nineteenth century texts. My aim has been to suggest, however, that these texts, written at the moment of the "market revolution," do in fact help us to understand the ideological bases of neoliberalism, precisely by expressing—and in Melville's case, exploiting—the gap I referred to earlier, between the point of view of the market (which reaches its apotheosis in neoliberalism) and the point of view of labor. These alternatives also entail different models of governmentality, and different conceptions of the role of the state. Depending on how one looks at the tale, Bartleby is either a reluctant entrepreneur or a proletarian activist; he either successfully refuses to be commodified or is crushed by the capitalist machine; either the prison represents a respite from the thoroughfares of the marketplace or its walls are merely an extension of Wall Street. In Melville's text, in fact, either conclusion turns out to be pessimistic—even Bartleby's success turns out to be illusory. Nevertheless, if history proved Melville right in one sense, it proved him wrong in another. The reformist state that became the progressive state that became the welfare state did, in fact, seek to redress not only the instabilities but the inequities of capitalism. That is to say, it recognized the gap between the viewpoint of the market and the viewpoint of labor. Neoliberalism, by contrast, seeks to assimilate the latter to the former. Its commitment to the self-governing individual becomes, at the same time, a commitment to ignoring structural economic inequality altogether.

It would be grossly unfair to accuse either Hardt and Negri or Žižek of sharing this commitment. What one can say, however, is that, in eliding the possibility that the state could operate (and has operated) as a site of resistance to capitalist hegemony, they sacrifice an important theoretical challenge to neoliberal ideology. What they sacrifice at the level of political practice, meanwhile, might best be summarized in Žižek's own words. In the same text in which he invokes Bartleby's absolute refusal as the necessary form of contemporary

political protest, Žižek criticizes Simon Critchley for the claim that "politics has to be conceived at a *distance* from the state," at a local, "situational" level.[55] Žižek responds, "is not Critchley's position one of relying on the fact that *someone else* will take on the task of running the state machinery, enabling us to engage in critical distance toward the state?"[56] Increasingly, that "someone else" is represented by neoliberal leaders whose policies continue to serve the interests of capital and to intensify the exploitation of labor. It is important to note, furthermore, that these leaders typically portray themselves as pragmatic "realists" devoid of ideology. In this respect, the task of political theory is precisely to refuse "critical distance"—to take the disavowed ideology seriously, if only in order to contest it.

NOTES

1. Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street," in *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces 1839-1860*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall, G. Thomas Tanselle and others, vol. 9, *The Writings of Herman Melville* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press and the Newberry Library, 1987), 23.

2. Egbert S. Oliver, "A Second Look at 'Bartleby,'" *College English* 6, no. 8 (1945): 431-39; Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1983; Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), 187-208; Brook Thomas, *Cross-Examinations of Law and Literature: Cooper, Hawthorne, Stowe and Melville* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 164-82.

3. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998), 48; Agamben, "Bartleby, or On Contingency," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999), 243-71; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000), 203-4; Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 381-85. On Bartleby and OWS, see Jonathan D. Greenberg, "Occupy Wall Street's Debt to Melville," *The Atlantic*, April 30, 2012, http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/04/occupy-wall-streets-debt-to-melville/256482/; Lauren Klein, "What Bartleby Can Teach Us About Occupy Wall Street," Arcade, http://arcade.stanford.edu/what-bartleby-can-teach-us-about-occupy-wall-street.

4. Henry D. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," in *Reform Papers*, ed. Wendell Glick (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), 76.

5. Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), 87-104.

6. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-79*, trans. Graham Burchell (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1-50.

7. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," 63-64.

8. Henry D. Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown," in *Reform Papers*, 121 (see note 4).

9. Gillian Brown, "The Empire of Agoraphobia," *Representations* 20 (Fall 1987): 134-57. Versions of the Bartleby-as-exploited-worker thesis include the following: Louise K. Barnett, "Bartleby as Alienated Worker," *Studies in Short Fiction* 11 (Fall 1974): 379-85; Barbara Foley, "From Wall Street to Astor Place: Historicizing Melville's 'Bartleby,'" *American Literature* 72, no. 1 (2000): 87-116; David Kuebrich, "Melville's Doctrine of Assumptions: The Hidden Ideology of Capitalist Production in 'Bartleby,'" *The New England Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (1996): 381-405.

10. Michael Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), 132-45.

11. Herman Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," in *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces 1839-1860*, 327, 326 (see note 1).

12. Eric Foner provides a useful overview of the debates around "wage slavery" in the preface to the second edition of his *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1995).

13. Melville, "Bartleby," 14.

14. Ibid., 28, 32.

15. The strongest version of this claim is made by Robin West, who contends that at least two work-related physical injuries are referenced in the text. "Invisible Victims: A Comparison of Susan Glaspell's 'Jury of Her Peers,' and Herman Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener,'" *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 8, no. 1 (1996): 215-16.

16. Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 240-49.

17. Ibid., 1-16.

18. Melville, "Bartleby," 13.

19. See Thomas Augst, T*he Clerk's Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003); Brian P. Luskey, *On the Make: Clerks and the Quest for Capital in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: NYU Press, 2010); Michael Zakim, "The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary; or, a Labor History of the Nonproducing Classes," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26 (Winter 2006): 563-603. I borrow the term "the market revolution" from historian Charles Sellers's book of the same name.

20. Zakim, "Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary," 567.

21. Melville, "Bartleby," 19.

22. Zakim, "Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary," 568.

23. Ibid., 565-67.

24. Augst, The Clerk's Tale, 10.

25. Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government," 78.

26. Edward Tailer, diary entry, Jan 1, 1850, New-York Historical Society, quoted in Augst, *The Clerk's Tale*, 52.

27. Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), 324.

28. Both Barbara Foley and David Kuebrich (see note 9) make a convincing case that Melville would have been aware of both the actions and the class-conscious rhetoric of the radical labor movement in New York.

29. David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 108.

30. Ibid., 94-99.

31. Quoted in Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 95.

32. See Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "'America's Greatest Criminal Barracks': The Tombs and the Experience of Criminal Justice in New York City, 1838-1897," *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 5 (2003): 525-54.

33. Dorothea Dix, *Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States* (1845; repr., Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1967), 16.

34. Melville, "Bartleby," 44.

35. Ibid., 43.

36. Ibid., 44.

37. Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 116.

38. Ibid., 224.

39. Ibid., 241, 226 (brackets original to translation).

40. Thoreau, *Walden*, 6.

41. Zakim, "Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary," 597.

42. Thoreau, *Walden*, 52.

43. Of course, the most vocal criticism of Obamacare has come from the right. Ironically, however, the right's defense of the "free market" against "big government" in this instance could equally be described as opposition to the market—or, more precisely, of the attempt to make governmental policy conform to the logic of the market. This illustrates the extent to which the rhetoric of *laissez-faire* liberalism fails to adequately capture the political realities of neoliberalism. By the same token, it illustrates one way in which Thoreau's liberal conception of the relationship between self-government and civil government differs significantly from neoliberalism's. For if the liberal state was supposed to simply leave you to pursue your own economic interests, part of the function of the neoliberal state is to tell you what those interests are (or should be): neoliberal policy privileges individual choice, while at the same time acting to produce "rational" market behavior (see Foucault, Birth of Biopolitics, 270). In a more Melvillian register, one might say that neoliberalism respects your preferences, but not your right to "prefer not to" (if that means opting out of the market altogether).

44. Jacques Donzelot, "Pleasure in Work," trans. Colin Gordon, in *The Foucault Effect*, 270 (see note 5).

45. Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2006).

46. "The 99%" therefore expresses a different kind of generality than "the middle class," which is apparently the only admissible reference to class in mainstream US political discourse. Indeed, Rick Santorum missed the point when he criticized Mitt Romney for using this allegedly "divisive" term, since, as I have suggested, the point of the term is precisely to reimagine class as a differential rather than an antagonistic relation. In contemporary discourse, moreover, even this economic difference is minimized by the near-universal application of the term, which implies that there is no class outside the middle class (hence really poor people can only be described as an "underclass"—a term that typically carries the whiff of an accusation of social deviance). Underpinning this notion of a middle class that we (can or do) all belong to is the

entrepreneurial ethos that shapes the worldview of the neoliberal economist no less than it shaped the ambitions of nineteenth-century clerks.

47. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "The Fight for 'Real Democracy' at the Heart of Occupy Wall Street," *Foreign Affairs*, October 11, 2011, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/136399/michael-hardt-and-antonio-negri/the-fight-for-real-democracy-at-the-heart-of-occupy-wall-street#.

48. Ibid.

49. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 86, 217.

50. Žižek, Parallax View, 382.

51. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 12. Lukács also points out the irrelevance of the criticism that Marx's division of society into capitalists and workers is descriptively inaccurate or over-simplistic: "The critics completely overlooked the fact that Marx posited this society for the sake of argument, i.e., to see the problem more clearly, before pressing forward to the larger question of the place of this problem within society as a whole" (ibid., 31).

52. Žižek, Parallax View, 381.

53. Ibid., 384-85. Of OWS, Žižek writes, "What should be resisted at this stage is any hasty translation of the energy of the protest into a set of concrete demands." Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London: Verso, 2012), 82.

54. Žižek, Parallax View, 382.

55. Simon Critchley, "The Problem of Hegemony," *Political Theory Daily Review*, http://www.politicaltheory.info/essays/critchley.htm.

56. Žižek, Parallax View, 333.

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FEATURES

THE ANTI-DICTIONARY: FERREIRA GULLAR'S NON-OBJECT POEMS

MARIOLA V. ALVAREZ

"*os artistas neoconcretos preferem mergulhar na natural ambigüidade do mundo para descobrir, nele, pela experiência direta, novas significações.*"

"the Neoconcrete artists prefer to plunge themselves into the world's natural ambiguity to discover new meanings within it through direct experience." –Ferreira Gullar [1]

The words of Ferreira Gullar precede his reputation. As a writer, Gullar's work emerges from the fields of poetry, theory, criticism, history, and journalism. A member of the Brazilian art and poetry movement Neoconcretism, Gullar served as its main theorist and champion, establishing the discursive frame of the group in two central texts, "The Neoconcrete Manifesto" and "Theory of the Non-Object," both from 1959. These writings conceptualized the group as working in the interstices between disciplines and positioned their production in relation to the history of European avant-garde art. The Neoconcrete group included originally three poets, Gullar, Reynaldo Jardim, and Theon Spanúdis; two

sculptors, Amilcar de Castro and Franz Weissmann; a painter, Lygia Clark; and an engraver, Lygia Pape.[2] Connected by an "affinity" of interests and ideas rather than a single medium, all the Neoconcretists experimented radically to overturn traditional categories of art and collaborated to challenge existing divides between high and low culture, or between fields such as fine art and dance. Gullar's own work in particular played with the limits of image and text. In this essay I examine Gullar's hybrid artistic production, specifically his poem-sculptures, *Poemas espaciais* (*Spatial Poems*) from 1959 and *Poema enterrado* (*Buried Poem*) from 1960. Given Gullar's diverse interests, disciplinary limits have divided the reception of his work, and within the literature on Neoconcretism he is most often situated only as a critic rather than a poet, artist, *and* critic. As a result, this period when he worked at the intersection of poetry and art remains unexamined. With this consideration of Gullar as a poet and an artist, I draw attention to the fact that Neoconcretism emerged from a debate about Brazilian poetry, and therefore to the significance of poetry to any understanding of the movement.[3]

Gullar pointed to the fact that his theoretical writings and conception of Neoconcretism as an interdisciplinary movement responded to the activities of the group rather than vice versa when he wrote, "My theories would never have hatched had it not been for the work produced by my fellow group members."[4] In other words, theory followed practice. For example, it is well known that "Theory of the Non-Object" was composed after his encounter with a work by Lygia Clark, and as a response to the trajectory of her art as it shifted from painting to sculpture, or more accurately to a category no longer described by those mediums—*the non-object*. Scholars agree that Gullar's preoccupation in "Theory of the Non-Object" was with the historical evolution of modern art to overcome the function and inherent meanings of the frame for painting and the base for sculpture.[5] I argue in this essay how Gullar also defined Neoconcretism through the text-based non-object, or Neoconcretism as a plastic art *and* poetry movement. Moreover I point to how *Spatial Poems* and *Buried Poem* engaged with a philosophy of language, drawing from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of phenomenology, and thus how our notion of the non-object includes the "verbal."[6]

In "Theory of the Non-Object," published in the Sunday Supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil* on December 19-20, 1959, Gullar wove together his version of the history of European avant-garde art, with references to Cubism and Russian constructivism, and his views on contemporary art, like Tachisme and Neoconcretism.[7] The Rio de Janeiro-based newspaper and supplement served as the main vehicles for publishing and publicizing Neoconcrete works and texts. In the simplest terms, according to Gullar, the non-object is "not an anti-

object"; rather, it names artworks "for which the designations painting or sculpture perhaps no longer fit" and it lies outside "the realm of use or verbal designation." [8]

Modern art, exemplified by Neoconcretism, had developed beyond traditional fixed categories and, as a result, encroached on the divisions between mediums. Gullar's conceptualization of this historical shift argued for Neoconcrete art as leading a revolution in modern art begun by the European avant-garde, and significantly, positioned Brazilian art as the rightful inheritor of the mantle of "Modern Art." Consequently he excised the art of the New York School from that historical narrative, especially the theories of Clement Greenberg who called for medium-specificity. He also separated the non-object from the legacy of the Duchampian readymade, wherein the artist took an object from its former context and reinserted it into an art context. Gullar believed the readymade derived "its meaning and relations" from "use and routine." He went on to write, "Soon that obscurity so characteristic of the thing would snatch the artwork back into the world of common things." The non-object, in contrast to "common things," achieves transcendence through its form. Meaning and form synthesize together whereas the readymade or artworks, which bring the found object into the frame of art, as in Tachist paintings, cannot escape the meaning ascribed *a priori* to the found object or form in the world. The non-object, on the other hand, creates meaning from within its form; "it bursts from the inside out, from non-meaning toward meaning." The non-object, released from a name—a non-, a no-thing—and thus a designated function, "is pure appearance." The spectator apprehends the non-object as pure phenomenon, without pre-conceptions of artistic categories, without reflected consciousness, but rather with the senses.

Gullar's theorization of the non-object makes visible the appeal of phenomenology to his thinking, especially the enfolding relationship of the subject and object, and the development of participation as a central contribution of Neoconcretism. With references to philosophers Merleau-Ponty, Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer in "The Neoconcrete Manifesto," Gullar established phenomenology as a constitutive element of the movement specifically as a way to combat against the extreme rationalism of other art movements, i.e. Concrete art, and conversely to privilege the aims of Neoconcretism as "expressive." [9] Phenomenology as a philosophical practice describes phenomena and centers the human subject's experience of the lived world. Concerned with the concrete and consciousness as experiential, phenomenology broke with past traditions of philosophy that defined knowledge of the world as a priori or strictly intellectual. Of interest to Gullar was this emphasis on the experiential and phenomenology's attention to the appearance of things, as we shall see below. By the time of the manifesto, Gullar had read the works of Merleau-Ponty, including *The Structure of Behavior* (1942), *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), and "Cézanne's Doubt" (1945). [10] Merleau-Ponty, with his attention to the body, pushed further than previous

philosophers the entanglement of the human subject and the lived world, and defined consciousness as always and immediately imbricated in the world or, as he wrote, "man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself."[11] Consciousness could not be detached from the body. The embodied subject experienced the world with his sense organs and translated perceived phenomena into ideas. Merleau-Ponty marked the body as a "vehicle of being in the world" and the site of intersubjective knowledge, therefore, the body is incapable of occupying the object position. These texts offered Gullar a vocabulary to make an argument against the mechanization of art and the artist, and to develop the non-object as open simultaneously and irrevocably to the mind and body, the intellectual and the sensory—to pure perception.

Meaning in art and the ability of art to address "the problem of meaning" preoccupied Gullar throughout his writings and attracted him to the projects of artists such as Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian, and philosophers like Merleau-Ponty.[12] In the manifesto he credited the latter with the idea that a work of art "creates its own tacit meaning (Merleau-Ponty), which emerges within it for the first time."[13] Moreover the artwork as a phenomenological body models the relationship between subject and object in the world; or in other words, meaning is found in the enfolding interaction between the spectator and the work. This model of participation in Neoconcretism has radically redefined the field of modern and contemporary art. The non-object often required the spectator's interaction, whether through moving parts or traversing a space. The work came into being via its activation *and* the transformation of the spectator into a participant. Gullar wrote, "Most of the existing non-objects imply, in some form or other, the viewer or reader's movement in relation to it. The viewer/reader is invited to use the non-object. Mere contemplation is not enough to reveal the sense of the work—the reader/viewer must move from contemplation to action…The contemplation leads to action, which in turn leads to further contemplation."[14] Gullar in his own work arrived at the notion of participation through the act of reading. The non-object like a book does not remain a divided object from the subject, neither the artist/author nor the spectator/participant/reader. New meanings continually present themselves in the direct experience with the non-object.

As already stated, the theory of the non-object described works of art, yet it also included the world of words. Three months after the publication of "Theory of the Non-Object," Gullar performed a solo question and answer session published as "A Dialogue on the Non-Object" in the Sunday Supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil* on March 23, 1960.[15] In order to dispel misunderstandings about the non-object, Gullar both posed and answered a series of pointed questions to acknowledge counter-criticisms and to explain clearly his ideas. He concluded this "interview" by addressing poetry. He wrote that the poet like the plastic artist

"strives for a primary experience of the world." For the visual artist access to this experience is through form, for the poet it is the word, or as he described it, the "job" of the poet was "to reveal how much of the world is deposited in the word." The interview then continued, "You have written that, when it comes to poetry, the non-object is the search for a place for the word. What do you mean by that?" And Gullar responded, "The word is either in a sentence—where it loses its individuality—or in the dictionary, where it is alone and mutilated, given as mere denotation. The verbal non-object is the anti-dictionary: it is the place where the isolated word irradiates its entire charge. The visual element married to it there serves the function of rendering explicit, of intensifying and concretising the multivocality the word contains." With this explanation, Gullar gave primacy to the word as the locus of meaning of the non-object poem, and the visual, whether the materiality of language or the sculptural turn of his Neoconcrete art, opened up additional meanings contained in the word. According to Gullar the non-object as anti-dictionary cannot be reduced to one meaning or limited to only an arbitrary sign. Like the visual non-object, the verbal non-object avoids sameness or commonness and rejects the ability of language to only designate. And yet paradoxically, are not all words readymades themselves? Let us turn to Gullar's poetry to consider how the word took on crucial importance for his theory, and how Merleau-Ponty's ideas argue against speech as a readymade.

The word already occupied a central place in Gullar's poetry practice, since he began working in 1957 within the genre called *poesia concreta* or concrete poetry.[16] Poets in Brazil, along with Eugen Gomringer in Switzerland, invented concrete poetry, which depends on minimal language and an attention to the materiality of language as a structuring principle of the poem.[17] In 1952 three poets in São Paulo—Décio Pignatari and the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos—formed the Noigandres group and published a magazine of the same name that featured their concrete inventions. In the many theoretical texts written by the Noigandres members they defined their poems as "words that act as autonomous objects," characterized them as "optical-sound structures, irreversible and functional," and most definitively claimed them as, "concrete poetry: tension of word-things in space-time."[18] For example, an early poem from Augusto de Campos' *poetamenos* series "eis os amantes" ("here are the lovers"), 1953, demonstrates how Augusto worked with the spatialization of language and polychromatic word design to give meaning to the poem (Figure 1). He alternated between the use of complete words and fractured words as well as an emphasis on syllables. Charles A. Perrone in his book on Brazilian poetry points to how the *poetamenos* series "was already a type of writing that acted in space and welcomed visible form, valuing alphabetic and phonetic patterns."[19] Throughout the 1950s and 1960s *poesia concreta* would continue to explore the objectification of language, avoiding metaphor or

romanticism, especially through the use of a reduced number of words as a way to break with the tradition and structure of lyric poetry.

Figure 1. Augusto de Campos, "eis os amantes," 1953

By 1954 Gullar had come in contact with the Noigandres group and within a few years his poetry reflected the tenets of concrete poetry, yet unlike the Noigandres' work, Gullar's poems consistently preserved the integrity of the word. I argue that Gullar's emphasis on the word in "A Dialogue on the Non-Object" was informed by his earlier work, therefore blurring the dividing line between Concrete/Neoconcrete. Perrone questions whether there even existed a marked difference between Gullar's Concrete and Neoconcrete poetry given that in his collected book of poems the two are organized indiscernibly together. [20] But what proves even more interesting is that the section "Concrete/Neoconcrete poems" in this collection comprises the years 1957-1958—*before* the emergence of the Neoconcrete group in 1959. We find here an example of the elasticity of Gullar's concept of "Neoconcretism." Given Gullar's privileged position as the generator of the term "Neoconcrete," and as the Apollinaire-like spokesman of the group, I argue that the name "Neoconcretism" designates

both a retrospective and an anticipatory quality. When Gullar conceived of the name, he was thinking of the artists and poets' production leading up to 1959, so it collected and pointed to past and present works. Moreover the energy that created the group continued to influence their practices long after the dissolution of what was in fact a short-lived two-year Neoconcrete period. Though the group was active only from 1959 to 1961, "Neoconcretism" embraces works and ideas before and after those years. With Gullar, his Neoconcrete practice did not constitute a complete rupture from his previous poetry practice; rather it marked an intensification and a spatialization of his work. Perhaps to begin with his poems were never purely *poesia concreta.* (In an interview from 1998, when asked to give an example of a Neoconcrete poem, Gullar suggested a poem of his from 1955![21]) To illustrate my point, I turn to examples of Gullar's "early" poems, now categorized as both *and* neither Concrete/Neoconcrete.

In a 1957-58 poem, "verde" ("green"), Gullar structured the poem around only two words, *verde* ("green") and *erva* ("grass") (Figure 2). This work and Gullar's other concrete poems were often short in length and utilized few words. The word "verde" repeats twelve times in a square grid made of three columns and four rows with the word "erva" appearing once at the right of the field of "green." Overall Gullar's poems relied on images of nature and color, appealing to the visual and the tactile, and the repetition of single words or syllables that were in and of themselves meaningful. For example, the poem "vermelho" ("red") includes only two words, "vermelho," repeated three times across the page in a single line, and "ver" ("to see") as the last final word. The poem operates in the relationship between the two words: "ver" acts as both the first syllable of "vermelho" *and* as a word in itself. Together the words invite the reader "to see red." For Gullar the word and its significance were the primary elements of concrete poetry, whereas for the Noigandres, a much more playful system of organization did not bar them from breaking up the word, playing with the phonemes, opening up language to a nonsense of meaning but a materiality of form and language as sound. Gullar was unable to divide the word from its meaning, while simultaneously, he presented words as able to contain a "multivocality" or the potentiality for supplementary meanings. Words acted as carriers of meanings; the relationship between the two was not fixed or stable.

Figure 2. Ferreira Gullar, "verde," 1957-1958. Experiência neoconcreta: Momento-limite da arte, de Ferreira Gullar. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007

By 1957 Gullar along with Rio de Janeiro-based poets Oliveira Bastos and Reynaldo Jardim broke with the São Paulo Concrete poets, which caused a larger rupture of the national Concrete project gathered the previous year at the *First National Concrete Art Exhibition*. With this 1956 exhibition Brazil announced its commitment to Concrete art and poetry with both forms on display at museums in São Paulo and Rio.[22] The debate amongst the poets from Brazil's major urban centers eventually gave birth to Neoconcretism, as mentioned above. The break resulted in part from an essay written by Haroldo de Campos in 1957 titled "Da Fenomenologia da Composição à Matemática da Composição" ("From the Phenomenology of Composition to the Mathematics of Composition"), which argued for a pragmatic and objective poetry based in formal methods of construction. As a counter-argument the carioca poets (carioca refers to someone from Rio de Janeiro) wrote "Poesia Concreta: Experiência Intuitiva" ("Concrete Poetry: An Intuitive Experience"). Both essays were published in the Sunday Supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil* in June 1957. Though Augusto de Campos believed the split had less to do with aesthetics than with personal idiosyncrasies, the carioca poets underscored their belief in the significance of intuition to any artistic practice, especially against a mathematical approach suggested by the title of the Noigandres text.[23] Haroldo in his essay, "From the Phenomenology of Composition to the Mathematics of Composition," called for the construction of the poem beforehand through a mathematical or quasi-mathematical process.[24] He wrote in the manifesto, "Concrete poetry instead seeks a mathematical structure planned before the word…The definition of structure which fits the poem will be the exact moment of the creative option."[25] The Noigandres

poets sought to evacuate the expressive subjectivity of the author, and as result release poetry from a hermeneutics based in Romanticism. Instead the poem would exist for itself as a concrete object and meaning would be generated through the formal structure of the poem or as Haroldo stated, "the content of the poem will always be its structure."[26] The carioca poets, on the other hand, rejected the Noigandres' call for rigorous objectivity. They wrote, "Only a scientistic error could lead one to suppose that the being of language is in its formalisation [*sic*]. The proposed submission of poetry to mathematical structures is proof of this error."[27] Gullar and his fellow poets interpreted a shift to a poetry of mathematics as a formalization of language, and therefore an end to language as mutable, affective and expressive. The poet according to the cariocas should "concretize expression." The essay "Concrete Poetry: An Intuitive Experience" most strongly criticized the Noigandres idea of poetic apriorism, instead privileging the intrinsic time of the poem—the creative process as its inception and the reader as its culmination, or "the poem begins when the reading ends."[28] The carioca artists emphasized the defining roles of the subject and object or the reader and the poem, whereas Haroldo and the Noigandres focused on the production of the poem in their essay.

I purposely juxtapose Gullar's poetic and theoretical production of 1957-1958 alongside his theoretical text from 1959 to demonstrate that his conceptualization of Neoconcretism and the non-object drew from his earlier work, and also described and anticipated work under development, his series, *Spatial Poems*. With these hybrid works, the already short length of his concrete poems was reduced even further to the presentation of only one word. In addition to the word, the Neoconcrete poet/artist invited "forms, colours and movements, on a level at which the verbal and plastic languages interpenetrate."[29] *Spatial Poems* construct a space beyond the page for the word. An example from the series includes "Ara" ("Altar") from 1959, constructed of wood and painted white (Figure 3). It consists of a shallow square box with a triangular flap, when opened the interior reveals the word "Ara" printed in small black lettering in the center of the square. When closed, the triangle pierces the square and the work presents a classic geometric object reduced further by the pure white color. Significant for the practice of Neoconcretism, the object asks the spectator to interact with it, to seek an additional expression of the object. The spectator turned participant lifts the triangle upwards and finds the word, "Ara." The object is now transformed by the word and its meaning. Gullar, with this work, underscored the primacy of the word, indivisible from its material, graphic element, and strengthened by the context given the single word—white geometry.

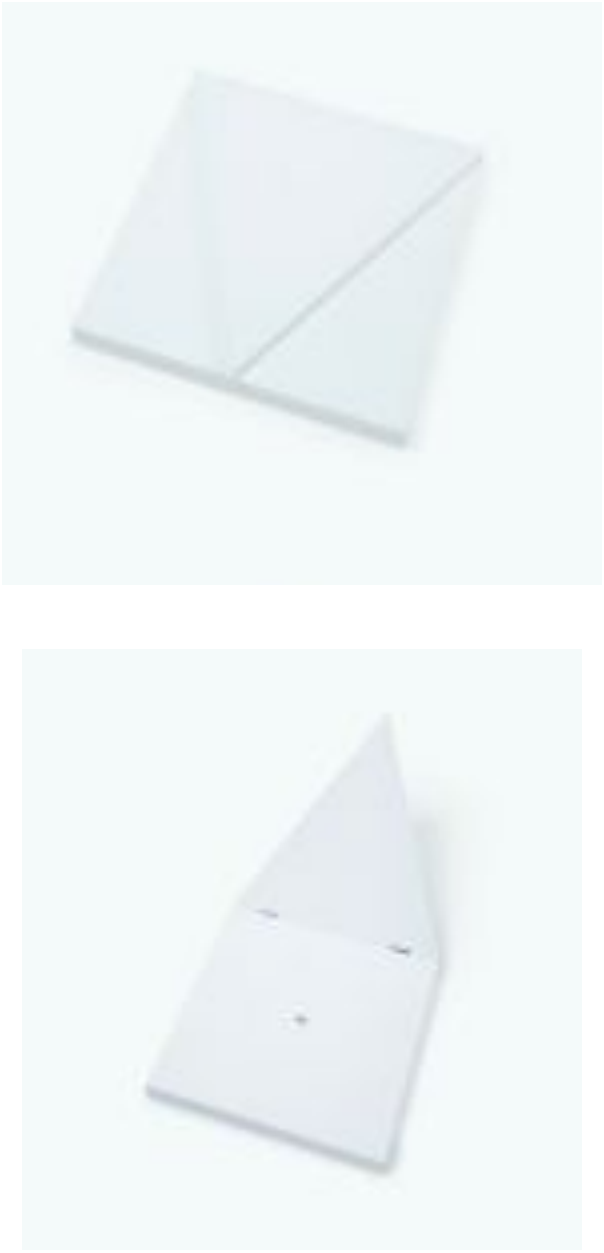

Figure 3. Ferreira Gullar, "Ara," 1959. Experiência neoconcreta:
Momento-limite da arte, de Ferreira Gullar. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007

Spatial Poems marked the most radical leap of Gullar's practice, and actually developed out of a transitional period of work, *Livros-poemas* (*Book-poems*), produced in the same year that he continued to work with the traditional word and page, but in a book form. Exhibited in the first Neoconcrete exhibition in March 1959, *Book-poems* experimented with the page design of poetry, and as a result the experience of reading. For example, Gullar placed a single word alone on a page, and the poem unfolded as the reader turned the pages and collected the

words into the fuller meaning of the poem. The words were printed on the reverse side of pages with the pages cut at an angle to avoid obscuring the previous word. According to Gullar his intention was "obliging the reader to read the poem word by word" and "to make them emerge before his eyes one by one."[30] Inherent in this project was not only controlling the act of reading but also an antipathy to the surface quality of concrete poetry, which by definition "is concerned with making an object to be perceived rather than read."[31] Like Ezra Pound's ideograms, an original source of reference for the Noigandres poets, Concrete poetry *shows* its meaning through the structure of the poem rather than communicating it through a linear-discursive drift. Imagined as a gestaltic whole, the poem as a visual sign engages the reader like a street sign or an advertisement (both of which were influential on the Noigandres)—an active, graphic object.[32] Meaning lies on the surface. A concrete poem asks the reader to look at it rather than through it.[33] And yet this was exactly Gullar's objection to the Noigandres' work: the persistence of the surface as the site of meaning production. Gullar rejected the object as surface because he interpreted it as empty, flat, bereft of durational time, therefore, machine-like, and ultimately then, non-human and non-expressive.

In this difference over how the poem should operate lay the central argument between Gullar and the Noigandres. Gullar resisted the fundamental characteristics of *poesia concreta*, and through this rejection of the surface emerged the theory of Neoconcretism. As a poetic experience, Gullar wanted the reader to be a full participant in the act of reading, or involved in the durational unfolding of the object itself, outside of linear time or time as instantaneous. Gullar conceived of *Book-poems* as objects, in which "word and page constituted an indissoluble unity."[34] Durational time was organic time, associated with the body, the human, the lived world or as he stated elsewhere "to eliminate 'time' in language would mean a descent into chaos."[35] Instead Gullar focused on the durational experience of reading, as something happening in and over time, through the unfolding of words in space. Therefore instead of the grid formation of words on one page—one surface—like with his own "verde," his *Book-poems* introduced the long experience of reading across many pages. Like a painting becoming sculpture, the words enfold the space, and according to Gullar in "A Dialogue on the Non-Object," "This spatial transformation is the very condition of the birth of the non-object."[36] In this way, the verbal non-object emphasizes space and time as intrinsic elements in the experience of language and meaning.

The works in the *Spatial Poems* series epitomize the non-object, embodied through their form and the visual and tactile engagement with the spectator/reader. Gullar made seven works in the series and they all resemble each other in that they represent geometric shapes with moveable parts painted either monochromatically or with one or two additional primary

colors and include a single centrally placed word. Initially Gullar made the boxes out of cardboard, and subsequently he sent them to be fabricated in wood.[37] Neither purely poems nor sculptures, they defy clear categorization. To return to "Ara," as a poem, it depends on one word, perhaps chosen for being a palindrome, yet unlike other examples within concrete poetry wherein the word gives itself over to the repetition of letters or sounds of letters, "ara" sits isolated on a field of white space. "Ara" defines Neoconcrete non-object poetry as beyond syntax and both a spatial and temporal experience. As a sculpture, the work eschews a base, and instead relies on mobility, whether moving from place to place or handling by the spectator. The non-object sculpture invites interaction and begins when the participation ends, to adapt the carioca poets' statement on poetry "the poem begins when the reading ends," also applicable here. Moreover "Ara" as an "anti-dictionary" escapes usefulness and achieves transcendence by synthesizing word and form as expression. It does not ask us to re-view a found object within a new set of relations, instead the meaning and the spatialization of the word transforms the object and our experience of it.

The elements of the works—words and colors and shapes and parts—operate in concert and the spectator performs the work. Let us look at another example to see how this works. "Não" is a thin black box whose top includes two panels, which when opened unfolds out into a white interior with a black diamond shape in the center (Figure 4). The black diamond once removed exposes yet another diamond but painted red and including the word "Não" ("No").

Figure 4. Ferreira Gullar, "Não," 1959. Experiência neoconcreta: Momento-limite da arte, de Ferreira Gullar. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007

This work emphasizes the play of contrary forces at the heart of the non-object, in this case, yes and no, black and white (and red), and more generally, presence and absence, interior and exterior, concrete and abstract, sensory and mental, action and reflection, and object and non-object.[38] What is the non-object but an assertion of negation in order to distance art and poetry from common things? And yet this absence happens through the presence of a physical object intent on its sensual materiality, whether colors, the form of a word, or interactive action. In fact Gullar made clear, "The *non-object* is not an anti-object, rather it is a

special object in which one intends the synthesis of sensory and mental experiences: a body that is transparent to phenomenological knowledge, integrally perceivable, that gives itself to perception without surplus. It is pure appearance." [39]

Here Gullar found echoes of his ideas in the writings of Merleau-Ponty about how science teaches us to distinguish between our senses and to divide sensation and thought. Neoconcrete art sought to overcome the knowledge of the body gained through scientific analysis; art instead acts as "a primary experience of the world." I argue that this primary experience is one understood directly through phenomenology, which reminds us that the human body must be understood as already in the world and thus cannot be conceived as semi-independent of thought at any point, or for that matter, one bodily sense from the other. The synthesis of sensory and mental experiences in art was central to the theorization of Neoconcretism and the non-object.

Merleau-Ponty's consideration of language, or more specifically of *la parole*—the French translation of word *and* speech—allowed him to propose how meaning adheres to words. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty turned to speech as another mode of being in the body and world. His main focus was to reject the possibility that either thought or speech could precede each other. Instead "they are intervolved, the sense being held within the word, and the word being the external existence of the sense." [40] Given the centrality of the subject for Merleau-Ponty, words are positioned as part of the "equipment" of the body and the body's experience of the world. "It [Language] presents or rather it is the subject's taking up of a position in the world of his meanings." [41] Neither speech nor thought can be understood as external to the subject. They are the means by which the subject comes into being in the world. With Gullar's presentation of words in his *Spatial Poems*, he asks us to consider this exact role of language to mark us as in the world. Through the invitation to interact with the objects, colors, forms, speech, thought, and the body become "intervolved," and the non-object presents itself to be perceived. Significant for Neoconcretism, the *Spatial Poems* as non-objects construct an expressive experience of the word and the poetic word takes on new, emotive expression, not only literal meaning. Merleau-Ponty isolated poetry as able to reveal "the emotional content of the word," or what he terms the "gestural." [42] The poem boxes indicate the transformation of the word and its sense central to the phenomenology of language. Gullar abandoned the project of *poesia concreta* so as to leave behind the dissection of speech as a diagrammatic play of rules and apriorism. Neoconcretism put "thought back among the phenomena of expression." [43]

With what would become his final Neoconcrete work, *Buried Poem*, Gullar devised a living habitat for the word. Published first in the Sunday Supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil* as a conceptual list of instructions, the installation was materialized in the garden of fellow

Neoconcretist Hélio Oiticica's parents' house in 1960 (Figure 5).[44] Gullar sought to fully transform poetry into an object experienced off the page and instead penetrated by the body. *Buried Poem* invites a single person to descend a staircase into an underground square chamber of over eight feet in length and width. Once inside, enshrouded in near darkness except for a single light source, the spectator stands above a red cube. Instructed to lift the geometric form, he finds yet another green cube and within that a white cube. Below the white square the spectator now participant now reader reads the word "rejuvenesça" or "rejuvenate." Finally, "The 'reader' will then put the three cubes back exactly as he found them and linger a while observing the red cube, which is irreparably changed, as he knows what it conceals and stores. The reading is thus complete. In order to heighten the experience, only one 'reader' should enter the poem at a time. Throughout the whole experience the 'reader' will feel the scent of jasmine that hangs in the air."[45]

The work was made to be experienced by only one "reader"—a singularly intimate experience that placed the emphasis on a personal "reading" and the act of reading (now reduced to one word) as a phenomenological practice. Asked to enter a ritualistic space, affected by the darkness and jasmine scent, the spectator discovered the word like a secret knowledge.[46] With intentionality, Gullar chose the verb "rejuvenesça" and used the imperative tense of the verb, thus asking the spectator to do something—to perform the word. The word "rejuvenesça" functions as a sign, and yet exactly how the reader *experienced* rejuvenation was left undetermined. In contrast to the selection of the nouns "ara" or "pássaro" (the titles and words of other *Spatial Poems*, translated as "altar" and "bird" respectively) Gullar's verb choice depended on the individual to enact the meaning and therefore allowed for many possible variations of "rejuvenation."

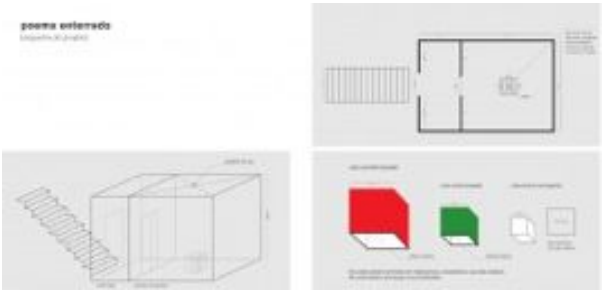

Figure 5. Ferreira Gullar, Buried Poem, 1959-60. Experiência neoconcreta: Momento-limite da arte, de Ferreira Gullar. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007

With this work, the birth of the reader, though not yet formulated by Roland Barthes, appeared in Brazil in the 1950s. Recall in the essay discussed above "Concrete Poetry: An Intuitive Experience" by Gullar, Bastos, and Jardim a work of art is not ruled by laws determined a priori, such as mathematical formulas, instead it comes into being with its

making. In addition the poem relies on the reader—"the poem begins when the reading ends."[47] Interestingly the essay makes clear a fragile balance between the creative energy of the producer of art and the spectator/reader who completes the meaning of art. Gullar desired art to create an experience for the spectator, but a controlled experience, like with his *Book-poems*, or *Buried Poem*, in which specific instructions were provided for the spectator before entering the work.[48] The birth of the reader did not necessitate the death of the author in Neoconcrete art, or as with the Noigandres, the evacuation of the Romantic artist. Boris Groys in his writings on the history of the art of participation comments on this paradox, "One might also claim that the enactment of this self-abdication, this dissolution of the self into the masses, grants the author the possibility of controlling the audience—whereby the viewer forfeits his secure external position, his aesthetic distance from the artwork, and thus becomes not just a participant but also an integral part of the artwork. In this way then participatory art can be understood not only as a reduction, but also as an extension, of authorial power."[49] *Buried Poem* depends on participation and the performative to fully realize the meaning of the work, but Gullar's selection of the word points to the "intervolved" relationship between the author and reader or the speaking subject and the listener. Gullar did not forfeit his control as the author and yet he also understood speech as multivocal.

With this language-art installation, a non-object that fits no traditional fine art category, instead a living habitat for the word, Gullar essentially demonstrated the way meaning dwells in language itself. As discussed in *Phenomenology of Perception*, meaning is not external to words just as thought and speech cannot be external to each other. Merleau-Ponty very eloquently and beautifully explained, "The process of expression, when it is successful, does not merely leave for the reader and the writer himself a kind of reminder, it brings the meaning into existence as a thing at the very heart of the text, it brings it to life in an organism of words, establishing it in the writer or the reader as a new sense organ, opening a new field or a new dimension to our experience."[50] *Buried Poem* and "rejuvenation" through language and art act as this "new sense organ" to plunge the artist, poet and reader/participant into meaning. The object "radiates" its existence and meaning; we see and read and feel and smell *and* think. It presents itself to the reader/participant. Gullar's construction of an "anti-dictionary," or "the place where the isolated word irradiates its entire charge" models the crossing of perception between subjects and objects, consciousness and (non)things. Gullar explored together the philosophy of language and the problem of meaning in the verbal and visual arts to show the interrelationship of the body, speech and consciousness.

The Neoconcrete group dissolved shortly after *Buried Poem*. Gullar's move into art production left him uncertain about his future as a poet, and the direction of his poetry with only single word compositions. He left Rio de Janeiro for Brasília, the new capital of Brazil, to work as the director of the Fundação Cultural de Brasília (Brasília Cultural Foundation) and his departure added to the reasons for the separation of the group. By 1962 Gullar became involved with Centro Popular de Cultura (CPC or Center for Popular Culture), part of the National Union of Students (UNE), which aligned itself with "popular revolutionary art" rather than European avant-garde practices.[51] Gullar renounced his associations with vanguard theory and its usefulness in favor of art and poetry directly engaged with the Brazilian people, articulated in his 1964 book, *Culture in Question*.[52] The historical period had dramatically shifted from a democratic government intent on development to a military dictatorship ruling through oppression and the dismantling of civil liberties.[53] The lofty pursuits of Neoconcretism and the non-object appeared to Gullar by 1964 as outmoded and "out of place" tools to transform Brazilian society. And yet today with the increasing popularity of Neoconcretism, and especially the work of Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica in museums, collections and academic study, Gullar's role as theorist and critic of the group has emerged as *the* explanatory frame of this Brazilian avant-garde. This article argues for the immense significance of Gullar's poetic *and* artistic production as a site not only for understanding Neoconcretism as an inherently interdisciplinary movement but also as an origin place for his theoretical thinking, especially as a vehicle for the influence of phenomenology on Brazilian art and poetry. Though heavily dependent on philosophy and discourse to understand and explain art, Gullar's work, and Neoconcretism by extension, reminds us to place the aesthetic object at the center of perception, as the source that radiates, and from which we begin to experience new meanings.

NOTES

I would like to thank Rebecca Kinney, Sara Stevens, John Pluecker, and Maki Smith for their intelligent revision suggestions, and an anonymous reader for the useful feedback.

1. Ferreira Gullar, "Arte neoconcreta," *Etapas da arte contemporânea: do cubismo à arte neoconcreta* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Revan, 1999), 246. This translation is mine.

2. I include here the original members who signed the 1959 manifesto and exhibited together at the First Neoconcrete Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art Rio de Janeiro from March 19 to April 19, 1959. By the Second Neoconcrete Exhibition, at the Ministry of Education and Culture from November 21 to December 10, 1960, the number of Neoconcrete artists had ballooned from seven to twelve, including the loss of Spanúdis from the group and the addition of new members: Aluísio Carvão, Claudio Mello e Souza, Décio Vieira, Hélio Oiticica, Hércules Barsotti, Osmar Dillon, Roberto Pontual and Willys de Castro. This was not actually their second showing. The first exhibition travelled to Salvador da Bahia in November 1959, but was reconfigured and expanded to include the original artists and Carvão, Mello e Souza, Carlos Fernando Fortes de Almeida, Oiticica, and Castro. Though Spanúdis exhibited in Bahia, he no longer worked with the group thereafter. The third and last Neoconcrete Exhibition took place from April 27 to May 14, 1961 in São Paulo at the Museum of Modern Art. The Third Neoconcrete Exhibition did not present works by Vieira nor Mello e Souza, but did introduce the poet Albértus Marques.

3. As Michael Asbury notes, "The first *National Exhibition of Concrete Art* had opened at São Paulo's Museum of Modern Art in 1956 and travelled to Rio in 1957. Despite the disagreements that surrounded the exhibition, which clearly indicated a rift between the São Paulo and Rio-based group of artists, it was primarily through poetry that the neoconcrete rupture took place." Michael Asbury, "Neoconcretism and Minimalism: Cosmopolitanism at Local Level and a Canonical Provincialism," in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, ed. Kobena Mercer (London: Institute of International Visual Arts and Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), 176.

4. Gullar, *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 123. The book includes its own translations in English by Anthony Doyle, which I use throughout this essay.

5. See Sérgio Bruno Martins, "Phenomenological Openness Historicist Closure: Revisiting the *Theory of the Non-Object*," *Third Text* 26, 1 (January 2012): 79-90.

6. I have decided to use the term "the *verbal* non-object" to indicate the text-based non-object, in comparison to the visual non-object. Gullar in his writings refers to this class of objects as "verbal non-objects," and I have decided to use his term, even though I understand that verbal can also designate oral, rather than written. I use verbal to describe objects that include words and language as a semantic system.

7. Gullar, "Theory of the Non-Object," *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 142-145. All quotes in this paragraph taken from this essay from the English translation by Doyle.

8. The latter quote taken from Gullar, "A Dialogue on the Non-Object," *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 145.

9. Gullar, "The Neoconcrete Manifesto," *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 157-160. For reasons of space I do not have the opportunity here to discuss the debate between the Concrete artists working in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. These artists first exhibited together in the 1956 *National Exhibition of Concrete Art* but by 1957 the two groups had split. Arguments about the process of making art and the ontology of the artwork were waged in print especially through the two main critics, Waldemar Cordeiro of São Paulo and Gullar of Rio.

10. Gullar discussed reading Merleau-Ponty in his interview with Ariel Jiménez. *Ferreira Gullar in Conversation with Ariel Jiménez* (New York and Caracas: Fundación Cisneros/Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, 2012), 69-70.

11. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), xii.

12. Gullar wrote, "Trata-se, portanto, de um problema de *significação* e não meramente de percepção." ("Therefore, the work of art deals with the problem of *meaning* and not merely perception.") Gullar, *Etapas da arte contemporânea: do cubismo à arte neoconcreta* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Revan, 1999), 246. This translation is mine.

13. Gullar, "The Neoconcrete Manifesto," *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 159.

14. Gullar, "A Dialogue on the Non-Object," *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007),149-150.

15. Gullar, "A Dialogue on the Non-Object," *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 145-150. All quotes in this paragraph taken from this essay from the English translation by Doyle.

16. I use the date 1957 because that is what is given in the collected poems of Gullar. Gullar, *Toda poesia 1950-1980* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1981). Gullar, *Poesia completa, teatro e prosa* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Aguilar, 2008). I find this date troubling because one could argue that Gullar's concrete poetry began with the poem "O formigueiro" in 1955 since he worked with the visual arrangement of language and moreover it was exhibited in the first *National Exhibition of Concrete Art* in 1956. But I maintain here the more strict chronology put forth by Gullar in his poetry collections.

17. See Mary Ellen Solt, *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1969) for the international emergence of concrete poetry.

18. These words are taken from two manifestos, Augusto de Campos, "Poesia Concreta" (1955) and "poesia concreta" (1956) in *Teoria da poesia concreta*, ed. Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos (São Paulo: Duas Cidades, 1975), 34-35, 44-45.

19. Charles A. Perrone, *Seven Faces: Brazilian Poetry Since Modernism* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 31.

20. Ibid., 62

21. "A trégua – Entrevista com Ferreira Gullar," *Cadernos da Literature Brasileira – Ferreira Gullar*, Instituto Moreira Salles (1998), 36. When asked to give an example of a Neoconcrete poem, Gullar suggested "O formigueiro" from 1955. He said, "Ele realmente não é um poema concreto. 'O formigueiro' tem essa duração de que falaria mais tarde o *Manifesto Neoconcreto*."

22. See Lorenzo Mammì, João Bandeira and André Stolarski, eds., *Concreta '56: a raiz de forma* (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 2006).

23. Augusto de Campos, http://poesiaconcreta.com.br/, accessed July 28, 2008. "De fato, à distância, as divergências parecem mais verbais do que práticas. E as diferenças, mais fruto de idiossincrasias e percursos individuais, empatias e desempatias, do que de grandes desavenças estéticas."

24. Traditionally within the scholarship the first name of the brothers are used to identify them. In this essay then I will refer to them by their first names, Augusto and Haroldo. Haroldo de Campos, "Da Fenomenologia da Composição à Matemática da Composição," in *Teoria da poesia concreta*, ed. Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos (São Paulo: Duas Cidades, 1975), 93-94. Originally published in the Sunday Supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil*, June 23, 1957.

25. Ibid., 93. "…uma estrutura matemática, planejada anterioramente à palavra…A definição da estrutura que redundará no poema será o momento exato da opção criativa." I used Jon Tolman's translation found in "The Context of a Vanguard: Toward a Definition of Concrete Poetry," *Poetics Today* 3,3 (Summer 1982), 156.

26. Ibid., 94. "…o conteúdo do poema será sempre sua estrutura."

27. Gullar, Oliveira Bastos and Reynaldo Jardim, "Concrete Poetry: An Intuitive Experience," in Gullar, *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 137. Originally published in the Sunday Supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil*, June 23, 1957.

28. Ibid., 136.

29. Gullar, "A Dialogue on the Non-Object," *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 149.

30. Gullar, *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 122.

31. Mary Ellen Solt, *Concrete Poetry: a World View* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1969), 7. Theo van Doesburg, the founder of Art Concret in 1930, theorized his paintings similarly, writing, "There is nothing to be read in painting: there is only something to be seen." Theo Van Doesburg, "Towards White Painting," in Joost Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1974), 183.

32. Mary Ellen Solt recalls how Augusto had originally envisioned for the *Poetamenos* poems "luminous letters which could automatically switch on and off as in street advertisements," *Concrete Poetry: a World View* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1969), 12. Though pre-dating Jean-Luc Godard's film *Pierrot le Fou* by 10 years, Augusto's description and the reproduction of a poem from the *Poetamenos* series in *Teoria da Poesia Concreta* very much resemble the titles of the film with their creation of words through color and light. With *Pierot le Fou* the colors symbolized the tricolor of France with blue, white and red, whereas Augusto's poem has been reproduced in several places with different color schemes. In *Teoria* the poem includes red and black.

33. Claus Clüver, "Reflections on Verbivocovisual Ideograms," *Poetics Today* 3, 3 (Summer 1982), 140.

34. Ferreira Gullar, *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 122.

35. Gullar, "Letter to Augusto de Campos, 1955," *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 157.

36. Gullar, "A Dialogue on the Non-Object," *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 148.

37. Gullar first made six *Spatial Poems* out of cardboard, including "Ara," "Lembra," "Era," "Pássaro," "Não," and "Onde." He later added to the group "Noite," for a total of seven works in the series. He then sent them to be constructed out of wood. Personal email correspondence with the artist, December 14, 2012.

38. My thanks to Marcia Brennan for taking the time to converse with me about my project.

39. Gullar, "Theory of the Non-Object," *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 142.

40. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 211.

41. Ibid., 225.

42. Ibid., 217.

43. Ibid., 221.

44. Before anyone could experience the work, the space was flooded, and the work destroyed. It has never been re-constructed. A model of the work would also be included in Hélio Oiticica's 1961 "Maqueta para Projeto Cães de Caça."

45. Gullar, "Buried Poem," *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 151.

46. Hans Robert Jauss writes of the Christian Romanesque taste for "The full and objective meaning of the text is initially hidden and only unfolds in the course of time through the new commentaries of later readers." Hans Robert Jauss, "Modernity and Literary Tradition," *Critical Inquiry* 31:2 (Winter 2005), 337.

47. Gullar, Oliveira Bastos and Reynaldo Jardim, "Concrete Poetry: An Intuitive Experience," in Gullar, *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 136.

48. Ibid., 136. The carioca writers of "Concrete Poetry" explicitly affirmed this when they wrote, "The Concrete poem is a means of entirely controlling an experience."

49. Boris Groys, "A Genealogy of Participatory Art," in *The Art of Participation 1950 to Now*, ed. Rudolf Frieling (New York: Thames&Hudson, 2008), 23.

50. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 212.

51. For a more detailed discussion of the CPC see Charles A. Perrone, *Seven Faces: Brazilian Poetry Since Modernism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 72-74.

52. Gullar, *Cultura posta em questão* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1965). See Irene Small's excellent essay for a lengthier discussion of the book and Gullar's turn away from vanguard theory. Irene V. Small, "Exit and Impasse: Ferreira Gullar and the 'New History' of the Last Avant-Garde," *Third Text* 26, 1 (January 2012): 91-101.

53. On March 31, 1964 the Brazilian military overthrew the sitting President João Goulart and for the next 21 years ruled the country under a military dictatorship, which included restrictions on civil liberties, eradication of political parties, and pervasive repression and torture of the Brazilian people. See Thomas Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil 1930-1964: An Experiment in Democracy* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967, 2007) for a discussion of the events leading to the coup. For a history of Brazil during the dictatorship, see Maria Helena Moreira Alves, *State and Opposition in Military Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), Thomas E. Skidmore, *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil, 1964-1985* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), and *Torture in Brazil: A Shocking Report on the Pervasive Use of Torture by Brazilian Military Governments, 1964-1979*, prepared by Archdiocese of São Paulo and trans. Jaime Wright (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).

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BERNHARD'S WAY

MICHAEL W. CLUNE

O Lord God grant me the grace to produce a few good verses, which shall prove to myself that I am not the lowest of men, that I am not inferior to those whom I despise.

Charles Baudelaire, "At One O Clock in the Morning"

What would a commitment to art that has passed *through* the postmodern critique of art look like? The recent return to aesthetics has largely proceeded by either denying or ignoring this critique. Pierre Bourdieu presents the postmodern case in perhaps its most elegantly distilled form. The tradition declares art is about experience; actually it is about status. The tradition declares great art is timeless; actually its motives, meanings, and effects are circumscribed by the conditions of its production. The tradition declares the value of art is produced by formal relations within the work; actually it is produced by social relations between antagonistic groups.[1]

The new aesthetic criticism reverses these reversals. The experiences and affects provoked by art are not covert claims of status; they have their basis in living bodies.[2] Artistic form is not a disguise for social relations; it offers an opportunity for analyzing those relations.[3] The aesthetic is not the means of establishing social distinctions, but "the site of an unprecedented equality."[4] The artwork is not bound to its social context; artistic form enables the work to maintain relations across time and space.[5]

The extrication of art from the postmodern critique—perhaps institutionally necessary for a profession that bases its claims to social value on the value of art—has been aided by the critics' critics. We have learned from critics like Bruno Latour and John Guillory how to be suspicious of the epistemological grounds of postmodern suspicions.[6] We have learned from critics like Michael Fried and Rita Felski to be suspicious of the sleight of hand with which postmodern writers and artists make the possibility of absorption or defamiliarization vanish from their works, thus showing what postmodern theorists cannot prove.[7] With the help of these critics, we are learning how to carry art over or around the postmodern morass.

But what would it mean for art go through it? How can art accept that every aesthetic experience or judgment is a fraudulent disguise for social relations without becoming anti-art, without dedicating itself to the exhaustive (and now exhausted) exemplification of the critique?[8] How might art learn from the postmodern critique? How might it benefit from the exposure of the falseness of its effort to defeat time, to create experience, to renew sensation? How can it possibly learn from this exposure without dying of it?

From the depths of the postwar period's most rigorous critique of art, in the midst of its most relentless exposure of every actual and imaginable artwork as "pseudo art," Thomas Bernhard looks around at the assembled cultural elite of Vienna and finds them guilty of "pretense," "social climbing," "lies," "desperate" bids for "social recognition."[9] This Austrian writer, who began life under the nazis, devoted his late work to exposing the experience of absorption in a work of art as a form of social domination, and the creation and consumption of artworks as concealed pleas for social distinction.[10] And yet, this dismissal of every artwork that passes before him is not only compatible with a commitment to art as the highest human value, that commitment motivates the critique. His most damning attack on his contemporaries is that "they've quite simply failed to achieve *the highest*, and as I see it *only the highest* can bring real *satisfaction*" (*W,* 54).

Written in the 1980's, Bernhard's *Woodcutters* is not unusual in its insistence that the audience's relation to art works is a disguised way of relating to others. It is unusual in taking this condition as a challenge to art to realize its pretensions. The urgency of this challenge is not purely or merely artistic. The postmodern critique of art relations as disguised social relations is so damning to art precisely because the social relations in question convulse with anxiety, compulsion, degradation, and pain. Imbrication in the social world compromises art because the social world described by the postmodern critique is inherently compromising.

Bernhard agrees with critics like Bourdieu in denouncing art's covert parasitism on the networks of social status. But he disagrees about what to do. Bourdieu wants to jettison the ideal of the aesthetic as disinterested attention to form. This might annihilate some forms

of snobbery. But it is hard to imagine that settling accounts with Kant will do much to change the social world's basic nature as a hierarchy founded on fear and pain.[11] Bernhard, with a deep understanding of how art has been infected by the social relations described by postmodern critics, reacts more rationally. Don't get rid of art; get rid of social relations.

The satisfaction of the highest art for Bernhard thus defines a human space both replete with value and outside society. In this it does not look so different from the Kantian ideal of aesthetic experience. But there is a crucial difference. For Bernhard, accepting the truth of the postmodern critique means accepting that every relation between an artwork and an audience becomes enmeshed in status relations. Bernhard faces the consequences squarely. The "real satisfaction" of art can never be achieved by the audience of a work, but only and solely by its creator.

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The speaker of Thomas Bernhard's *Woodcutters*—whom I follow the Austrian courts in identifying as Thomas Bernhard—has been invited to an "*artistic dinner*" following the funeral of an old friend.[12] His hosts, the Auersbergers, are friends he broke with several decades ago. Upon entering the Auersbergers' apartment, Bernhard takes a seat in the semi-darkness of the anteroom, a position which affords him a view of the music room where the other guests have assembled. As readers of the novel have noted, his position is that of a critic viewing a performance.[13] He proceeds over nearly two hundred pages, without paragraph breaks, to present his damning judgment on the Auersbergers, their friends, himself, and all actually existing art.

A typical passage, on the furnishing of the music room, will illustrate his procedure. He notes that the chamber is furnished with priceless antiques. But these objects are compromised by the Auersbergers' intention in displaying them, which is to convey to others their own superior taste. "The Auersbergers, who have always been credited with what is called taste, have never had any real taste, but only a secondhand surrogate, just as they have no life, but only a secondhand surrogate" (*W,* 138).

Why is their taste "secondhand?" Because they want people to admire them, "when in fact people admire only their polished cabinets and sideboards, their tables and chairs, the many oil paintings on their walls, and their money" (*W,* 138). Their taste is "tasteless" because it is an effort to acquire social distinction by means of the distinction possessed by art objects. The dim lighting of the apartment accentuates the objects' role as status symbols. Bernhard can recognize the famous names, the celebrated styles. But there is light enough only for him to identify the aura of prestige, not to become absorbed in the forms.

Literature, philosophy, and music are not immune to the mania for self-aggrandizement that degrades the furniture and paintings. Bernhard recalls the scene when the Auersbergers forced themselves on his attention in the street in order to invite him to their tasteless party on the eve of their mutual friend's funeral. "Before rushing off with all their parcels they told me that they have bought *everything by Ludwig Wittgenstein*, so that they could *immerse themselves in Wittgenstein during the coming weeks*" (*W*, 10).

But to describe the works as compromised by the use to which the Auersbergers put them is to leave open the possibility that the beautiful works themselves are worthy objects of genuinely good taste. To remove the Auersbergers' paintings from the Auerbergers' clutches—to install them in a well-lit museum, perhaps—would be to free them for disinterested contemplation. Bernhard quickly forestalls this possibility. He expresses gratitude that the dim lighting prevents his being able to see "these art treasures" properly, "for I would undoubtedly have been sickened by the sight" (*W*, 139). The very perfection of the art treasures is another, distinct source of their tastelessness. "Such perfection, which hits you in the eye and crowds in upon you from every side, is simply repellent" (*W*, 139).[14]

Here the sociological critique joins with an older anti-theatrical critique to proclaim that taste itself is tasteless.[15] It is practically impossible to escape the fact that the sole function of these art treasures is to proclaim the wealth and sophistication of the social-climbing couple. But even if you could bring yourself somehow to bracket the Auersbergers completely, and to place yourself before these masterpieces in rapt attention, the objects themselves would betray an intrinsic tastelessness. Masterpieces demonstrate their "ostentatious" lack of taste in the brutal way their very beauties force themselves upon you in a desperate effort to compel your attention (*W*, 139).

One of the innovations of Bernhard's novel is to house the sociological critique of taste in the context of the anti-theatrical critique. Most of the novel unfolds while the dinner party is suspended, waiting for hours for a "celebrated actor from the Burgtheater" to appear. Some of its funniest pages are devoted to attacking the theater, describing, for example, how not just the "sensitive Kleist" but "even the great Shakespeare falls victim to the butchers of the Burgtheater" (17). Bernhard's critique of the Burgtheater follows the same procedure as his critique of the Auersbergers' "art treasures." The Burgtheater is known to be one of Europe's best theaters. This distinction is tastelessly exploited by the Austrian nation to distinguish itself as a center of world culture. But even were one able to bracket the Burgtheater's function in the cultural status hierarchy of Europe, the very perfection of Burgtheater acting would "sicken" you by the way each word and gesture proclaims its "pretense."

Bernhard can link a Bourdieu-style sociological critique of art to an anti-theatrical critique of art because both the sophisticated collector and the actor depend on the pretense that they are not doing what in fact they are doing: asking you to recognize them. People make judgments of taste in order to be recognized by others. Painters paint paintings, actors deliver lines, poets write poems in order to be recognized by others. The objects they create come into the world deformed by their attention-grabbing fineness of line, color, and phrase.

The anti-theatrical critique can contain the sociological critique because it is more radical, more wide-reaching. The Auersbergers' taste is tasteless because they want you to recognize them as superior, and this claim to be superior is offensive. The ostentatious perfection of their art treasures is tasteless because they clamor to be recognized, and this clamor to be recognized is itself offensive.

The Auersbergers' demand for recognition turns the Auersbergers half-lit masterpieces into monsters. The masterpieces' own demand for recognition turns themselves into monsters. And social life, oriented as it is around the demand for recognition, turns people into monsters. "For more than two decades," Bernhard writes, he had avoided the Auersbergers and thus avoided "any further contact *with these monsters* as I could not help calling them privately" (*W*, 44). Later he describes people with a noun that more accurately represents the "unnatural" distortions caused by the desire for recognition. People are "gargoyles" (*W,* 172-3).

Art is infected with the social disease.[16] The problem with artworks is that they ask to be treated like people. The problem with people is that they demand to be recognized. As Michael Fried has shown, the history of art is tolerable for the anti-theatrical critic only insofar as he allows himself to be convinced by a given work's pretense. The pretense is that it is not asking the viewer to recognize it. Art thus pretends that it is not pretense. Bernhard tries this out as a social strategy.

"Actually I've always dissembled with the Auersbergers, I thought, sitting in the wing chair, and here I am again, sitting in the wing chair and dissembling once more: I'm not really here in their apartment in the Gentzgasse, I'm only pretending to be in the Gentzgasse, only pretending to be in their apartment, I said to myself. I've always pretended to them about everything—I've pretended to everybody about everything. My whole life has been a pretense…I drew a deep breath and said to myself, in such a way that the people in the music room were bound to hear it: *You've always lived a life of pretense, not a real life—a simulated existence, not a genuine existence*" (*W*, 60).

To be present at a social gathering is to present a claim for social recognition. Bernhard, despising the social demand that one must turn oneself into an object to be appreciated by others, tries to duck making this claim. So he pretends not to be at the artistic dinner. Structurally, this is identical with the way the viewer before the work of art tries to forget his position in front of the work. The viewer with good taste tries to *lose himself* in contemplation of the work. So Bernhard sits in the semidarkness, observing the dinner as theater. He tries to lose himself in this observation. He gradually becomes absorbed in the pretense that he is not there. Finally he becomes so absorbed in his pretense that he succeeds, he truly does forget himself. At this point he begins speaking aloud, attracts the attention of the other guests, and thus spectacularly demonstrates the failure of his pretense and the reality of his social presence.

Bernhard is a gargoyle. His own social being as a subject tied to a pathetically recognition-soliciting object is just as monstrous as everyone else's. This is vividly brought home in an episode where he remembers seeing Auersberger and a companion in the street.

> I recalled how I had turned around, quivering with revulsion, and set off towards the Stephanplatz after the pair had disappeared into that dilapidated building. I was so sickened by what I had just witnessed that I turned to throw up against the wall in front of the Aida coffeehouse; but then I looked into one of the mirrors of the coffeehouse and found myself staring at my own dissipated face, and my own debauched body, and I felt more sickened by myself than I had been by Auersberger and his companion. (*W*, 14)

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Art has a social problem. Art has caught the social disease. This is the truth of the postmodern critique. Relations to art works are always disguised forms of relations between persons. The passage where Bernhard pretends not to be in the Auersbergers apartment is his experiment with the solution proposed by anti-theatrical aesthetics. Seen "accurately and radically" absorption is, in the end, only pretense.[17] After and before its tricks, the work stands there asking to be looked at. In the same way, even so vehemently antisocial a man as Bernhard is, in the end, just another person begging pathetically for our recognition.

He struggles mightily against the social problem. He tells us that he has perfected "the art of being left alone" (*W*, 24). "At precisely the right moment," when he is listening to someone speak to him, he looks down at the ground. But of course this behavior only succeeds in making a spectacle of himself. His "art of being left alone" suffers the same fate

as the Auersbergers' "art treasures." In Bernhard's prose we overhear art telling itself the postmodern truth: "*You've always lived a life of pretense, not a real life*."

And yet, one of the works Bernhard describes in *Woodcutters* does attain a partial solution, and represents a partially effective cure for the social disease. One work is presented as not "totally" bankrupt. He tells us that Joana, the friend whose suicide provided the occasion for the "*artistic dinner*," was once married to a "tapestry artist" named Fritz. Joana was "not cut out for a career" herself (*W*, 77). Instead, she put all her considerable artistic energy, all her artistic effort, into shaping and advancing Fritz's career. And Fritz's work was transformed. His tapestries became famous, and now hang in the best "museums and office buildings" all over the world.

"Fritz was her one work of art" (*W,* 78). "She fashioned Fritz into this colossal work of art" (*W*, 78). The narrator is utterly unimpressed by the value the world finds in what he disparagingly calls Fritz's "carpets." But he is fascinated by Joana's creation of this Fritz-work. His reflections generate this remarkable passage:

> I will go further and say that Fritz's art, the works he created, all the tapestries which now hang in famous museums throughout the world, are really Joana's, just as everything he is today derives from Joana, is Joana. But obviously nobody takes an idea like this seriously, even though of course such ideas, which are not taken seriously, are actually the only serious ideas and always will be. It is only in order to survive, it seems to me, that we have such serious ideas which are not taken seriously. (*W*, 79)

Bernhard spares Joana's artwork from the intense sarcasm that drips from every other of his references to art. But he cannot describe Fritz's career as an "artwork" entirely seriously, either. Here we see a modulation in Bernhard's description of art, from sarcasm to "unseriousness." In this modulation we discern the outlines of a new vision, the ultimate achievement of which we will see reflected not in the content but in the form of the novel. Yet even here, in this provisional and only partially successful art, the outlines of the "highest" form become clear. Joana's Fritz work is different from other works in that it is structurally impossible for Joana to gain or expect recognition from this work. Channeling her creativity through Fritz, she has set up the visible form of the work at a distance from her creative relation to that work. Fritz's visible authorship acts as a kind of fetish; he is a sacrificial victim taking upon himself the degrading recognition dynamic that is the fate of all art in the social world. What the audience sees in Fritz's work is the work of Fritz. Joana's animating intention remains concealed.

Joana's Fritz work lies outside the networks of recognition. Its very existence as a work is not recognizable, but must be put forward as a kind of serious joke. Her authorship is concealed in a much deeper way than that of an artist who uses a pseudonym, or who allows another to claim authorship of a work she has created with her own hands. Joana does not create Fritz' work with her own hands. She creates by somehow causing Fritz to create, by subtly influencing him in a thousand small ways over a period of years. This kind of authorship is something no court could recognize, something that no one could take seriously.

The aesthetic value Bernhard finds in Joana's Fritz work—its authenticity, its lack of pretense, its purity—lies in Joana's relation to that work. She is the creator of a work immune to recognition. And yet the concealment of authorship is not the only criterion. The form of the work also plays a role. Bernhard's treatment of the aesthetic value of the tapestries themselves is very subtle. He acknowledges that they are acclaimed as beautiful. He does not admire this beauty; far from it, they possess exactly the kind of "perfection" that makes all taste—even the best taste—fundamentally tasteless. And yet this beauty is not irrelevant to the status Joana's Fritz-work has for him. One can imagine that if Fritz produced tapestries which left everyone cold, Bernhard would not consider Joana's creation of this career to be a "colossal work of art."

Aesthetic values are formed in public, in the social world, and the aesthetic properties of observable artworks are fundamentally social phenomena. Here Bernhard is in entire agreement with Bourdieu, for example, and against Kant. Aesthetic values, however, are not extrinsic to the "highest" art, the art free of recognition. They matter, but only insofar as they provide evidence of the quality of the act of creation. Their value as something to be looked at, something accessible to an audience, is for Bernhard below negligible.

In fact Joana's Fritz-work is only partially successful. Eventually this work, so far from providing "real satisfaction," simply "crushed and destroyed her" (*W*, 78). This is because the work's freedom from public relations is ultimately parasitic on a relation that is, if not public, nevertheless intractably social: her marriage to Fritz. Intimacy, and especially the "matrimonial hell," is not a valued space for Bernhard in any case. But in this instance, her inflation of Fritz's career brought him the adoring attention of the world, which made him susceptible to the wiles of a younger woman, with whom he absconded to Mexico, leaving Joana to the consolation prize Bernhard reserves for those who have searched nobly for satisfaction but failed. She commits suicide.

But reflecting on her one artwork has led Bernhard to articulate, for practically the only time in his late work, the core of his belief in the possibility of the highest art. "The serious idea which [is] not taken seriously" is that of a work of art not oriented to recognition, and the benefit of which is entirely realized by its creator.

Here we confront a problem that the thematic level of this text will be of only limited assistance in solving. The aesthetic value of Fritz's tapestries is valuable to Bernhard only insofar as they speak to the quality of Joana's act of creation. But what is this quality? It cannot be the Kantian quality, the disinterested feeling of pleasure in contemplation of the beautiful. Rather, we will see that this quality is fundamentally transformative. The satisfaction of the highest art is the feeling the creator has of becoming something other than a monster. The form of the work is the visible channel of this transformation.

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Once the artistic dinner has finally come to an end, Bernhard takes his leave. He tells his hostess what a pleasant time he has had, while cursing himself inwardly for his nauseating pretense. Once he exits the building he begins to run. He runs through the streets, possessed by a strange excitement, a sudden feeling of "love." Here is how the novel ends:

> And as I went on running I thought: I'll write something *at once*, no matter what—I'll write about this *artistic dinner* in the Gentzgasse *at once, now*. *Now*, I thought—*at once*, I told myself over and over again as I ran through the Inner City—*at once*, I told myself, *now—at once, at once*, before it's too late. (*W,* 181)

Like Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, *Woodcutters* ends with the narrator about to write the narrative we've just read. The joy and urgency he now associates with writing, so anomalous in the context of the 181 pages of excoriation of art and artists that precedes it, presents a puzzle. Facing the prospect of composing the novel we've just read, the narrator seems enthralled by a premonition of the "real satisfaction" of the "highest" art. This satisfaction is, after all, almost the only positive affect that Bernhard has named in the course of delivering his stream of invective against the Auersbergers, their guests, and himself. It seems then, an appropriate name to give to the prospect that excites him as he heads home to begin the process of composition. So the deep question that confronts the reader at the end of *Woodcutters* is: Has Bernhard been justified in his premonition? Has the transformation that Joana approached actually been realized by Bernhard in writing the work we've just finished?

We have only the evidence of the novel. We know beforehand that we will not find the "real satisfaction" as a possible affective response by the reader to the work. So our own experience is quite irrelevant as an index of Bernhard's success at attaining "the highest." The satisfaction of the highest, if it exists, is foreclosed to us as readers from the outset.

We must instead seek traces of Bernhard's satisfaction. We must go back over the book, looking for signs of the author's successful disappearance from the social world, looking for evidence of the social Bernhard—the gargoyle-Bernhard—giving up the ghost. Approached in this way, the form of the novel might betray traces of what Bernhard has declared, at the level of content, to be the only "real satisfaction" possible in art and life.

In form the novel is uninterrupted first person narration. No quotation marks divide the unbroken speech of the narrator. He reports the speech of others without notation of any kind, and without departing from his characteristic tone and style. We have no access to others save through the narrator's language.

A problem intrinsic to narratives of this form is the difficulty of discerning the difference between the narrator's sense of things, and the way things might appear to others. Critics have traditionally dealt with this problem under the heading of the 'unreliable narrator.' But in the closest ancestor of Bernhard's novel—the fiction of Samuel Beckett—this problem becomes magnified to a degree that 'unreliability' undergoes a change in kind. Here the problem of the novel's enclosure within its narrator's subjectivity takes on metaphysical features. The first person narration developed by Beckett and brought to its highest pitch in his trilogy brings into the world a kind of subjectivity that cannot be identified with—that cannot identify itself as—any object. Further, as we shall see, the closer this subject comes to any object, including any object (face, body, voice) likely to house another subject, the border where the self stops and the other starts vanishes.

Formally, *Woodcutters* represents a precise and limited transformation of the mode of first person narration defined by Beckett's fiction. This transformation offers us the best evidence of the novel's success in terms of Bernhard's particular and demanding criteria. But why should our interpretation of *Woodcutters* privilege Beckett? At one level, of course, Bernhard's indebtedness to Beckett's work is obvious and has been noticed by most readers. The negativity, the pared-down language, the dark humor, the characters' obsession with mysterious projects mark Bernhard as among Beckett's successors both in prose and drama. But *Woodcutters* goes beyond these family resemblances in establishing a specific relation to one of Beckett's texts in particular. This relation is worked out through one of the novel's most peculiar formal features: the uncanny symmetry between the narrator and the actor from

the Burgtheater. This symmetry replicates the way Beckett's *Molloy* is balanced between the first person narration of Molloy and Moran.

Earlier I described how Bernhard's hostility to the actor helps to situate the novel's critique of art in the anti-theatrical tradition. Now I want to examine how his view of the actor undergoes a transformation. Bernhard's expression of his thoughts regarding the bankruptcy of art, of Austria, of society, and of the Auersbergers dominates the first half of *Woodcutters*. The actor's expression of his thoughts regarding the bankruptcy of art, of Austria, of society, and of the Auersbergers dominates the second half. The content of those thoughts is identical. The actor, repulsed by the Auersbergers and their guests, tells them: "You talk incessantly about art without having the faintest notion of what art is" (*W,* 167). He addresses a guest particularly odious to Bernhard in terms she "deserved," and which the narrator reflects that he himself could have used. "Words like *vicious, rude, insolent, hypocritical, infamous, megalomaniac, stupid*, rained down on the company," to the narrator's delight, but also to his bafflement, given that these are *his* thoughts and feelings the actors is so uncharacteristically expressing (*W,* 167).

The actor expresses both Bernhard's abundant social disgust, and his positive commitments. "We don't attain the highest just by wanting it," he says (*W*, 117). "Absurd ideas are the only true ideas," declares the actor, mirroring Bernhard's private insistence that only "unserious" ideas are worth taking seriously (*W*, 161). Finally, the actor links disgust with society with belief in art: "How I hate gatherings like this…How I long to be left in peace" (*W*, 169). Like Bernhard, he understands that escape from the social cannot be simply a matter of misanthropy and solipsism, but entails a radical transformation of the self. "If only I'd become a completely different person from the one I have become, a person who is left in peace" (*W*, 170).

It is important to note that Bernhard does not exactly hear the actor delivering these lines. He *overhears* them as the actor speaks, as it were, to himself.[18] The actor really gets going only when he realizes that he has completely lost his audience, that he is no longer "inhibited" by the other guests (*W*, 118). Bernhard describes his audience thus: "Every now and then they nodded, either looking straight at the actor or gazing down at the tablecloth, or else staring in bewilderment at the person sitting opposite; they had no chance whatever of participating in the actor's performance, with which he was regaling them so uninhibitedly, knowing that none of them could inhibit him" (*W*, 118). This is more than a performance animated by the fiction of an unawareness of audience. The actor's speech is made possible by the audience's incomprehension.

This "performance" scrupulously avoids both ordinary social intercourse and audience-oriented drama. Thus the actor's speech has the same structure as the narrator's own in the passage when he forgets himself, causing his private monologue to break into audibility. Earlier I used this passage as an example of Bernhard's failure to completely disappear from the social situation. The actor, who wishes he had "become a completely different person," also suffers from this failure. Uncomprehending staring is, after all, a form of social recognition, no matter how attenuated. Although he cannot disappear, the actor, like Bernhard, makes his effort towards the "art of being left alone." And the speech that issues from this effort to escape the social, while not exemplary of the "highest," nevertheless attains a kind of provisional freedom.

Bernhard is the one listener who does hear and understand the actor. But this is a strange kind of listening. He is able to hear the actor's meaning only because he has been thinking—and occasionally muttering aloud to himself—identical thoughts. Uncertainty as to the space in which it occurs characterizes this listening. Is the actor's voice inside Bernhard's head? Is the actor somehow giving voice to Bernhard's own thoughts? Or is the source of these thoughts the actor's interior? Does his interior—his thoughts and feelings—just happen to closely resemble Bernhard's?

We have all had the experience of reacting to something someone says with the thought: that's just what I think! There is an uncanniness to this kind of listening experience. Ordinarily, hearing another express ideas we hold, we feel drawn to the other. We feel that a bond has been established, that a friendship has begun. Our natural impulse is to get to know this mind that mysteriously, and in isolation from us, evolves thoughts so resonant with our own.

Nothing like this happens between the actor and Bernhard. Reflecting on the way that the actor's speech thrilled him, he writes: "But this does not mean that I should take to him now, were I to meet him again. He remains for me the unattractive and essentially superficial stage character he was from the start" (*W*, 175).

The thrilling relation between the actor and the narrator can never occur in social space, where they confront one another as monsters. They are the same kind of monster. The narrator observes with disgust as the actor take his leave while fulsomely praising the hosts whom he has just been castigating. Moments later Bernhard himself takes his leave, observing with the same disgust his own false assurances to the hostess that he has had a wonderful time.

Bernhard does not take the uncanny communion between himself and the actor as evidence of the possibility of establishing a good social relationship, a friendship. Rather, he speaks of the actor as having been, for a time, "transformed." The actor underwent "a truly philosophical metamorphosis" (*W*, 172). The actor became the "completely different person"

he wanted to be. When he became this person, he communed with Bernhard, not in social space, but in a space interior to this transformed "person." His speech took on the qualities of Bernhard's own internal speech; it carried the conviction and power of internal speech.[19] This transformation, the "absurd" prospect of which tantalizes the actor, represents the attainment of the highest. Bernhard affirms that—for a brief time—the actor attained this ultimate freedom. "He underwent a philosophical metamorphosis." Does this mean Bernhard has also undergone this sea change? The answer to this question depends on how we understand their relation.

The identity of the actor's thoughts with Bernhard's puts the relation between the actor and Bernhard—affectively marked by Bernhard's alternating repulsion and fascination—into question. This uncanny symmetry between two beings distributed between two halves of a darkly comic first person narration also describes *Molloy*, the first novel of Beckett's trilogy.[20] The actor/Bernhard escapes from others, not by leaving them behind, but by somehow expanding to include them. And he accomplishes this feat though artistic means. "We don't attain the highest just by wanting it" (*W*, 117). The profound mechanisms of the metamorphosis attempted by *Woodcutters* exploit the artistic method developed by Beckett in *Molloy*. Briefly examining the transformed persons of that novel will clear the way for understanding Bernhard's.

Molloy is a key work in the development of what Anthony Uhlmann has recently called "Beckett's art of nonrelation."[21] Beckett explores the contours of this art through the form of first person narration, a form that dominates his prose writing from 1946 to 1964.[22] Hugh Kenner, in one of the earliest accounts of the trilogy that occupies the center of this period, shows how the first person form gives rise to nonrelation. Beckett "carries the Cartesian process backwards, beginning with a bodily je suis and ending with a bare cogito."[23] The novels are inhabited by a subjectivity that cannot fix itself to any object and, through this lack of objecthood, encounters no firm boundaries between itself and everything it perceives.

Molloy/Moran is continually trying to place himself; trying to determine and delimit what is inside by trying, unsuccessfully, to find an object that is unambiguously outside. A few sentences will give the flavor of his experience.

"I must have been on the top, or on the slopes, of some considerable eminence, for otherwise how could I have seen, so far away, so near at hand, so far underneath, so many things, fixed and moving. But what was an eminence doing in this land with hardly a ripple? And I, what was I doing there, and why come? These are things that we shall try and discover. But these are things we must not take seriously. There is a little of everything, apparently, in nature…

And I am perhaps confusing several different occasions, and different times, deep down, and deep down in my dwelling."[24]

Molloy cannot position himself in relation to things. He is constantly unsure whether a given apparition is next to him, far from him, imagined, or remembered. In part this condition is thematized through the speaker's famous trouble with objects, from his bicycle to his "sucking stones." In part it is thematized through the complete failure of the social recognitions that serve, as the Hegelian tradition tells us, to delimit us as isolate and integral selves.[25] If I become myself by identifying with the object you recognize when you see me, Molloy's "I" cannot be recognized. "I was now becoming…unrecognizable," Moran says, summing up his dealings with others (*M*, 233). Encountering him, others see nothing solid, nothing real, and so Moran's sense of his own phantom objecthood gradually melts utterly into air. Molloy's encounters–knocking on his mother's teeth or trying unsuccessfully to explain himself to a policeman—similarly fail to yield recognition.

And yet there are a number of examples of successful communication in the novel. Every instance involves Molloy/Moran talking to *himself*.

> And the voice I listen to needs no Gaber to make it heard. For it is within me… Yes, it is rather an ambiguous voice and not always easy to follow, in its reasonings and decrees. But I follow it none the less, more or less, I follow it in this sense, that I know what it means, and in this sense, that I do what it tells me. (*M*, 180-81)

Intrasubjectivity replaces intersubjectivity as the space of successful communication. More radically, since this self cannot be fixed by reference to an object, the very meaning of 'self' is transformed. The voice Moran hears is an "ambiguous" voice. It is not quite his own, but neither does it come from without. Without any determinate boundary to the subject, voices inhabit Molloy's experience like a world. This "I" becomes a hive of voices.

Daniel Katz notes that Beckett creates Molloy's condition in part by radicalizing formal features of first person discourse. "Anyone can say 'I'—'I' refers only to the person saying 'I' at a particular moment."[26] "Subjectivity, then, comes to depend on enunciation—if 'I' refers only to the person saying 'I' at a particular moment, then the moment and the utterance both make possible and are logically prior to any subjective designation, rather than simply being the expression of a moment at which the subject already happened to find itself."[27] First person discourse produces subjectivity without regard for psychological consistency, and Beckett exploits this effect to create the illusion of an infinitely capacious subject.

For Katz, the point of noticing the dependence of Molloy's subjectivity on the curious properties of first person discourse is to argue, in familiar poststructuralist terms, that subjectivity is the effect of the operation of a system. "I" compulsively personifies Molloy as a side-effect of its workings. The objectivity of the system comes to seem in such analyses the determining factor.

But what is so remarkable about *Molloy* is the extent to which this subjectivity, created by language, itself causes the materiality of language to vanish. Molloy's discourse makes the materiality of its support disappear. It disappears, granted, only for *him*. But the novel is a record of Molloy/Moran's experience, and of the process by which Molloy/Moran composes his experience as discourse. This is a novel that thematizes writing. Molloy begins by telling us he is writing, and Moran ends the same way. Thus his condition is identified as a condition of writing. For this author, the process of composition, so far from revealing the resistant materiality underneath subjectivity, annihilates it.

The deconstructive reading accurately registers the structure that enables the curious experience embodied by the novel. To do this it must approach the text distantly, as a reader who can distance himself from instances of another's written 'I'. But if we ask how things are for Molloy, how things are for the writer of the 'I,' a quite different perspective emerges. To move from an interpretive position dominated by the reader's relation to the text to an interpretive position dominated by the writer's relation to the text is here to switch the basic question we are asking. Now the question is not: How can subjectivity be unmasked as objectivity? The question is: What kind of subjectivity dissolves all objects? Viewed from the perspective of the writer Molloy, the space of a written first person narrative is a space in which subjectivity becomes boundless.

From within this narrative, Molloy reaches fruitlessly for objects, for something or someone outside his own consciousness. "To restore silence is the role of objects," he writes (*M*, 16). He equates the discovery of a firm boundary between self and not-self with the cessation of language. This quixotic quest to discover objectivity within the world of the first person text generates a bizarre fantasy. Molloy imagines blackening the sheet of paper. He imagines "fill[ing] in the holes of words till all is blank and flat" (*M*, 16). This desire for writing to become an object makes vividly clear the fact that writing here is *not* an object. Writing—first person writing, writing that says 'I'—is the medium of a total, object-devouring subjectivity. The writer cannot tell if he is perceiving, remembering, or imagining. He cannot tell if a given object is inside or outside him. The writing makes the identification of a boundary or limit to his experience impossible.

And yet this seemingly total subjectivity has a seam. Molloy did not, after all, write *Molloy*. Brian McHale has located the fissure caused by the nonidentity of actual and fictional author in the trilogy's frequent references to god. Molloy, Malone, and the Unnamable know they must have come from somewhere; they must have a creator, and they pursue this creator, with increasing urgency, across the trilogy. The nameless narrator of the trilogy's final novel, for example, knows "he can never get outside his own imaginings to the reality of his ultimate creator… The god whom the unnamable can never reach, is of course Samuel Beckett himself, and the retreating ceiling is the unbreachable barrier between the fictional world of the unnamable and the real world which Samuel Beckett shares with us, his readers." [28]

Thomas Bernhard's revision of Beckett's first person narration is simple. He erases this barrier between the 'I' that comes to consciousness in the text and 'I' of the author. [29] We have seen how the features of Beckett's first person narration supply for the consciousness it enshrines all the criteria of Bernhard's "highest art." This consciousness has passed beyond all social relations. Bernhard, in writing *Woodcutters*, seizes the true satisfaction this consciousness represents.

This withdrawal from relation totally transforms the "I." The nonrelational "I," the "I" of radical first person narration, has nothing in common with the "I" in relation, the "recognizable" I, the "gargoyle" I. It has undergone what Bernhard calls a "philosophical metamorphosis." In *Molloy*, a character who is not Samuel Beckett undergoes this metamorphosis. This character's strange condition is an object of interest for readers, who have for sixty years explored the manifold relations his condition obtains with "the real world."

In *Woodcutters*, the subject that has undergone the transformation is the creator, the author. If the form of first person narration supplies the mechanism of this transformation, the themes of the novel articulate the desirability of the transformed state as the only "real satisfaction" possible in art or life. This change, though small, is not minor. *To establish the identity of author and narrator is to transform the meaning of the post-Beckett novel.* It is to supply the motive, the desire for this kind of novel, the desire that this kind of novel uniquely satisfies. It is to place this desire—for freedom from social relations and from social being—and the satisfaction of this desire, at the heart of the meaning of the form. Molloy writes because he has found himself writing in a book called *Molloy*. Bernhard writes because he wants, in writing himself into a book like *Molloy*, to become free, to achieve the highest goal of art/life.

One way of capturing what is new in Bernhard's autobiographical project is by comparing it with Paul de Man's account of autobiography. "We assume," de Man writes, "that life produces the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with

equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life…by the resources of [the] medium?"[30] For Bernhard, the resources of first person narration first revealed by Beckett do indeed determine the form of life, the "real satisfaction," of the referent of *Woodcutters*' first person. The point here however, is not to expose, with de Man, the constructedness of a putatively extra-literary consciousness. It is rather to celebrate what that construction makes possible: a life free of recognition, an unrecognizable life.

Of course, this celebration depends on bracketing the 'undecidability' that the imbrication of sign and referent, trope and grammar, life and text, meaning and matter, create for de Man. But this bracketing, it turns out, is rather easy. As sophisticated literary readers, and against the Austrian courts, we will admit, for example, that to identify the Auersbergers with a particular couple from Bernhard's extra-textual life is problematic for many reasons. The distortions introduced by the book's thematic identification of art with fraud, to take just one reason, introduce a fictional element into the representation of these particular artists and collectors. We might imagine, further, that in orchestrating the boundary-evading textual turns of his own 'I' that Bernhard is performing another artistic fraud.

And we might be right. But we must remember our place. We are only readers. Undecidability is a problem for readers. It is our problem, not Bernhard's. It does not mar the joy of the creator of *Woodcutters*. And the joy with which he greets the prospect of true artistic satisfaction at the very end of the novel he has just written means, of course, that this is the joy of satisfaction achieved.

Bernhard's belief that authorship entails a transformation of the writer derives much of its plausibility from the testimony of centuries of authors who declare themselves transformed by writing, and by the conventions that associate artistic speech with a quasi-divine apotheosis of the voice.[31] *Woodcutters*' innovation lies in specifying the mode of the transformation, articulating a form adequate to that mode, and declaring this transformation of the author to be the sole and highest value of the work. This value is the result of what modernism learns from postmodernism.

Bernhard thus endows the first person narrative with an entirely new meaning and value. That meaning and value utterly exhausts itself in the experience of its creator. What is verifiable from our readers' perspective is the following: 1) Bernhard thinks, in good postmodern fashion, that the problem of art is a social problem. 2) He thinks through this postmodern problem to conclude that the ideal form of art will not be dependant on social relations. 3) Logically, such a form can give satisfaction only to its creator, never to its audience. 4) In freeing life from recognition, such a form will "transform" its creator, and give him the only "real satisfaction" possible in art or life. 5) The end of *Woodcutters* suggests that Bernhard

sees in his novel just such a form. 6) *Woodcutters'* exploitation of the first person narrative techniques of Beckett's *Molloy* provides some limited evidence that the joy expressed at the end of the novel is the joy of real satisfaction at total transformation. [32]

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I want to conclude by briefly facing a possible objection to my reading of Bernhard's transformed modernism, and by even more briefly sketching a context for that modernism's possible future triumph. The objection is that Molloy is unhappy, that *Molloy* is an unhappy book, and that to transform oneself into someone like Molloy inhabiting a book like *Molloy* is to suffer a misfortune, not to be satisfied. The objection, in other words, is that Bernhard must be ironic when he speaks of the satisfaction of anti-relational art, that the joy he expresses at the prospect of beginning to write must have a more pedestrian source.

"I'll write about this *artistic dinner* in the Gentzgasse *at once, now*. *Now*, I thought—*at once."* Bernhard is excited, perhaps, by the prospect of composing a work that thousands of readers and dozens of critics will adore. He is excited by the prospect of cementing his reputation as the greatest living writer in the german language. Or maybe he is excited simply by the idea of working off some nervous energy. In any case, no one could be excited by the prospect of transforming oneself into a boundaryless 'I.' No one could want to be Molloy.

Unless, that is, one wants to become immortal. Molloy represents one of the great immortal figures of world literature, and perhaps the most powerful evocation of immortality in postwar writing. And Molloy is not immortal in the sense that generations of readers continue to read him; this audience-oriented immortality through fame is something Molloy has no sense of. How could you imagine being recognized through the ages when you can't get your own mother to recognize you? Rather, Molloy is immortal in a more immediate sense. To become a subject with no boundaries and no objecthood is to exist in a state in which the question of one's death is without meaning. Molloy endlessly refers to "my life without end," to his "interminable life" (*M*, 18). "At the same time it is over and it goes on, is there a tense for that?" (*M*, 47)

But the mere fact of endlessness does not, of course, guarantee happiness. Far from it. Certain images of endlessness have long furnished hell, and Molloy can be seen as a close cousin to Sisyphus, the figure so beloved of the existentialists. But unlike Sisyphus, Molloy's experience is not one of mere repetition, but of constant laughter and surprise. Wolfgang Iser has noted Molloy's unlimited vitality. Sentence after incredible sentence is generated out of a condition lacking suspense, lacking teleology, lacking relationships. For Iser, Molloy is a "self set free to pursue a course of endless self-discovery…a supercritical chain reaction." [33]

Finally, a case can be made that much of Molloy/Moran's experience is best described as a species of mystical vision.

> And I note here the little beat my heart once missed, in my home, when a fly, flying low above my ash-tray, raised a little ash, with the breath of its wings. (*M*, 223)

In this single moment of intensely observed particularity, the expansion of the subject's feeling ("the little beat my heart once missed") blots out the difference between observed and observer. The timeless quality of this moment lies in its utter severing from before and after; it obeys, as do so many sentences here, the logic of the fragment. Of course one might see in the fly an image of dirt and decay. Or one might see it—like the image of the fly that interrupts Shenryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* or the image of the fly that serves Dickinson as emblem for eternity—as an image whose nature repels the clichés that cling to winged things.

These brief reflections on the affective dimensions of Beckettian first person narration might give us some grounds for supposing that Bernhard need not be ironic when he describes the condition of the narrator of such a work as the only "real satisfaction." But these reflections may be quite beside the point. When Bernhard talks about satisfaction, and when he expresses joy at the prospect of writing himself into this *Molloy*esque work, he's not addressing us. The fact he's writing to himself doesn't, of course, mean he's *not* being ironic. One can be ironic in addressing oneself. But if Bernhard's own irony makes him laugh, then he is in the Molloy position and enjoying it. And if Bernhard is not being ironic at all, then he is in the Molloy position and enjoying it. [34]

NOTES

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge MA, 1984). The social critique of aesthetics was not, of course, confined to Bourdieu-style sociological accounts. For two particularly influential literary critical examples, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction,* (Oxford, 1990) and Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, (Oxford, 1991).

2. There are three distinct ways of treating affect and experience in recent criticism. One mode, inflected by neuroscientific and cognitive scientific approaches, is exemplified by critics like Blakey Vermule (*Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?* [Baltimore, 2009]) and Alan Richardson (*The Neural Sublime*, [Baltimore, 2010]). Another mode, inflected by philosophical and sociological approaches, is exemplified by critics like Sianne Ngai (*Ugly Feelings*, Cambridge MA, 2007) and Phillip Fisher (*Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences,* [Cambridge MA, 1998)]. Finally, Gerard Genette (*The Aesthetic Relation,* [Ithaca, 1999]) and Charles Altieri (*Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry,* [Cambridge, 2009]) extend and develop the Kantian account of aesthetic experience.

3. See Robert Kaufman, "Red Kant, or, the Persistence of the Third Critique in Adorno and Jameson," *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Summer, 2000).

4. Jacques Ranciere, *Aesthetics and it Discontents,* (Cambridge, 2009), 13.

5. See Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time,* (Princeton, 2008) and Aaron Kunin, "Artifacts," in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics,* (Princeton, forthcoming).

6. John Guillory, "The Sokal Affair and the History of Criticism," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2002); Bruno Latour "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter, 2004).

7. Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood,* (Chicago, 1998); Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature,* (Oxford, 2008).

8. For an influential discussion of postmodern art as the critique of art, see Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture,* (Berkeley, 1994).

9. Thomas Bernhard, *Woodcutters*, trans. David McLintock ([1984] New York, 1987). Henceforth cited parenthetically as *W*. This is the central novel in a trilogy of works about art and artists—it is preceded by *The Loser*, trans. Jack Dawson ([1983] New York, 1991) and followed by *Old Masters* trans. Ewald Osers ([1985] Chicago, 1989). My decision to focus on *Woodcutters* is dictated partly by the clarity and intensity with which Bernhard's view of art is presented thematically in this book, and partly by the fact that several features—which I explore below—of the form of its first person narration makes it particularly compelling site for exploring Bernhard's commitment to that mode.

10. Matthias Konzett draws on Bernhard's acute sense of Austria's Nazi past in describing him as an "early postmodernist in postwar Austrian literature" (Introduction, in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard* [Rochester, 2002], p. 15). Bernhard turned his back on the avant-garde of his youth as part of what Konzett cites Geoffrey Hartman as calling the post-Holocaust reckoning that led art to become "suspicious of itself" (p. 12). This suspicion, as we shall see, comes to bear a close resemblance to Bourdieu's critique of aesthetics. The resemblance is especially striking when both writers focus on the same object: Bourdieu and Bernhard offer nearly identical critiques of Heidegger's obscurity as a tactic for gaining recognition. Bernhard's critique is developed in his novel *Old Masters*; Bourdieu's in *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger* (Cambridge, 1991).

11. Bernhard is not alone in accepting Bourdieu's analysis of the social role of aesthetic judgment while rejecting his solution. John Guillory, to take a strikingly different example, has argued that to simply erase the social claims of the aesthetic would be to deliver the social field entirely over to economic stratification (*Cultural Capital*, [Chicago, 1995]). I should also note here something that will become clear over the course of my discussion. Bernhard, in rejecting the idea that the elimination of the aesthetic will rehabilitate the social, also rejects the idea that a robust aesthetic realm can play a redemptive social role. See Leo Bersani's *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge MA, 1990) for an account of literary history relevant to Bernhard's position in this respect.

12. On the libel suit that greeted publication of *Woodcutters*, and the subsequent banning of the novel in Austria, see Gitta Honegger, *Thomas Bernhard: The Making of an Austrian* (New Haven, 2001), pp. 239-42. I take up the implications of identifying *Woodcutters'* first person speaker with Bernhard in detail below.

13. See especially Kata Gellen and Jakob Norberg, "The Unconscionable Critic: Thomas Bernhard's *Holzfallen*," *Modern Austrian Literature* 44.1-2. (2011). "The narrator, silent and immobile in his armchair, assumes the role of the spectator who sits in the darkened theater and remains invisible to the actors" (p. 58). The authors also describe the hostility to the social as such in the novel. But where they take this to mean that the narrator's critique is unreasonable—in the sense that he expresses no reason for his hostility to the social—I will argue that it is in fact animated by both a reasonable rejection of

recognition, and a reasoned commitment to a mode of collective being outside of recognition. For a reading of Bernhard's critical position that attends to its properties as "second order observation which observes observations and distinguishes distinctions" see Bianca Theisen, "The Art of Erasing Art: Thomas Bernhard." *MLN* 121 (2006), p. 552.

14. *Old Masters*, which takes place entirely in a well-lit museum, provides an extended version of the critique concentrated in these few pithy statements in *Woodcutters*.

15. For the classic account of Diderot's anti-theatrical aesthetics, see Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality,* (Chicago, 1980). On the ubiquity of the theme of art's failure in Bernhard see Francis Michael Sharp, "Thomas Bernhard: Literary Cryogenics or Art on Ice," *Modern Austrian Literature* 21.3-4 (1988), p. 206. For a reading of Bernhard's sense of the failure of art that links it to Benjamin's concept of the loss of aura, see Russel T. Harrison, "The Social(ist) Construction of Art in Thomas Bernhard's *Alte Meister*," *Monatshefte* 101.3 (2009).

16. A number of critics have noticed the negativity with which Bernhard views the social as such. George Steiner objects to the novels' "obsessive, indiscriminate misanthropy," which he sees as motivated by "mere hatred" ("Black Danube" in *George Steiner at the New Yorker* (New York, 2009), p. 127. Rudiger Gorner notes Bernhard's similarity, in his rejection of social relations, to Satre, for whom the other represents hell ("The Broken Window Handle: Thomas Bernhard's Notion of Weltbezug," in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, p. 92).

17. This phrase comes from Bernhard's *Old Masters* (p. 34), and expresses his sense that scrutiny will expose the fatal theatricality of even the greatest works.

18. J.S. Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties," in *Dissertations and Discussions, Politics, Philosophy, and History*, vol. 1. (London, 1859).

19. This transformation, in which another person begins to utter the narrator's private thoughts, is most fully developed with respect to the figure of the actor. But this transformation is not restricted to the actor. In fact, it happens to *every* character in the novel, even Auersberger, who at one point declares: "Society ought to be abolished" (*W*, 141). This ubiquity gives another twist to Bernhard's insistence that the actor's "philosophical metamorphosis" has nothing to do with the actor as a person he might meet outside the space of this particular dinner party (and the novel which encloses it). In fact, as we will see, formal properties of first person narration make what happens between Bernhard and the actor a possibility for every other character. The possibility of relation sliding into identity is briefly realized for figures like Auerberger and Jeanie, and sustained throughout the second half of the novel for the actor.

20. "Moran both is and is not identical with Molloy," Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, (London, 1987), 13.

21. Anthony Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image,* (Cambridge, 2006), 36. See also Leo Bersani, who describes the "figure of nonrelationality" in Beckett's fiction ("Sociality and Sexuality," in *Is the Rectum a Grave?* [Chicago, 2010], 103-04).

22. Uhlmann, *Samuel Beckett and the Philosophical Image,* 49.

23. Hugh Kenner, "The Cartesian Centaur," in *Critical Essays on Samuel Beckett*, ed. Patrick A. McCarthy (Boston, 1989), p. 62.

24. Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (New York, 1995), p. 17. Henceforth cited in the text as *M*.

25. For the classic sociological account of subject formation—an account informed by Hegel–see George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, (Chicago, 1934). For an account of the centrality of the recognition dynamic to post W. W. 2 politics, see Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a Post-Socialist Age," *New Left Review* 1/212 (July/August 1995).

26. Daniel Katz, *Saying I No More: Subjectivity and Consciousness in the Prose of Samuel Beckett* (Evanston, IL, 1999), 20.

27. Ibid, p. 21.

28. McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 13.

29. J. J. Long in *The Novels of Thomas Bernhard* (Rochester, 2001) argues that *Woodcutters* is "the most autobiographical of all Bernhard's novels…at the same time, it foregrounds fictional devices to a greater extent than b's other fictional works" (146). This is a good way of describing the way Bernhard's "I" is a transformed, rather than simply mimetic, first person. Mark Anderson notes the "metonymic" rather than "metaphoric" relations that bind different persons in the novel into an uncanny unity ("Fragments of a Deluge: The Theater of Thomas Bernhard's Prose," in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, 125). Anderson describes this effort "to break down the barrier between self and other" as "the impossible, insane project behind Bernhard's texts" (126). He reads this "absolutist desire to merge with one's writing," however, as a quasi-suicidal effort to destroy subjectivity itself. His reading thus parallels Katz's reading of Beckett as a deconstructively-

inflected analysis of key features of Bernhard's project that nonetheless misreads, in my view, the nature of the prospect of "real satisfaction" and of the subjectivity that animates it.

30. Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement," *MLN* 94 (1979), 920.

31. On the transformation of the lyric "I" in Western poetic traditions, see Allen Grossman and Mark Halliday, *The Sighted Singer* (Baltimore, 1991). For an account of this process in prose fiction, see J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth Century Writers* (Cambridge MA, 1963). Writing of Emily Bronte, Miller argues "the author herself has disappeared in her creation" (161). Bronte's own sense of the value of her creation is as a private enrichment of her own experience; the reader is needed only to "make it real" (162).

32. Michael Fried has identified a similar strategy in Courbet, who he sees as attempting an "all but literal merger of himself as painter-beholder with the painting on which he was working" (Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, [Chicago, 1990] p. 224). Of course the difference in medium, which enables Bernhard to exploit the grammatical properties of the first person, means that the parallel between these figures remains distant.

33. Wolfgang Iser, "Subjectivity as the Autogenous Cancellation of Its Own Manifestations," in *Samuel Beckett's Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, ed. Harold Bloom, (New York, 1988), 83.

34. The dramatic expansion of creative writing programs in the United States—one of the great transformations of higher education in the past half-century—provides the ideal conditions for the democratization and generalization of Bernhard's way of disappearing from the social world. It has often been said that there are now more writers than readers of serious literature. What has not been noticed, until now, is that this condition approximates modernism's highest goal. The generation of audienceless writers now under training are Bernhard's ideal readers.

I want to stress the word "ideal." There is no question that the creative writing program as it currently exists—and as it has been so brilliantly described in Mark McGurl's recent book—is hostile to Bernhardian transformation. As McGurl argues, the program is oriented towards "excellence," the current preferred word for valuable recognition (*The Program Era* [Cambridge MA, 2009], 273-320). Furthermore, he makes a good case for why the preferred model for first person narration in creative writing workshops—Raymond Carver—operates in a regime of recognition. Carver's minimalism provides a mechanism for lower middle class students to transform their lives in a process that McGurl calls "shame management." The workshop trains the writer to create out of the materials of his life a less-embarrassing surface.

There are good reasons why actually existing creative writing is oriented towards recognition at every level. The program is, after all, embedded in the social world. But it doesn't have to be. The materials of its ideal existence have already been assembled. 1) The infrastructure and staff for training millions of Americans to write. 2) The desire on the part of undergraduates to write about their own lives. 3) The absence of an audience for this writing. In addition, there exists 4) a vestigial, traditional sense that the value of literature lies in its exteriority with respect to the social world of work, ambition, and utility.

All that remains to start up the machine that will enable millions to definitively solve the social problem is 5) the replacement of the old writing-program models Raymond Carver, Sylvia Plath, and Flannery O'Connor with the new writing-program model: Thomas Bernhard.

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DJANGO UNCHAINED, OR, *THE HELP*: HOW "CULTURAL POLITICS" IS WORSE THAN NO POLITICS AT ALL, AND WHY

ADOLPH REED, JR.

Django Unchained, or *The Help*

On reflection, it's possible to see that *Django Unchained* and *The Help* are basically different versions of the same movie. Both dissolve political economy and social relations into individual quests and interpersonal transactions and thus effectively sanitize, respectively, slavery and Jim Crow by dehistoricizing them. The problem is not so much that each film invents cartoonish fictions; it's that the point of the cartoons is to take the place of the actual relations of exploitation that anchored the regime it depicts. In *The Help* the buffoonishly bigoted housewife, Hilly, obsessively pushes a pet bill that would require employers of black domestic servants to provide separate, Jim Crow toilets for them; in *Django Unchained* the sensibility of 1970s blaxploitation imagines "comfort girls" and "Mandingo fighters" as representative slave job descriptions. It's as if Jim Crow had nothing to do with cheap labor and slavery had nothing to do with making slave owners rich. And the point here is not just

that they get the past wrong—it's that the particular way they get it wrong enables them to get the present just as wrong and so their politics are as misbegotten as their history.

Thus, for example, it's only the dehistoricization that makes each film's entirely neoliberal (they could have been scripted by Oprah) happy ending possible. *The Help* ends with Skeeter and the black lead, the maid Aibileen, embarking joyfully on the new, excitingly uncharted paths their book—an account of the master-servant relationship told from the perspective of the servants—has opened for them. But dehistoricization makes it possible not to notice the great distance between those paths and their likely trajectories. For Skeeter the book from which the film takes its name opens a career in the fast track of the journalism and publishing industry. Aibileen's new path was forced upon her because the book got her fired from her intrinsically precarious job, more at-whim than at-will, in one of the few areas of employment available to working-class black women in the segregationist South—the precise likelihood that had made her and other maids initially reluctant to warm to Skeeter's project. Yet Aibileen smiles and strides ever more confidently as she walks home because she has found and articulated her voice.

The implication is that having been fired, rather than portending deeper poverty and economic insecurity, was a moment of liberation; Aibileen, armed with the confidence and self-knowledge conferred by knowing her voice, was now free to venture out into a world of unlimited opportunity and promise. This, of course, is pure neoliberal bullshit, of the same variety that permits the odious Michelle Rhee to assert with a straight face that teachers' defined-benefit pensions deny them "choice" and thereby undermine the quality of public education. But who knows? Perhaps Skeeter brought with her from the 2000s an NGO to arrange microcredit that would enable Aibileen to start up a culturally authentic pie-making venture or a day spa for harried and stressed domestic servants. In the Jackson, Mississippi of 1963, no such options would exist for Aibileen. Instead, she most likely would be blackballed and unable to find a comparable menial job and forced to toil under even more undesirable conditions.

Django Unchained ends with the hero and his lady fair riding happily off into the sunset after he has vanquished evil slave owners and their henchmen and henchwomen. Django and Broomhilda—whose name is spelled like that of the 1970s comic strip character, not the figure in Norse mythology, presumably a pointless Tarantino inside joke—are free. However, their freedom was not won by his prodigious bloodletting; it was obtained within the legal framework that accepted and regulated property rights in slaves. Each had been purchased and manumitted by the German bounty hunter who, as others have noted, is the only character in the film to condemn slavery as an institution.

Django is no insurrectionist. His singular focus from beginning to end is on reclaiming *his* wife from her slave master. Presumably, we are to understand this solipsism as indicative of the depth and intensity of his love, probably also as homage to the borderline sociopathic style of the spaghetti western/blaxploitation hero. Regardless, Django's quest is entirely individualist; he never intends to challenge slavery and never does. Indeed, for the purpose of buttressing the credibility of their ruse, he even countermands his bounty hunter partner's attempt to save—through purchase, of course—a recalcitrant "Mandingo fighter" from being ripped apart by dogs. He is essentially indifferent to the handful of slaves who are freed as incidental byproducts of his actions. The happy ending is that he and Broomhilda ride off together and free in a slavocracy that is not a whit less secure at the moment of celebratory resolution than it was when Django set out on his mission of retrieval and revenge.

In both films the bogus happy endings are possible only because they characterize their respective regimes of racial hierarchy in the superficial terms of interpersonal transactions. In *The Help* segregationism's evil was small-minded bigotry and lack of sensitivity; it was more like bad manners than oppression. In Tarantino's vision, slavery's definitive injustice was its gratuitous and sadistic brutalization and sexualized degradation. Malevolent, ludicrously arrogant whites owned slaves most conspicuously to degrade and torture them. Apart from serving a formal dinner in a plantation house—and Tarantino, the Chance the Gardener of American filmmakers (and Best Original Screenplay? Really?) seems to draw his images of plantation life from *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone With the Wind,* as well as old Warner Brothers cartoons—and the Mandingo fighters and comfort girls, Tarantino's slaves do no actual work at all; they're present only to be brutalized. In fact, the cavalier sadism with which owners and traders treat them belies the fact that slaves were, first and foremost, capital investments. It's not for nothing that New Orleans has a monument to the estimated 20,000-30,000 antebellum Irish immigrants who died constructing the New Basin Canal; slave labor was too valuable for such lethal work.

The Help trivializes Jim Crow by reducing it to its most superficial features and irrational extremes. The master-servant nexus was, and is, a labor relation. And the problem of labor relations particular to the segregationist regime wasn't employers' bigoted lack of respect or failure to hear the voices of the domestic servants, or even benighted refusal to recognize their equal humanity. It was that the labor relation was structured within and sustained by a political and institutional order that severely impinged on, when it didn't altogether deny, black citizens' avenues for pursuit of grievances and standing before the law. The crucial lynchpin of that order was neither myopia nor malevolence; it was suppression of black citizens' capacities for direct participation in civic and political life, with racial disfranchisement and the constant threat of terror intrinsic to substantive denial of equal protection and due process before the

law as its principal mechanisms. And the point of the regime wasn't racial hatred or enforced disregard; its roots lay in the much more prosaic concern of dominant elites to maintain their political and economic hegemony by suppressing potential opposition and in the linked ideal of maintaining access to a labor force with no options but to accept employment on whatever terms employers offered. (Those who liked *The Help* or found it moving should watch *The Long Walk Home*, a 1990 film set in Montgomery, Alabama, around the bus boycott. I suspect that's the film you thought you were watching when you saw *The Help*.)

Django Unchained trivializes slavery by reducing it to its most barbaric and lurid excesses. Slavery also was fundamentally a labor relation. It was a form of forced labor regulated—systematized, enforced and sustained—through a political and institutional order that specified it as a civil relationship granting owners absolute control over the life, liberty, and fortunes of others defined as eligible for enslavement, including most of all control of the conditions of their labor and appropriation of its product. Historian Kenneth M. Stampp quotes a slaveholder's succinct explanation: "'For what purpose does the master hold the servant?' asked an ante-bellum Southerner. 'Is it not that by his labor, he, the master, may accumulate wealth?'" [1]

That absolute control permitted horrible, unthinkable brutality, to be sure, but perpetrating such brutality was neither the point of slavery nor its essential injustice. The master-slave relationship could, and did, exist without brutality, and certainly without sadism and sexual degradation. In Tarantino's depiction, however, it is not clear that slavery shorn of its extremes of brutality would be objectionable. It does not diminish the historical injustice and horror of slavery to note that it was not the product of *sui generis*, transcendent Evil but a terminus on a continuum of bound labor that was more norm than exception in the Anglo-American world until well into the eighteenth century, if not later. As legal historian Robert Steinfeld points out, it is not so much slavery, but the emergence of the notion of free labor—as the absolute control of a worker over her person—that is the historical anomaly that needs to be explained. [2] *Django Unchained* sanitizes the essential injustice of slavery by not problematizing it and by focusing instead on the extremes of brutality and degradation it permitted, to the extent of making some of them up, just as does *The Help* regarding Jim Crow.

The Help could not imagine a more honest and complex view of segregationist Mississippi partly because it uses the period ultimately as a prop for human interest cliché, and *Django Unchained's* absurdly ahistorical view of plantation slavery is only backdrop for the merger of spaghetti western and blaxploitation hero movie. Neither film is really *about* the period in which it is set. Film critic Manohla Dargis, reflecting a decade ago on what she saw as a growing Hollywood penchant for period films, observed that such films are typically

"stripped of politics and historical fact…and instead will find meaning in appealing to seemingly timeless ideals and stirring scenes of love, valor and compassion" and that "the Hollywood professionals who embrace accuracy most enthusiastically nowadays are costume designers."[3] That observation applies to both these films, although in *Django* concern with historically accurate representation of material culture applies only to the costumes and props of the 1970s film genres Tarantino wants to recall.

To make sense of how *Django Unchained* has received so much warmer a reception among black and leftoid commentators than did *The Help,* it is useful to recall Margaret Thatcher's 1981 dictum that "economics are the method: the object is to change the soul."[4] Simply put, she and her element have won. Few observers—among opponents and boosters alike—have noted how deeply and thoroughly both films are embedded in the practical ontology of neoliberalism, the complex of unarticulated assumptions and unexamined first premises that provide its common sense, its lifeworld.

Objection to *The Help* has been largely of the shooting fish in a barrel variety: complaints about the film's paternalistic treatment of the maids, which generally have boiled down to an objection that the master-servant relation is thematized at all, as well as the standard, predictable litany of anti-racist charges about whites speaking for blacks, the film's inattentiveness to the fact that at that time in Mississippi black people were busily engaged in liberating themselves, etc. An illustration of this tendency that conveniently refers to several other variants of it is Akiba Solomon, "Why I'm Just Saying No to 'The Help' and Its Historical Whitewash" in *Color Lines,* August 10, 2011, available at: http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/08/why_im_just_saying_no_to_the_help.html.

Defenses of *Django Unchained* pivot on claims about the social significance of the narrative of a black hero. One node of this argument emphasizes the need to validate a history of autonomous black agency and "resistance" as a politico-existential desideratum. It accommodates a view that stresses the importance of recognition of rebellious or militant individuals and revolts in black American history. Another centers on a notion that exposure to fictional black heroes can inculcate the sense of personal efficacy necessary to overcome the psychological effects of inequality and to facilitate upward mobility and may undermine some whites' negative stereotypes about black people. In either register assignment of social or political importance to depictions of black heroes rests on presumptions about the nexus of mass cultural representation, social commentary, and racial justice that are more significant politically than the controversy about the film itself.

In both versions, this argument casts political and economic problems in psychological terms. Injustice appears as a matter of disrespect and denial of due recognition, and the remedies proposed—which are all about images projected and the distribution of jobs associated with their projection—look a lot like self-esteem engineering. Moreover, nothing could indicate more strikingly the extent of neoliberal ideological hegemony than the idea that the mass culture industry and its representational practices constitute a meaningful terrain for struggle to advance egalitarian interests. It is possible to entertain that view seriously only by ignoring the fact that the production and consumption of mass culture is thoroughly embedded in capitalist material and ideological imperatives.

That, incidentally, is why I prefer the usage "mass culture" to describe this industry and its products and processes, although I recognize that it may seem archaic to some readers. The mass culture v. popular culture debate dates at least from the 1950s and has continued with occasional crescendos ever since.[5] For two decades or more, instructively in line with the retreat of possibilities for concerted left political action outside the academy, the popular culture side of that debate has been dominant, along with its view that the products of this precinct of mass consumption capitalism are somehow capable of transcending or subverting their material identity as commodities, if not avoiding that identity altogether. Despite the dogged commitment of several generations of American Studies and cultural studies graduate students who want to valorize watching television and immersion in hip-hop or other specialty market niches centered on youth recreation and the most ephemeral fads as both intellectually avant-garde and politically "resistive," it should be time to admit that that earnest disposition is intellectually shallow and an ersatz politics. The idea of "popular" culture posits a spurious autonomy and organicism that actually affirm mass industrial processes by effacing them, especially in the putatively rebel, fringe, or underground market niches that depend on the fiction of the authentic to announce the birth of new product cycles.

The power of the hero is a cathartic trope that connects mainly with the sensibility of adolescent boys—of whatever nominal age. Tarantino has allowed as much, responding to black critics' complaints about the violence and copious use of "nigger" by proclaiming "Even for the film's biggest detractors, I think their children will grow up and love this movie. I think it could become a rite of passage for young black males."[6] This response stems no doubt from Tarantino's arrogance and opportunism, and some critics have denounced it as no better than racially presumptuous. But he is hardly alone in defending the film with an assertion that it gives black youth heroes, is generically inspirational or both. Similarly, in a January 9, 2012 interview on the *Daily Show,* George Lucas adduced this line to promote his even more execrable race-oriented live-action cartoon, *Red Tails,* which, incidentally, trivializes segregation in the military by reducing it to a matter of bad or outmoded attitudes. The

ironic effect is significant understatement of both the obstacles the Tuskegee airmen faced and their actual accomplishments by rendering them as backdrop for a blackface, slapped-together remake of *Top Gun.* (Norman Jewison's 1984 film, *A Soldier's Story,* adapted from Charles Fuller's *A Soldier's Play,* is a much more sensitive and thought-provoking rumination on the complexities of race and racism in the Jim Crow U.S. Army—an army mobilized, as my father, a veteran of the Normandy invasion, never tired of remarking sardonically, to fight the racist Nazis.) Lucas characterized his film as "patriotic, even jingoistic" and was explicit that he wanted to create a film that would feature "real heroes" and would be "inspirational for teenage boys." Much as *Django Unchained*'s defenders compare it on those terms favorably to *Lincoln*, Lucas hyped *Red Tails* as being a genuine hero story unlike "*Glory,* where you have a lot of white officers running those guys into cannon fodder."

Of course, the film industry is sharply tilted toward the youth market, as Lucas and Tarantino are acutely aware. But Lucas, unlike Tarantino, was not being defensive in asserting his desire to inspire the young; he offered it more as a boast. As he has said often, he'd wanted for years to make a film about the Tuskegee airmen, and he reports that he always intended telling their story as a feel-good, crossover inspirational tale. Telling it that way also fits in principle (though in this instance not in practice, as *Red Tails* bombed at the box office) with the commercial imperatives of increasingly degraded mass entertainment.

Dargis observed that the ahistoricism of the recent period films is influenced by market imperatives in a global film industry. The more a film is tied to historically specific contexts, the more difficult it is to sell elsewhere. That logic selects for special effects-driven products as well as standardized, decontextualized and simplistic—"universal"—story lines, preferably set in fantasy worlds of the filmmakers' design. As Dargis notes, these films find their meaning in shopworn clichés puffed up as timeless verities, including uplifting and inspirational messages for youth. But something else underlies the stress on inspiration in the black-interest films, which shows up in critical discussion of them as well.

All these films—*The Help, Red Tails, Django Unchained,* even *Lincoln* and *Glory*—make a claim to public attention based partly on their social significance beyond entertainment or art, and they do so because they engage with significant moments in the history of the nexus of race and politics in the United States. There would not be so much discussion and debate and no Golden Globe, NAACP Image, or Academy Award nominations for *The Help, Red Tails,* or *Django Unchained* if those films weren't defined partly by thematizing that nexus of race and politics in some way.

The pretensions to social significance that fit these films into their particular market niche don't conflict with the mass-market film industry's imperative of infantilization because those pretensions are only part of the show; they are little more than empty bromides, product differentiation in the patter of "seemingly timeless ideals" which the mass entertainment industry constantly recycles. (Andrew O'Hehir observes as much about *Django Unchained,* which he describes as "a three-hour trailer for a movie that never happens."[7]) That comes through in the defense of these films, in the face of evidence of their failings, that, after all, they are "just entertainment." Their substantive content is ideological; it is their contribution to the naturalization of neoliberalism's ontology as they propagandize its universalization across spatial, temporal, and social contexts.

Purportedly in the interest of popular education cum entertainment, *Django Unchained* and *The Help*, and *Red Tails* for that matter, read the sensibilities of the present into the past by divesting the latter of its specific historicity. They reinforce the sense of the past as generic old-timey times distinguishable from the present by superficial inadequacies—outmoded fashion, technology, commodities and ideas—since overcome. In *The Help* Hilly's obsession with her pet project marks segregation's petty apartheid as irrational in part because of the expense rigorously enforcing it would require; the breadwinning husbands express their frustration with it as financially impractical. Hilly is a mean-spirited, narrow-minded person whose rigid and tone-deaf commitment to segregationist consistency not only reflects her limitations of character but also is economically unsound, a fact that further defines her, and the cartoon version of Jim Crow she represents, as irrational.

The deeper message of these films, insofar as they deny the integrity of the past, is that there is no thinkable alternative to the ideological order under which we live. This message is reproduced throughout the mass entertainment industry; it shapes the normative reality even of the fantasy worlds that masquerade as escapism. Even among those who laud the supposedly cathartic effects of Django's insurgent violence as reflecting a greater truth of abolition than passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, few commentators notice that he and Broomhilda attained their freedom through a market transaction.[8] This reflects an ideological hegemony in which students all too commonly wonder why planters would deny slaves or sharecroppers education because education would have made them more productive as workers. And, tellingly, in a glowing rumination in the *Daily Kos*, Ryan Brooke inadvertently thrusts mass culture's destruction of historicity into bold relief by declaiming on "the segregated society presented" in *Django Unchained* and babbling on—with the absurdly ill-informed and pontifical self-righteousness that the blogosphere enables—about our need to take "responsibility for preserving racial divides" if we are "to put segregation in the past and fully fulfill Dr. King's dream."[9] It's all an indistinguishable mush of bad stuff about racial

injustice in the old-timey days. Decoupled from its moorings in a historically specific political economy, slavery becomes at bottom a problem of race relations, and, as historian Michael R. West argues forcefully, "race relations" emerged as and has remained a discourse that substitutes etiquette for equality. [10]

This is the context in which we should take account of what "inspiring the young" means as a justification for those films. In part, the claim to inspire is a simple platitude, more filler than substance. It is, as I've already noted, both an excuse for films that are cartoons made for an infantilized, generic market and an assertion of a claim to a particular niche within that market. More insidiously, though, the ease with which "inspiration of youth" rolls out in this context resonates with three related and disturbing themes: 1) underclass ideology's narratives—now all Americans' common sense—that link poverty and inequality most crucially to (racialized) cultural inadequacy and psychological damage; 2) the belief that racial inequality stems from prejudice, bad ideas and ignorance, and 3) the cognate of both: the neoliberal rendering of social justice as equality of opportunity, with an aspiration of creating "competitive individual minority agents who might stand a better fighting chance in the neoliberal rat race rather than a positive alternative vision of a society that eliminates the need to fight constantly against disruptive market whims in the first place." [11]

This politics seeps through in the chatter about *Django Unchained* in particular. Erin Aubry Kaplan, in the *Los Angeles Times* article in which Tarantino asserts his appeal to youth, remarks that the "most disturbing detail [about slavery] is the emotional violence and degradation directed at blacks that effectively keeps them at the bottom of the social order, a place they still occupy today." Writing on the Institute of the Black World blog, one Dr. Kwa David Whitaker, a 1960s-style cultural nationalist, declaims on *Django's* testament to the sources of degradation and "unending servitude [that] has rendered [black Americans] almost incapable of making sound evaluations of our current situations or the kind of steps we must take to improve our condition." [12] In its blindness to political economy, this notion of black cultural or psychological damage as either a legacy of slavery or of more indirect recent origin—e.g., urban migration, crack epidemic, matriarchy, babies making babies—comports well with the reduction of slavery and Jim Crow to interpersonal dynamics and bad attitudes. It substitutes a "politics of recognition" and a patter of racial uplift for politics and underwrites a conflation of political action and therapy.

With respect to the nexus of race and inequality, this discourse supports victim-blaming programs of personal rehabilitation and self-esteem engineering—inspiration—as easily as it does multiculturalist respect for difference, which, by the way, also feeds back to self-esteem engineering and inspiration as nodes within a larger political economy of race relations. Either way, this is a discourse that displaces a politics challenging social structures that reproduce

inequality with concern for the feelings and characteristics of individuals and of categories of population statistics reified as singular groups that are equivalent to individuals. This discourse has made it possible (again, but more sanctimoniously this time) to characterize destruction of low-income housing as an uplift strategy for poor people; curtailment of access to public education as "choice"; being cut adrift from essential social wage protections as "empowerment"; and individual material success as socially important role modeling.

Neoliberalism's triumph is affirmed with unselfconscious clarity in the ostensibly leftist defenses of *Django Unchained* that center on the theme of slaves' having liberated themselves. Trotskyists, would-be anarchists, and psychobabbling identitarians have their respective sectarian garnishes: Trotskyists see everywhere the bugbear of "bureaucratism" and mystify "self-activity;" anarchists similarly fetishize direct action and voluntarism and oppose large-scale public institutions on principle, and identitarians romanticize essentialist notions of organic, folkish authenticity under constant threat from institutions. However, all are indistinguishable from the nominally libertarian right in their disdain for government and institutionally based political action, which their common reflex is to disparage as inauthentic or corrupt.

The previous year's version of the socially significant film bearing on race (sort of), Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, which also received startlingly positive responses from nominal progressives,[13] marks the reactionary vector onto which those several interpretive strains converge. It lays out an exoticizing narrative of quaint, closer-to-nature primitives living in an area outside the south Louisiana levee system called the Bathtub, who simply don't want and actively resist the oppressive intrusions—specifically, medical care and hurricane evacuation, though, in fairness, they also mark their superiority by tut-tutting at the presence of oil refineries—of a civilization that is out of touch with their way of life and is destroying nature to boot. The film validates their spiritually rich if economically impoverished culture and their right to it. (Actually, the Bathtub's material infrastructure seems to derive mainly from scavenging, which should suggest a problem at the core of this bullshit allegory for all except those who imagine dumpster-diving, back-to-nature-in-the-city squatterism as a politics.) Especially given its setting in south Louisiana and the hype touting the authenticity of its New Orleans-based crew and cast, *Beasts* most immediately evokes a warm and fuzzy rendition of the retrograde post-Katrina line that those odd people down there wouldn't evacuate because they're so intensely committed to place. It also brings to mind Leni Riefenstahl's post-prison photo essays on the Nilotic groups whose beautiful primitiveness she imagined herself capturing for posterity before they vanished under a superior civilization's advance.[14]

Beasts of the Southern Wild stands out also as a pure exemplar of the debasement of the notion of a social cause through absorption into the commercial imperative, the next logical step from fun-run or buy-a-tee-shirt activism. The film's website, has a "get involved" link, a ploy clearly intended to generate an affective identification and to define watching and liking the film as a form of social engagement. There's nothing to "get involved" with except propagandizing for the film. But the injunction to get involved pumps the idea that going to see a movie, and spending money to do so, is participating in a social movement. (I happened to be on a flight from Hartford, Connecticut, to Chicago with Oprah's BFF and my local news anchor, Gayle King, on the premiere weekend of Oprah's film adaptation of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Gayle intimated in a stage whisper to the gaggle of gushing Oprah fans seated around her that it was *very* important to see the film on opening weekend in order to build the all-important box office count. I hadn't realized theretofore that making yet more money for Oprah ranks as a social responsibility.) In this device Zeitlin repeats a technique employed by Davis Guggenheim's *Waiting for Superman,* the corporate school privatization movement's *Triumph of the Will,* speaking of Leni Riefenstahl, and its fictional counterpart Daniel Barnz's *Won't Back Down,* that movement's *Birth of a Nation*. It is a minor cause for optimism that, to put it mildly, neither of those abominations came anywhere near its predecessor's commercial or cultural success.

In addition to knee-jerk anti-statism, the objection that the slaves freed themselves, as it shows up in favorable comparison of *Django Unchained* to *Lincoln,* stems from a racial pietism that issued from the unholy union of cultural studies and black studies in the university. More than twenty years of "resistance" studies that find again and again, at this point ritualistically, that oppressed people have and express agency have contributed to undermining the idea of politics as a discrete sphere of activity directed toward the outward-looking project of affecting the social order, most effectively through creating, challenging or redefining institutions that anchor collective action with the objective of developing and wielding power. Instead, the notion has been largely evacuated of specific content at all. "Politics" can refer to whatever one wants it to; all that's required is an act of will in making a claim.

The fact that there has been no serious left presence with any political capacity in this country for at least a generation has exacerbated this problem. In the absence of dynamic movements that cohere around affirmative visions for making the society better, on the order of, say, Franklin Roosevelt's 1944 "Second Bill of Rights," and that organize and agitate around programs instrumental to pursuit of such visions, what remains is the fossil record of past movements—the still photo legacies of their public events, postures, and outcomes. Over time, the idea that a "left" is defined by commitment to a vision of social transformation and substantive program for realizing it has receded from cultural memory. Being on the left

has become instead a posture, an identity, utterly disconnected from any specific practical commitments.

Thus star Maggie Gyllenhaal and director Daniel Barnz defended themselves against complaints about their complicity in the hideously anti-union propaganda film *Won't Back Down* by adducing their identities as progressives. Gyllenhaal insisted that the movie couldn't be anti-union because "There's no world in which I would ever, EVER make an anti-union movie. My parents are left of Trotsky."[15] Barnz took a similar tack: "I'm a liberal Democrat, very pro-union, a member of two unions. I marched with my union a couple of years ago when we were on strike."[16] And Kathryn Bigelow similarly has countered criticism that her *Zero Dark Thirty* justifies torture and American militarism more broadly by invoking her identity as "a lifelong pacifist."[17] Being a progressive is now more a matter of how one thinks about oneself than what one stands for or does in the world. The best that can be said for that perspective is that it registers acquiescence in defeat. It amounts to an effort to salvage an idea of a left by reformulating it as a sensibility *within* neoliberalism rather than a challenge to it.

Gyllenhaal, Barnz, and Bigelow exemplify the power of ideology as a mechanism that harmonizes the principles one likes to believe one holds with what advances one's material interests; they also attest to the fact that the transmutation of leftism into pure self-image exponentially increases the potential power of that function of ideology. Upton Sinclair's quip—"It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it"—takes on all the more force when applied not merely to actions or interpretations of an external world but to devoutly savored self-perception as well.

That left political imagination now operates unself-consciously within the practical ontology of neoliberalism is also the most important lesson to be drawn from progressives' discussion of *Django Unchained* and, especially, the move to compare it with *Lincoln*. Jon Wiener, writing in *The Nation,* renders the following comparisons: "In Spielberg's film, the leading black female character is a humble seamstress in the White House whose eyes fill with tears of gratitude when Congress votes to abolish slavery. In Tarantino's film, the leading female character (Kerry Washington) is a defiant slave who has been branded on the face as a punishment for running away, and is forced—by Leonardo DiCaprio—to work as a prostitute. In Spielberg's film, old white men make history, and black people thank them for giving them their freedom. In Tarantino's, a black gunslinger goes after the white slavemaster with homicidal vengeance."[18]

Never mind that, for what it's worth, Kerry Washington's character, as she actually appears in the film, is mainly a cipher, a simpering damsel in distress more reminiscent of Fay Wray in the original *King Kong* than heroines of the blaxploitation era's eponymous vehicles *Coffy* or *Foxy Brown*. More problematically, Wiener's juxtapositions reproduce the elevation of private, voluntarist action as a politics—somehow more truly true or authentic, or at least more appealing emotionally—over the machinations of government and institutional actors. That is a default presumption of the identitarian/culturalist left and is also a cornerstone of neoliberalism's practical ontology.

In an essay on *Lincoln* published a month earlier, Wiener identifies as the central failing of the film its dedication "to the proposition that Lincoln freed the slaves" and concludes, after considerable meandering and nit-picking ambivalence that brings the term pettifoggery to mind, "slavery died as a result of the actions of former slaves."[19] This either/or construct is both historically false and wrong-headed, and it is especially surprising that a professional historian like Wiener embraces it. The claim that slaves' actions were responsible for the death of slavery is not only inaccurate; it is a pointless and counterproductive misrepresentation. What purpose is served by denying the significance of the four years of war and actions of the national government of the United States in ending slavery? Besides, it was indeed the Thirteenth Amendment that abolished slavery.

Slaves' mass departure from plantations was self-emancipation, by definition. Their doing so weakened the southern economy and undermined the secessionists' capacity to fight, and the related infusion of black troops into the Union army provided a tremendous lift both on the battlefield and for northern morale. How does noting that proximity of Union troops greatly emboldened that self-emancipation diminish the import of their actions? But it was nonetheless the Thirteenth Amendment that finally outlawed slavery once and for all in the United States and provided a legal basis for preempting efforts to reinstate it in effect. Moreover, for all the debate concerning Lincoln's motives, the sincerity of his commitment to emancipation, and his personal views of blacks, and notwithstanding its technical limits with respect to enforceability, the Emancipation Proclamation emboldened black people, slave and free, and encouraged all slavery's opponents. And, as Wiener notes himself, the proclamation tied the war explicitly to the elimination of slavery as a system.

Firefly, or The Road to Serfdom

So why is a tale about a manumitted slave/homicidal black gunslinger more palatable to a contemporary leftoid sensibility than either a similarly cartoonish one about black maids and their white employers or one that thematizes Lincoln's effort to push the Thirteenth

Amendment through the House of Representatives? The answer is, to quote the saccharine 1970s ballad, "Feelings, nothing more than feelings." Wiener's juxtapositions reflect the political common sense that gives pride of place to demonstrations of respect for the "voices" of the oppressed and recognition of their suffering, agency, and accomplishments. That common sense informs the proposition that providing inspiration has social or political significance. But it equally shapes the generic human-interest "message" of films like *The Help* that represent injustice as an issue of human relations—the alchemy that promises to reconcile social justice and capitalist class power as a win/win for everyone by means of attitude adjustments and deepened mutual understanding.

That common sense underwrites the tendency to reduce the past to a storehouse of encouraging post-it messages for the present. It must, because the presumption that the crucial stakes of political action concern recognition and respect for the oppressed's voices is a presentist view, and mining the past to reinforce it requires anachronism. The large struggles against slavery and Jim Crow were directed toward altering structured patterns of social relations anchored in law and state power, but stories of that sort are incompatible with both global marketing imperatives and the ideological predilections of neoliberalism and its identitarian loyal opposition. One can only shudder at the prospect of how Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film, *The Battle of Algiers,* or Costa-Gavras's *State of Siege* (1972) would be remade today. (Guy Ritchie's and Madonna's execrable 2002 remake of Lina Wertmüller's 1974 film *Swept Away* may provide a clue; their abomination completely erases the original film's complex class and political content and replaces it with a banal—aka "universal"—story of an encounter between an older woman and a younger man, while at the same time meticulously, almost eerily, reproducing, scene by scene, the visual structure of Wertmüller's film.)

Particularly as those messages strive for "universality" as well as inspiration, their least common denominator tends toward the generic story of individual triumph over adversity. But the imagery of the individual overcoming odds to achieve fame, success, or recognition also maps onto the fantasy of limitless upward mobility for enterprising and persistent individuals who persevere and remain true to their dreams. As such, it is neoliberalism's version of an ideal of social justice, legitimizing both success and failure as products of individual character. When combined with a multiculturalist rhetoric of "difference" that reifies as autonomous cultures—in effect racializes—what are actually contingent modes of life reproduced by structural inequalities, this fantasy crowds inequality as a metric of injustice out of the picture entirely. This accounts for the popularity of reactionary dreck like *Beasts of the Southern Wild* among people who should know better. The denizens of the Bathtub actively, even militantly, choose their poverty and cherish it and should be respected and appreciated for doing so. But no one ever supposed that Leni Riefenstahl was on the left.

The tale type of individual overcoming has become a script into which the great social struggles of the last century and a half have commonly been reformulated to fit the requirements of a wan, gestural multiculturalism. Those movements have been condensed into the personae of Great Men and Great Women—Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, George Washington Carver, Martin Luther King, Jr., Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer and others—who seem to have changed the society apparently by virtue of manifesting their own greatness. The different jacket photos adorning the 1982 and 1999 editions of Doug McAdam's well known sociological study of the civil rights movement, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970,* exemplify the shift. The first edition's cover was a photo of an anonymous group of marching protesters; the second edition featured the (staged) photo—made iconic by its use in an Apple advertising campaign—of a dignified Rosa Parks sitting alone on the front seat of a bus looking pensively out the window. [20]

Ironically, the scholarly turn away from organizations and institutional processes to valorize instead the local and everyday dimensions of those movements may have exacerbated this tendency by encouraging a focus on previously unrecognized individual figures and celebrating their lives and "contributions." Rather than challenging the presumption that consequential social change is made by the will of extraordinary individuals, however, this scholarship in effect validates it by inflating the currency of Greatness so much that it can be found any and everywhere. Giving props to the unrecognized or underappreciated has become a feature particularly of that scholarship that defines scholarly production as a terrain of political action in itself and aspires to the function of the "public intellectual." A perusal of the rosters of African American History Month and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day speakers at any random sample of colleges and universities attests to how closely this scholar/activist turn harmonizes with the reductionist individualism of prosperity religion and the varieties of latter-day mind cure through which much of the professional-managerial stratum of all races, genders, and sexual orientations, narrates its understandings of the world.

There is another, more mundane factor at play in the desire for "black heroes." It stems from a view that Hollywood is resistant to depiction of black heroes and that, therefore, any film with a bona fide black hero is the equivalent of a civil rights victory. Minister J. Kojo Livingston, writing in the *Louisiana Weekly* put his appreciation of *Django Unchained* succinctly: "I liked the Black guy winning in the end." [21] That's fair enough, so far as it goes, particularly when consideration is given to how recently it has become possible to expect the black guy to win in the end. I was quite impressed and gratified at the time that Keith David's character made it along with Kurt Russell's to the end of John Carpenter's 1982 remake of *The Thing* and that in the 1979 *Alien* Yaphet Kotto's character was the penultimate one killed and only

then because of the ineptitude of another crewmember who blocked his line of attack on the creature. When we watched the 1982 *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan,* my then twelve year-old son remarked that he'd want to leave the theater if the black starship captain (played by Paul Winfield) killed himself to save Captain Kirk, which of course happened moments later. (As Minister Livingston continued, "Heck, I liked the Black guy even living to see the end of a movie.") But, understandable as that impulse is, it is problematic as a basis for making claims about films' social significance at this point in American history. Black characters or characters played by black actors now routinely survive to the end of films in which most characters die, and black actors commonly enough play leading roles.

Literature scholar Kenneth Warren has suggested that objections to films like *Lincoln* on the basis of what they don't do often rest on a premise that mass-market films depicting themes that bear on black American history are so rare that each of them is under pressure to address everything that could be addressed. So a film that focuses on a particular legislative initiative in a brief period at the end of 1864 and early months of 1865 has sparked objections that it does not address issues outside its scope, such as Lincoln's evolving views of blacks, the role of black abolitionists and black troops in creating the climate that made the Thirteenth Amendment possible. But the sense that everything must be said at once sets an expectation that no film could ever satisfy even minimally. And, as Warren notes, the notion that occasions for such films are extremely rare is also problematic. That belief, like the premise that Hollywood refuses black heroes, is sustained largely by reference to a past—although, as I indicate above, a not very distant one—when it was clearly true.

Of course stereotypical representations of black characters remain. I had exactly the same reaction as Armond White to Hushpuppy, Quvenzhané Wallis's character in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*. When the two-bit magical realism and lame ponderousness of the dialogue are boiled off, she is, down to her name, a contemporary pickaninny and a window into the racial fantasy life of the hipster carpetbaggers who have flocked to New Orleans post-Katrina searching for authenticity and careers. Like all good satire, the "Black Acting School" in Robert Townsend's 1987 *Hollywood Shuffle* had a foundation in material reality. Viola Davis seems to be a quite accomplished actor, but not only did she do basically the same performance in *The Help* and *Won't Back Down;* both characters are all too evocative of a stock figure—the quietly strong, long-suffering black woman depicted over the years by a string of actors from Joanna Moore and Claudia McNeil to Mary Alice, Beah Richards, Cicely Tyson, and now, woe be unto those with low tolerance for overacting, Angela Bassett. And it is not unreasonable to contend that double standards persist for black and white actors, directors, and thematic matter. Denzel Washington, after turning in basically the same sort of performance in a spate of films since the 1990s, finally won the best actor Academy Award for

the version of it that was in the character of a corrupt, murderous cop, and he was nominated again in 2013 for a role as another ethically and morally flawed character, this time an alcoholic airline pilot.

Nevertheless, racial stereotypes and morally compromised characters are not the totality of black representation in films any more, nor even the preponderance. What made *Hollywood Shuffle* possible, and more significantly what made it successful, was the extent to which the conditions it satirized were already under critical scrutiny if not retreat. And a debate over whether there are *enough* starring roles for black characters, black actors cast in leading roles that may not be racially specified, or films with black subject matter is a much more complicated and ambiguous matter—enough according to what standard of expectation, after all?—than whether there are *any*.

The more interesting issue is the inclination to see the racial limitations of the present through the lens of the exclusion of the past. This habit of mind shapes the claim that *Django Unchained* breaks a convention of sanitizing slavery in both films and American culture in general. Harvard sociologist Lawrence D. Bobo rests his proclamation of *Django's* cinematic and cultural significance, which belies his nearly simultaneous articulation of the "just entertainment" defense, on an assertion that "For too long American cinema has presented—and American audiences have accepted, digested and largely tacitly embraced—a hopelessly sanitized version of slavery in the South." He goes on to declaim on a "collective memory" in which the "defining image, of course, is that of Scarlett O'Hara and family enjoying the 'good life' before 'the War.' Slavery has been often rendered just a benign backdrop to the beauty, elegance and, indeed, virtue of the plantation elite."[22] Bobo is hardly alone in asserting that claim. It is a standard refrain, even including references to *Gone With the Wind* and *Birth of a Nation,* in defenses of Tarantino's film.[23]

Are we really to believe that, notwithstanding the massive sea change in the society since the end of World War II, Hollywood's depictions and the baseline of most Americans' presumptions about slavery are unchanged since 1915 or even 1939? In his defense of *Django* Adam Serwer at least limits the domain of persistent "lionization of the Lost Cause and the Confederacy" to the genre of the "revenge Western," but that qualification takes all the starch out of the claim. Redemption of the genre of the revenge Western seems like a low stakes, even lower reward undertaking. It would hardly be a notable victory for racial justice or any other significant social interest. I take Serwer's point that the "trope of the wronged former Confederate" is visible, albeit "excised from its historical context" in the sci-fi television program *Firefly* and its 2005 adaptation to feature-length film, *Serenity*. However, that excision from social context means more than he suggests.

Firefly's superficial parallels with the ex-Confederate hero trope are strong enough to have provoked discussion among devotees and adjustments in dialogue to have leading characters denounce slavery off the cuff.[24] The central characters are a crew of defeated insurgents operating as renegade traders who remain hostile to the oppressive and corrupt central authority that defeated them, and that makes the parallel to the wronged Confederate trope seem especially, even disturbingly, strong. I had an immediate and intensely negative reaction to it, even though the defeated rebels and those in league with them are a racially diverse lot, and neither the settings nor plot devices in any way evoke the slave South. Jeff Hart, in an essay on the theme of the brooding ex-Confederate hero in AMC's period drama *Hell on Wheels,* contends that *Firefly* "masterfully extracts all the cool stuff about being a Confederate that we love in our outlaws without any of the bad stuff (like slavery!)."[25]

However, that observation begs the question whether the "cool stuff about being a Confederate" can reasonably be seen as evoking the 1861 secessionist insurrection at all if it comes without that "bad stuff," without which there would have been no secessionist movement at all. Slavery, as Confederate Vice-President Alexander Stephens characterized it weeks after Lincoln's inauguration, in the midst of the secessionist frenzy, was the "cornerstone" of the southern order that he and his confreres considered in jeopardy.[26]

I recognize the impulse to treat the disconnected trope as though it has an essential meaning fixed by that distinctive context because that connection has such a lengthy, and more recently a charged, history. It has been around, after all, at least since the romance of the James brothers. As I remark above, that impulse affected my own reception of *Firefly*. It may be that Joss Whedon's appropriation of the trope of the brooding ex-Confederate outlaw hero for a setting that has nothing at all, even allegorically, to do with the nineteenth-century South in some way works backward to sanitize it in its more familiar context, but that seems far-fetched. There are, however, two ways in which that impulse is problematic.

First, the view that the trope of the emotionally damaged renegade outlaw of a Lost Cause is necessarily Confederate, even when disconnected entirely from racial subordination and slavery, may in effect validate apologists' argument that the secessionist treason rested on motives besides defense of slavery. The Lost Cause narrative emerged out of the consolidation of planter-merchant class hegemony in the South at the onset of the twentieth century. Films like *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind* were instrumental in propagating this discourse, which sought to preempt non-southern opposition to racial disfranchisement and Jim Crow. Rhetorically, in an era in which the secessionist insurrection was within two generations of living memory for many Americans (as many as 10,000 veterans of the hostilities were still alive as late as 1938), that project involved defusing slavery's legacy as a point of contention by representing it as a benign natural order in the antebellum era

and by asserting that secessionism's objective wasn't protecting the institution of slavery but defending a conveniently evanescent "way of life." [27]

Second, giving in to that impulse directs attention away from the political vision *Firefly* actually does articulate, which says more about the character of our historical moment. *Firefly's* narrative conceit resonates much more clearly with contemporary anti-statist conventions than it evokes the Lost Cause line. The trope of resistance to a brutal and insensitive central authority is what today corrals social imagination in that perverse ratification of inequality and bourgeois class power commonly euphemized as an abstract "freedom" or "liberty." This conceit permeates mass entertainment from *The Matrix* series to *The Hunger Games* and a line of dystopian fantasy that stretches back at least to Norman Jewison's original *Rollerball* in 1975. [28] It is recycled endlessly in the melodramatic cult of the maverick cop or physician who bristles under the corrupting and defeatist constraints of bureaucratic oversight—what otherwise might be described as accountability to the public trust. It has been a dominant theme in the genre of the disaster film and the lineage of sci-fi horrors in space spawned by *Alien*.

That the evil central authority is often cast as direct rule by corporations, as in *Rollerball* and *Alien* (where it may reflect these stories' roots in the still politically contested 1970s), is by now more a misdirection than a mitigation of the anti-government narrative; that plot device collapses the distinction between public and private and serves as a naïve counter to criticisms that the films purvey right-wing politics. However, the overarching narrative framework pits the local, familial/*gemeinschaftlich* and individual against the central, distant, and bureaucratic, which are invariably villainous. That device is only a step away rhetorically from the crypto-fascist, stab-in-the-back Vietnam vigilante films like the *Rambo* series and *Missing In Action*. [29]

But the ideological patron saints of these films are Friedrich Hayek or Gary Becker more than Julius Streicher or Ted Nugent. It is the trials and torments, and the glorification of the individual, often even The One, that drive their narrative arcs—even when they imagine themselves doing otherwise. The priority of individual will is a thread connecting fantasy, fiction and "faction" alike. *Cold Mountain* reduces the southern elites' treason to a thin backdrop for a puerile love story, barely leavened with a couple of trite "war is hell" references and a dash or two of Clarissa Pinkola Estés-style cultural feminism about how it's the women who *really* suffer from the wars that y'all men make. (As Dargis noted, however, the period artifacts nearly all pass muster for authenticity.) For all its bullshit, dorm-room philosophy, geeky double and triple reversals, and purported critique of authoritarianism, *The Matrix* films pivot on Neo as The One. In fact, apparently the only hope for combatting the ubiquitous threats in any given post-apocalyptic world is to wait for the arrival of the Chosen

One. *The Iron Lady* reduces even Margaret Thatcher to a bourgeois feminist story of Woman Overcoming.

No wonder Maggie Gyllenhaal couldn't tell the difference between her union-busting, ditzy zealot Jamie Fitzpatrick and Norma Rae or Karen Silkwood. Never mind that both those characters were modeled on real union activists: Norma Rae's inspiration was Crystal Lee Sutton, a member/organizer of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, now part of UNITE HERE, and Silkwood lost her life as an activist in the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union, now part of the United Steel Workers. That's all pointless detail, TMI; it's really all about individual working-class women fighting for what they believe in and Overcoming. (It may be a marker of the changed era that, twenty-eight years after she played the lead in *Silkwood*, Meryl Streep starred as Thatcher.)

Forget about possible evocations of the Confederacy; this is *Firefly's* ideological milieu. Its vision is anti-government, *punto,* a multiculturalist, and thus left-seeming, anti-statism. The main expression of the central authority's oppressiveness that affronts Serenity's band of inter-planetary smugglers is its exorbitant taxation and arbitrary, corrupt regulation of trade. The captain and central character, also the most given to political declamation, is a committed free-trader. *Firefly's* defenders describe its politics as libertarian. That is not only compatible with its multiculturalist egalitarianism; the two can fit organically. But, as Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, and Milton Friedman—as well as their acolyte, Thatcher—all were very much aware, there is no such thing as a left libertarianism. The belief that there is reflects the wishful thinking, or disingenuousness, of those who don't want to have to square their politics with their desired self-perception.

Libertarianism is a shuck, more an aesthetics than a politics. Libertarians don't want the state to do anything other than what they want the state to do. And, as its founding icons understood, it is fundamentally about property rights *über alles*. Mises and Hayek made clear in theory, and Thatcher and Friedman as Pinochet's muse in Chile did in practice, that a libertarian society requires an anti-popular, authoritarian government to make sure that property rights are kept sacrosanct. That's why it's so common that a few bad days, some sweet nothings, and a couple of snazzy epaulets will turn a libertarian into an open fascist.

Whether or not *Firefly* contains more or less abstruse secessionist allegory, the fact that that issue is the basis of concern about its politics is a window onto a core problem of the current political situation. It reflects a critical perspective that accepts neoliberal ideological hegemony as nature and finds its own standard of justice in the rearview mirror. To the extent that *Firefly* embraces a libertarian politics, what it would share with the slave South isn't racism but something more fundamental. Insofar as the "freedom" the heroes yearn for includes

destruction of the regulatory apparatus of the state in favor of a market-fundamentalist idea of freedom or liberty, no matter how racially diverse and egalitarian that world would be, it would be closer than one might think to the essential normative premise of the social order of which slavery was the cornerstone, the conviction that individual property rights are absolute and inviolable.

The southern political economy didn't become grounded on slavery because it was racist; it became racist because it was grounded on slavery.[30] That is, it was grounded on the absolute right of property-owners to define and control their property—including property in other human beings—as they wished without any interference or regulation, except, of course, reliance on the police powers of the state to enforce their rights to and in such property. This takes us back to the necessity for authoritarian government, about which there was little disagreement within the dominant planter class.

Prominent pro-slavery ideologist George Fitzhugh was resolutely antagonistic to free-market, especially free-labor, liberalism and would hardly be considered a philosophical libertarian. But neither would Hayek or Ron Paul have been when describing the authoritarian regime essential for realizing property-based Liberty. As one of the most vocal proponents of the argument that slavery was a positive good for all involved, Fitzhugh doubled down on the matter of holding property rights in people as the sectional crisis intensified. His 1854 book, *Sociology for the South, or, the Failure of a Free Society,* argued for enslavement of poor whites as well as blacks. James Henry Hammond, U.S. Senator and former governor of South Carolina, memorialized this perspective in what came to be known as his "Mudsill Speech" on the floor of the U.S. Senate in 1858 (also Django's big year). Speaking in Congress as a member of a party that counted northern free white workers among its core constituencies, Hammond was politic enough not to propose enslaving them. However, he did underscore the essential reduction of freedom to property rights, describing the slave South as enjoying "an extent of political freedom, combined with entire security, such as no other people ever enjoyed upon the face of the earth." And he argued that, in effect, freedom was more complete and more secure in the South because slavery permitted suppression and absolute exclusion from civic voice of its "mud-sills" —the stratum necessary "to do the menial duties, to perform the drudgery of life [without which] you would not have that other class which leads progress, civilization, and refinement." That's what made the South more effectively free than the North. Freedom, or liberty, meant the unbridled license of the propertied class.

The rhetoric of antebellum fire-eaters and the ordinances of secession they crafted stand out for the vehemence of their protests that *their* essential liberties were under attack. The secessionists framed their extravagant denunciations of the national government for its potential infringement of their right to hold property in human beings in language that from

our historical location seems Freudian in the blatancy with which they declared themselves as literally fearing enslavement by the United States. But it wasn't psychological projection or reaction formation. They considered any potential infringement on absolute property rights as indeed tantamount to enslavement. For them property is the only real right; therefore, property-holders are the only people in the society with rights that count for anything, and their rights trump all else.

This is a perspective that can provide some badly needed clarity on debates in contemporary politics regarding the relation of race, racism and inequality. For example, Ron and Rand Paul, libertarians of the highest order, do not oppose the 1964 Civil Rights Law because they hate, or even don't like, black people. (And, for the record, whenever one finds oneself agreeing at all with Kanye West about anything, it's time to take a step back, breathe deeply and reassess.) They oppose it, as they've made clear, because it infringes on property rights. They dislike black people because they understand, correctly, that black people are very likely to be prominent among those committed to pursuing greater equality. They oppose black people's demands and all others intended to mitigate inequality because any efforts to do so would necessarily impinge on the absolute sanctity of property rights. I don't mean to suggest that the Pauls aren't racist; I'm pretty confident they are, no matter how much they might protest the assessment. My point is that determining whether they're racist, then exposing and denouncing them for it, doesn't reach to what is most consequentially wrong and dangerous about them or for that matter what makes their racism something more significant than that of the random bigot who lives around the corner on disability.

Returning to *Firefly,* we don't ever have to confront Captain Mal's and his crew's libertarianism beyond platitudes and the sort of errant patter of an adolescent irked at being told to clean up her room. We don't because they aren't in a position to demonstrate what their libertarianism would look like in practice. What they do perform regularly is liberal multiculturalism, which no doubt reinforces a sense that the show's gestural anti-statism is at least consonant with an egalitarian politics. And that is a quality that makes multiculturalist egalitarianism, or identitarianism, and its various strategic programs—anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-heteronormativity, etc.—neoliberalism's loyal opposition. Their focus is on making neoliberalism more just and, often enough, more truly efficient. Their objective is that, however costs and benefits are distributed, the distribution should not disproportionately harm or disadvantage the populations for which they advocate.

But what if neoliberalism really can't be made more just? (And, to be clear, when I say neoliberalism, I mean capitalism with the gloves off and back on the offensive.) What if the historical truth of capitalist class power is that, without direct, explicit and relentless, zero-sum challenge to its foundations in a social order built on its priority and dominance

in the social division of labor, we will never be able to win more than a shifting around of the material burdens of inequality, reallocating them and recalibrating their incidence among different populations? And what if creation of such populations as given, natural-seeming entities—first as differentially valued pools of labor, in the ideological equivalent of an evolving game of musical chairs, then eventually also as ostensibly discrete market niches within the mass consumption regime—is a crucial element in capitalism's logic of social reproduction? To the extent that is the case, multiculturalist egalitarianism and the political programs that follow from it reinforce a key mystification that legitimizes the systemic foundation of the inequalities to which those programs object.

Regimes of class hierarchy depend for their stability on ideologies that legitimize inequalities by representing them as the result of natural differences—where you (or they) are in the society is where you (or they) deserve to be. Folk taxonomies define and sort populations into putatively distinctive groups on the basis of characteristics ascribed to them. Such taxonomies rely on circular self-validation in explaining the positions groups occupy in the social order as suited to the essential, inherent characteristics, capabilities and limitations posited in the taxonomy's just-so stories. These ideological constructions and the social processes through which they are reproduced, including the common sense that arises from self-fulfilling prophecy, are what Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields call "racecraft."[31] An implication of the racecraft notion is that the ideology, or taxonomy, of race is always as much the cover story as the source of even the inequalities most explicitly linked to race.

James Henry Hammond's mudsill theory is instructive. The southern system was superior and afforded greater freedom, he argued, because its mudsills were held to belong to an ascriptively distinct and naturally subordinate population. The North was a less secure and stable society because its mudsills were "of your own race; you are brothers of one blood. They are your equals in natural endowment or intellect, and they feel galled by their degradation. Our slaves do not vote. We give them no political power. Yours do vote, and, being the majority, they are the depositaries of all your political power." He in effect judged the North's ruling class to be more unstable than the South's because it hadn't been able to turn its mudsills into a sufficiently different ascriptive population. (Fitzhugh, the theorist, proposed a remedy for that problem; Hammond, the politician, understood that was easier said than done.)

Hammond was no doubt sincere in his conviction that blacks were by nature fit to be slaves, "of another and inferior race." But notwithstanding his sincerity, that view was relatively new as a defense of slavery. Alexander Stephens indicated as much in the "Cornerstone Speech" and noted that the dominant perspective of the Founding generation was that "enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature." Of course, Stephens insisted that that

perspective was "fundamentally wrong" in that it "rested upon the assumption of the equality of the races." The defense of slavery that he and Hammond articulated dated only from the 1830s, when the combined pressures of a surge in abolitionist activism and articulations of free labor ideology outside the South called for a more robust defense of the "peculiar institution" than the fundamentally apologetic contention that it was a "necessary evil" economically. South Carolina's father of the secessionist treason, John C. Calhoun, gave the new argument its systematic expression in "Slavery a Positive Good," an 1837 speech to the U. S. Senate.[32]

That argument aligned with the emergent race science that would provide the basic folk taxonomy through which Americans apprehend race and categories of racial classification to this day. A central text of that nascent race science was the 1854 tome *Types of Mankind,* co-authored by George R. Gliddon, a British-born Egyptologist, and Josiah C. Nott, a native South Carolinian and wealthy slave-holding physician in Mobile, Alabama.[33] In 1851 Samuel A. Cartwright, a plantation physician and pioneer in the science of racial medicine, published in *De Bow's Review* a paper, "Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race," which he had initially presented at a Louisiana medical convention and in which he examined, among other racial particularities, a condition he called "drapetomania"—a "disease of the mind" that induced slaves to "run away from service."[34] Race theory, that is, took shape as a defense of slavery only in the last decades of the institution's life; it was the expression of a beleaguered slavocracy doubling down to protect its property rights in human beings.

Hammond may have believed that he'd always believed the positive good argument and that black slavery was nature's racial decree. If he did, he would only have been demonstrating the power of ascriptive ideologies to impose themselves as reality. Marxist theorist Harry Chang thus analogized race to Marx's characterization of the fetish character of money. Just as money is the material condensation of "the reification of a relation called value" and "a function-turned-into-an-object," race is also a function—a relation in the capitalist division of labor—turned into an object.[35]

Race and gender are the ascriptive hierarchies most familiar to us because they have been most successfully challenged since the second half of the last century; ideologies of ascriptive difference are most powerful when they are simply taken as nature and don't require defense. The significant and lasting institutional victories that have been won against racial and gender subordination and discrimination, as well as the cultural victories against racism and sexism as ideologies, have rendered those taxonomies less potent as justifications for ascriptive inequality than they had been. As capitalism has evolved new articulations of the social division of labor, and as the victories against racial and gender hierarchy have been

consolidated, the causal connections between those ideologies and manifest inequality have become still more attenuated.

Race and gender don't exhaust the genus of ascriptive hierarchies. Other taxonomies do and have done the same sort of work as those we understand as race. The feebleminded and the born criminal, for example, were equivalent to racial taxa as ideologies of ascriptive hierarchy but did not hinge on the phenotypical narratives that have anchored the race idea. Victorian British elites ascribed essential, race-like difference to the English working class. The culture of poverty and the underclass overlap racially disparaged populations but aren't exactly reducible to familiar racial taxonomies. Some—like super predators and crack babies—have had more fleeting life spans. Their common sense explanatory power hinges significantly on the extent to which they comport with the perspectives and interests of the social order's dominant, opinion-shaping strata; as Marx and Engels observed in 1845, "the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force."[36]

Hell on Wheels, or the Tea Party

In addition, the exact sort of work that given taxonomies, or categories within one, will do is linked to historically specific regimes of hierarchy. A taxonomy's ideological significance and material impact, that is, can vary widely. "Race" was an ideology of essential difference in 1820, as it was in the 1850s. Yet it didn't do the same work in the earlier period's defenses of slavery as a necessary evil that it did in later defenses of it as a positive good, like those articulated by Fitzhugh and Hammond. Nor does gender do the same work in the early twenty-first century that it did at the beginning, or even the middle, of the twentieth.

Once established, stereotypes and the folk taxonomies that legitimize them may die hard, but their significance as props for a regime of class hierarchy can change along with the political-economic foundations of the class order. Persistence of familiar narratives of hierarchy can evoke the earlier associations, but that evocation can be misleading and counterproductive for making sense of social relations in both past and present. In particular the "just like slavery" or "just like Jim Crow" proclamations that are intended as powerful criticism of current injustices are more likely to undermine understanding of injustice in the past as well as the present than to enable new insight. Another version of the trope of the damaged ex-Confederate is illustrative.

Unlike *Firefly,* the television drama *Hell on Wheels* constructs the wounded ex-Confederate much nearer its original form but with revisions that underscore the contemporary period drama's problematic and ideological relation to history. Adam Serwer adduces *Hell on Wheels,* which is set in 1865 in a mobile railroad town, as another illustration of the persistence of the trope of the vengeful former Confederate brooding hero/sociopath, albeit in a "hilariously rationalized" form. Its version of the character, Cullen Bohannan, had been a large Mississippi planter who freed his slaves a year before the treasonous insurrection in deference to his northern, anti-slavery wife who—true to tale type—was later martyred by marauding Union soldiers, now the targets of his quest. Serwer is correct to say that the preposterous device of separating the hero's Confederate loyalties from commitment to slave-holding is a transparent effort to sanitize the hero's secessionism.

However, the difference in historical context is crucial in this regard as well. The old Lost Cause tropes, originating in the early twentieth-century southern ideological campaign for sectional reconciliation on white supremacist terms, don't do the same cultural and ideological work in a society in which Glenn Beck appropriates Martin Luther King, Jr. to accuse President Barack Obama of racism that they did in a society in which racial subordination was supported explicitly by the force of law and custom. This is not to imply that there's nothing politically disturbing and reactionary about the conceits of *Hell on Wheels.* On the contrary, going beyond the superficial rehearsal of hoary tropes to consider the program's representations in their actual historical context discloses its more insidious work in legitimizing inequality.

The conceit that Bohannan had freed his slaves before he fought for secession does more than separate the treason from its foundational commitment to slavery. That conceit also replaces slavery as an institution with slaveholding as a matter of individual morality, as in *Django Unchained.* That Bohannan manumitted his slaves as a gesture of love for his wife folds into another trope of the genre, the pedestalizing, "I love her so much I'd change my raffish ways for her" fantasy. That's the happy face of adolescent patriarchy, its expression that doesn't usually involve a restraining order, though it's probably best that the brooding loner hero's sainted wife is nearly always a martyr and thus motivation for, instead of the object of, his sadistic violence and mayhem. But in *Hell on Wheels* that device also reinforces the reduction of slavery to slaveholding as an individual act, a consumer preference to be negotiated within a marriage—like owning a motorcycle, going to the strip club with the guys every weekend, or painting the living room magenta.

From the standpoint of claims to social significance, a deeper problem with period vehicles like *Django Unchained, The Help,* and *Hell on Wheels* is their denial of historicity. By this I do not mean historical accuracy as faithfulness to facts about the past. The manumission

themes in *Hell on Wheels* and *Django Unchained* are instructive. Voluntary manumission was all but impossible in Mississippi as the sectional crisis intensified on the eve of secession. By 1860 even Maryland with a relatively large free black population and Arkansas, which had comparatively small slave population, had outlawed the practice; the states with the largest black populations had done so much earlier—South Carolina in 1820 and Mississippi in 1822. Considering its relatively incidental place in each story line, though, the historical inaccuracy on which those bits hinge is within the boundaries of acceptable artistic license. The problem is with the ideological character of the larger story lines that preclude even wondering whether manumission would have been possible.

Both tales trifle with slavery. For *Hell on Wheels* it's an unfortunate artifact of the genre, baggage that threatens to sully the appeal of the hero as wronged Confederate. Producers Joe and Tony Gayton (a former production assistant for political reactionary John Milius and co-writer with his brother Joe of the Vietnam POW rescue fantasy film *Uncommon Valor*) may also have been concerned to preempt sharp criticism for romanticizing the institution indirectly through their hero's secessionist loyalties. For Tarantino slavery is a prop for a claim to social significance and a hook to connect spaghetti western and blaxploitation. In both vehicles it is a generic bad thing, an especially virulent species of racism, though slavery's pastness—not only was Bohannan no longer a slave owner; but the series is set in 1865—keeps it peripheral in *Hell on Wheels*. And once again the central thread is the individual quest. Even the principal ex-slave in *Hell on Wheels*, Elam Ferguson (played by the rapper Common), is depicted as "coming to terms with the risks and responsibilities of his newly-acquired freedom," and, because he had a "white father and a slave mother," apparently he is therefore "a man with no true home or people he can call his own." And he and Bohannan, also a disconnected individual, engage in an exchange about the need to "let go of the past." Even though that exchange seems intended partly as a comment on the impossibility of either man's doing so, the punch line remains the individual quest, leavened with the unshakable personal demons that are the banal melodrama's yeast. (And I can anticipate the contention that *Hell on Wheels* is somehow critical of capitalism. It's not. It's critical of *big* capitalism and once again the capital/government nexus and their running roughshod over beleaguered individuals. That's the critical standpoint of a reactionary populism that's as likely to support Tea Party style fascism as any other politics, and it would be good for us all to be clearer in recognizing that for what it is.)

Effacement of historicity and the social in favor of the timeless—that is, presentist—narrative of individual Overcoming is the deep politics and social commentary propounded in these products of the mass entertainment industry. They differ from other such products only because they ostensibly apply the standard formulae to socially important topics. They

don't, however. They do exactly the reverse; they revise historically and politically significant moments to fit within the formula. In doing so they are nodes in the constitution of neoliberalism's ideological hegemony.

And the extent of that hegemony is attested by claims from the likes of Lawrence Bobo, Jon Wiener and others who should know better than to think that a film like *Django Unchained* somehow captures the essential truth of American slavery. That truth is apparently, as Bobo condenses it, "brutality, inescapable violence and absolutely thorough moral degradation." But those features were neither essential nor exclusive to slavery; they were behavioral artifacts enabled by the institution because it conferred, with support of law and custom, a property right—absolute control of life and livelihood—of some individuals over others. That property right was the essential evil and injustice that defined slavery, not the extremes of brutality and degradation it could encourage and abet. No effort is required to understand why mass-market films go for the dramatic excesses, but what about the scholars and other nominal leftists who also embrace that view of slavery?

In part, the inclination may stem from a corrosive legacy of Malcolm X. Malcolm was an important cultural figure for most of the 1960s, before and perhaps even more so after his death. He was not, however, an historian, and few formulations have done more to misinform, distort and preempt popular understanding of American slavery than his rhetorically very effective but historically facile "house Negro/field Negro" parable. It doesn't map onto how even plantation slavery—which accounted for only about half of slaves by 1850—operated. Not only was working in the house no major plum; it hardly fit with the Uncle Tom stereotype, such as Tarantino's self-hating caricature, Stephen. The well-known slave rebels Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey and Robert Smalls all gainsay that image. Anyway, the Uncle Tom notion is not a useful category for political analysis. It is only a denunciation; no one ever identifies under that label. Yet its emptiness may be the source of its attractiveness. In disconnecting critique from any discrete social practice and locating it instead in imputed pathological psychology—"Why, that house Negro loved the master more than the master loved himself," pace Malcolm—the notion individualizes political criticism on the (non-existent) racially self-hating caricature, and, of course, anyone a demagogue chooses to denounce. Because it centers on motives rather than concrete actions and stances, it leaves infinite room both for making and deflecting ad hominem charges and, of course, inscribes racial authenticity as the key category of political judgment.

That sort of Malcolm X/blaxploitation narrative, including the insistence that *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone With the Wind* continue to shape Americans' understandings of slavery, also is of a piece with a line of anti-racist argument and mobilization that asserts powerful continuities between current racial inequalities and either slavery or the Jim Crow regime. This line of

argument has been most popularly condensed recently in Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow,* which analogizes contemporary mass incarceration to the segregationist regime. But even she, after much huffing and puffing and asserting the relation gesturally throughout the book, ultimately acknowledges that the analogy fails.[37] And it would have to fail because the segregationist regime was the artifact of a particular historical and political moment in a particular social order. Moreover, the rhetorical force of the analogy with Jim Crow or slavery derives from the fact that those regimes are associated symbolically with strong negative sanctions in the general culture because they have been vanquished. In that sense all versions of the lament that "it's as if nothing has changed" give themselves the lie. They are effective only to the extent that things *have* changed significantly.

The tendency to craft political critique by demanding that we fix our gaze in the rearview mirror appeals to an intellectual laziness. Marking superficial similarities with familiar images of oppression is less mentally taxing than attempting to parse the multifarious, often contradictory dynamics and relations that shape racial inequality in particular and politics in general in the current moment. Assertions that phenomena like the Jena, Louisiana, incident, the killings of James Craig Anderson and Trayvon Martin, and racial disparities in incarceration demonstrate persistence of old-school, white supremacist racism and charges that the sensibilities of Thomas Dixon and Margaret Mitchell continue to shape most Americans' understandings of slavery do important, obfuscatory ideological work. They lay claim to a moral urgency that, as Mahmood Mamdani argues concerning the rhetorical use of charges of genocide, enables disparaging efforts either to differentiate discrete inequalities or to generate historically specific causal accounts of them as irresponsible dodges that abet injustice by temporizing in its face.[38] But more is at work here as well.

Insistence on the transhistorical primacy of racism as a source of inequality is a class politics. It's the politics of a stratum of the professional-managerial class whose material location and interests, and thus whose ideological commitments, are bound up with parsing, interpreting and administering inequality defined in terms of disparities among ascriptively defined populations reified as groups or even cultures. In fact, much of the intellectual life of this stratum is devoted to "shoehorning into the rubric of racism all manner of inequalities that may appear statistically as racial disparities."[39] And that project shares capitalism's ideological tendency to obscure race's foundations, as well as the foundations of all such ascriptive hierarchies, in historically specific political economy. This felicitous convergence may help explain why proponents of "cultural politics" are so inclined to treat the products and production processes of the mass entertainment industry as a terrain for political struggle and debate. They don't see the industry's imperatives as fundamentally incompatible with the notions of a just society they seek to advance. In fact, they share its fetishization of heroes

and penchant for inspirational stories of individual Overcoming. This sort of "politics of representation" is no more than an image-management discourse within neoliberalism. That strains of an ersatz left imagine it to be something more marks the extent of our defeat. And then, of course, there's that Upton Sinclair point.

NOTES

1. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Random House, 1956), 5.

2. Robert Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350-1870* (Chapel Hill, N.C., and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) and *Contract, Coercion and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

3. Manohla Dargis, "War Is Heaven," *Los Angeles Times,* December 28, 2003, available at: http://articles.latimes.com/2003/dec/28/entertainment/ca-dargis28

4. Ronald Butt, "Margaret Thatcher: Interview for *Sunday Times,*" *London Times,* May 3, 1981.

5. A key early compendium illustrating the basic fault lines in the debate is Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, eds., *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1956).

6. Erin Aubry Kaplan, "*Django* an Unsettling Experience for Many Blacks," *Los Angeles Times,* December 28, 2012, available at: http://articles.latimes.com/2012/dec/28/entertainment/la-et-django-reax-2-20121228

7. Andrew O'Hehir, "Tarantino's Incoherent Three-Hour Bloodbath," *Salon,* December 26, 2012, available at: http://www.salon.com/2012/12/26/tarantinos_incoherent_three_hour_bloodbath/

8. Omali Yeshitela, "*Django Unchained,* Or, 'Killing White While Protecting White Power': A Review," *Black Agenda Report,* January 30, 2013, available at: http://www.blackagendareport.com/content/django-unchained-or-"killing-whitey-while-protecting-white-power"-review is one of the few commentaries I've encountered that makes that observation, although otherwise the essay shows the limits of a racial critique of capitalism.

9. Ryan Brooke, "The Truth About 'Django Unchained,'" *Daily Kos,* January 10, 2013, available at: http://www.dailykos.com/story/2013/01/10/1177813/-The-Truth-About-Django-Unchained.

10. Michael Rudolph West, *The Education of Booker T. Washington: Black Leadership in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 2008).

11. Adolph Reed, Jr. and Merlin Chowkwanyun, "Race, Class, Crisis: The Discourse of Racial Disparity and its Analytical Discontents," *Socialist Register* (2012): 166.

12. Dr. Kwa David Whitaker, "Django Unchained Reflections" available at http://ibw21.org/news-and-commentary/django-unchained-reflections/.
Dr. Whitaker seems to have made his own peace with neoliberalism, not least as an operator, through his Ashe Cultural Center, of a half-dozen Cleveland-area charter schools which, in addition to making their contribution to the destruction of public education, have run afoul of the Ohio Department of Education for being so poorly managed as to be judged "unauditable." See: Edith Starzyk, "6 Charter Schools Sponsored by Ashe Cultural Center Declared Unauditable," *Cleveland Plain Dealer,* November 24, 2010; Starzyk, "Charter Schools to Lose State Funds Because of Poorly Kept Financial Records," *Cleveland Plain Dealer,* April 13, 2011; and Starzyk, "Lion of Judah Charter School Leader Indicted, Accused of illegally spending $1.2 Million in Public Money," *Cleveland Plain Dealer,* February 15, 2013.

13. Notable exceptions to the film's generally warm reception are Kelly Candaele, "The Problematic Political Messages of *Beasts of the Southern Wild," Los Angeles Review of Books,* August 9, 2012; Armond White, "How Do You Pronounce Quvenzhané?" *City Arts,* January 30, 2013, available at: http://cityarts.info/2013/01/30/how-do-you-pronounce-quvenzhane/; Vince Mancini, "The Case Against *Beasts of the Southern Wild,*" *Filmdrunk,* December 3, 2012, available at: http://filmdrunk.uproxx.com/2012/12/the-cast-against-beasts-of-the-southern-wild and two short reviews by Ben Kenigsberg: "Beasts of the Southern Wild," *Time Out Chicago,* July 5, 2012 available at: http://timeoutchicago.com/arts-culture/film/15470806/beasts-of-the-southern-wild-movie-review and "Beasts of the Southern Wild: A Republican Fantasy?" *Time Out Chicago,* July 6, 2012, available at: http://www.timeoutchicago.com/arts-culture/film/15493241/beasts-of-the-southern-wild-a-republican-fantasy.

14. See, for example, Leni Riefenstahl: *Vanishing Africa* (New York: Harmony Books, 1982); *Africa* (Cologne: Taschen, 2010), and *The Last of the Nuba* (London: Tom Stacey Ltd., 1973). For access to an additional layer of complication in these exoticizing accounts, I suggest juxtaposing the first two photographs that appear in the *Africa* volume.

15. Howard Gensler, "Maggie Gyllenhaal Talks Unions, Education and Motherhood," *Philadelphia Daily News,* September 28, 2012. She even compared her character to Norma Rae and Erin Brockovich. (Carol Lloyd, writing on the GreatSchools, Inc website, proclaimed the film "the *Silkwood*…for education reformers"; available at http://www.greatschools.org/improvement/parental-power/7033-wont-back-down-movie-review-parent-trigger-law.gs.) Gyllenhaal went on to aver "there are huge problems with the teachers union" and invoked that empty liberal phraseology to call for having the

temerity to "look at things that are broken." I won't speculate as to where being "left of Trotsky" might place Gyllenhaal on the political spectrum, but this patter brings to mind a conversation I had with our provost at the New School, the well-known post-colonial anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, when the adjunct faculty, who were 90% of the institution's total, were organizing with the United Auto Workers for collective bargaining rights. Appadurai had been even more aggressively hostile to the unionization effort than our unindicted former war criminal president, Bob Kerrey. I sought Appadurai out at a colleague's cocktail party to remonstrate with him about his manifest hostility to the unionization effort. He very warmly and genially assured me that he loves unions and that, if the New School were a place that *really* exploited its adjuncts, like Harvard or Yale, he'd be all for the effort. But, he said, the New School is such a fragile institution that it simply couldn't afford to take the risk. I told him that he sounded like the human resources director at Whole Foods or Wal-Mart.

16. Howard Gensler, "Director Daniel Barnz Defends *Won't Back Down," Philadelphia Daily News,* September 28, 2012. Barnz upped the ante by addressing criticism that Christian fascist billionaire Philip Anschutz bankrolled the film. For Barnz, "What's really going on here is a refreshing reach across the ideological divide. This is a conservative Republican evangelical Christian who hired the Jewish liberal Democrat—that's me—to helm this movie. This is someone who said: 'This is a problem in our country. I have the resources to help a wide exploration of this that could reach a lot of people and I'm going to do it.' And he let us go out and do it and he empowered us. He empowered me and he empowered this very liberal cast and producers to do that." Karen Butler, "Gyllenhaal, Barnz: *Won't Back Down* Doesn't Bash Teachers' Union," UPI News Service, September 28, 2012, available at: http://www.upi.com/Entertainment_News/Movies/2012/09/28/Gyllenhaal-Barnz-Wont-Back-Down-doesnt-bash-teachers-union/UPI-26961348868531/ Can Barnz be that stupid and gullible? Or does he just imagine the rest of us are?

17. Kathryn Bigelow, "Kathryn Bigelow Addresses *Zero Dark Thirty* Torture Criticism," *Los Angeles Times,* January 15, 2013, available at: http://articles.latimes.com/2013/jan/15/entertainment/la-et-mn-0116-bigelow-zero-dark-thirty-20130116.

18. Jon Wiener, "'Django Unchained': Quentin Tarantino's Answer to Spielberg's 'Lincoln,'" *The Nation,* December 25, 2012, available at: http://www.thenation.com/blog/171915/django-unchained-quentin-tarantinos-answer-spielbergs-lincoln.

19. Jon Wiener, "The Trouble with Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln*," *The Nation,* November 26, 2012, available at: http://www.thenation.com/blog/171461/trouble-steven-spielbergs-lincoln

20. Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982 and 1999). The change is especially striking because McAdam's account is driven by examination of structural processes and the dynamics of collective resource mobilization, perhaps to a fault.

21. Minister J. Kojo Livingston, "The Hard Truth—Why I Liked *Django," Louisiana Weekly,* January 14, 2013, available at: http://www.louisianaweekly.com/the-hard-truth-why-i-liked-django-another-minority-opinion/

22. Lawrence D. Bobo, "Slavery on Film: Sanitized No More," *The Root,* January 9, 2013, available at http://www.theroot.com/category/views-tags/slavery-film-1 In one breath he proclaims *Django* to be "the most cinematically and culturally important film dealing with race since Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*." Two paragraphs later he defends the film against those who have criticized its historical absurdities: "But the film is intended as entertainment, not as historical documentary-making. Indeed, it is explicitly pitched as a revenge fantasy, making the spaghetti western an almost perfect template. This is movie-making; this is cinema. It is art, not a history lesson."

23. See, for a smattering, two comments by Jamelle Bouie: "Quick Thoughts on Django Unchained," December 29, 2012, available at: http://jamellebouie.net/blog/2012/12/29/quick-thoughts-on-django-unchained and "A Different Kind of Revenge Film," *The American Prospect,* October 28, 2011, available at http://prospect.org/article/different-kind-revenge-film; Jelani Cobb, "Tarantino Unchained," *The New Yorker,* January 2, 2013, available at: http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2013/01/how-accurate-is-quentin-tarantinos-portrayal-of-slavery-in-django-unchained.html; Adam Serwer, "In Defense of Django," *Mother Jones,* January 7, 2013, available at http://www.motherjones.com/mixed-media/2013/01/tarantino-django-unchained-western-racism-violence.

24. See, for example, "The Confederacy and Firefly" at http://firefly10108.wordpress.com/2008/09/04/the-confederacy-and-firefly/

25. Jeff Hart, "Why Care About Cullen Bohannon?" *Culture Blues,* November 17, 2011, available at http://www.cultureblues.com/2011/11/why-care-about-cullen-bohannon/.

26. Alexander H. Stephens, "Cornerstone Speech," March 21, 1861, Savannah, Georgia, available at: http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?documentprint=76

27. Patricia Storace's fine essay "Look Away, Dixie Land," *New York Review of Books,* December 19, 1991, discusses Margaret Mitchell's and her family's roles in crafting and purveying that ideology. Her father was president of the Atlanta Historical

Society, one of the many such societies created in the years around World War I for the express purpose of propagating the South's story. Storace also notes Mitchell's mutual admiration with Thomas Dixon—a direct link to *Birth of a Nation*—including the gushing fan letter he sent her on her novel's publication and her equally gushing, appreciative reply.

[28.] Adolph Reed, Jr., "Crocodile Tears & Auto-critique of the Bourgeoisie: *Rollerball* & Rebellion in Mass Culture," *Endarch* 1 (Winter 1976).

[29.] It is chilling in this connection to note that H. Bruce Franklin, *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001) and Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 2000) examine the extent to which representations in those films that reverse iconic images from the war, along with repeated rehearsal of urban legends like the antiwar protesters spitting on returning GIs, have shaped collective memory of the war, including even veterans' memories of their own experiences. Also see Penny Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies and Hawks: The Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 2013).

[30.] This brings to mind historian Barbara Jeanne Fields's objection to the mindset among historians and others who "think of slavery in the United States as primarily a system of race relations—as though the chief business of slavery of were the production of white supremacy rather than the production of cotton, sugar, rice, and tobacco." See Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* (1990) reprinted in Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 117.

[31.] *Racecraft,* 20-24. Also see Walter Benn Michaels' review, "Believing in Unicorns," *London Review of Books,* February 7, 2013, 25-26.

[32.] Stephens's "Cornerstone Speech;" Hammond's "Mudsill Speech," and Calhoun's "Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions, Delivered in the Senate, February 6, 1837" are all available in Paul Finkelman, ed., *Debating Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Old South: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003).

[33.] Reginald Horsman, *Josiah Nott of Mobile: Southerner, Physician, and Racial Theorist* (Baton Rouge, La., and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 130 and 258, reports that Nott owned as many as sixteen slaves and in 1860 recorded assets of $40,000 in real estate, $10,000 personal property, and an annual income in excess of $10,000.

[34.] Samuel A. Cartwright, "Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race," *De Bow's Review* XI (July 1851): 64-69 and (September 1851): 331-36. It is reprinted in Paul F. Paskoff and Daniel J. Wilson, eds., *The Cause of the South: Selections from De Bow's Review, 1846-1867* (Baton Rouge, La., and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982). On Cartwright's place among antebellum southern apologists, see James Denny Guillory, "The Pro-Slavery Arguments of Dr. Samuel A. Cartwright," *Louisiana History* 9 (Summer 1968): 209-227.

[35.] Paul Liem and Eric Montague, eds., "Toward a Marxist Theory of Racism: Two Essays by Harry Chang," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 17 (1985): 39. See also Adolph Reed, Jr., "Marx, Race, and Neoliberalism," *New Labor Forum* 22 (Winter 2013): 51-52.

[36.] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 64. They elaborated: "The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas." This insight is straight-forward and should be clear enough to anyone not in thrall to the various academic and other discourses that have taken shape around the project of rendering capitalism invisible and obfuscating its class dynamics.

[37.] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color-Blindness* (New York: New Press, 2010). For a systematic critique of the limits and counterproductive features of this approach as both history and politics, see James Forman, Jr., "Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration: Beyond the New Jim Crow," *New York University Law Review* 87 (2012): 21-69. See also Reed and Chowkwanyun, "Race, Class, Crisis" and Adolph Reed, Jr., "Three Tremés," July 4, 2011, available at http://nonsite.org/editorial/three-tremes.

[38.] See, for example, Mahmood Mamdani, "The Politics of Naming: Genocide, Civil War, Insurgency," *London Review of Books,* March 8, 2007.

[39.] Reed, "Marx, Race, and Neoliberalism": 53.

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POETRY

SOME PASSAGES FROM VIRGIL'S ECLOGUES

NATE KLUG

An Exchange of Gifts

From Eclogue V

Mopsus

You're older, Menalcas, *you* decide

where to sit down and start singing: whether

beneath these shadows, shook and shifted

by the wind, or in that cave

wild vine clusters have almost covered up.

Menalcas

If you've got any valentines for Phyllis,
or praise for Alcon, or shit to say to Codrus,
go right ahead and sing it, Mopsus;
Tityrus can watch your grazing kids.

Mopsus

I've been writing a few new verses,
scratching them onto the green bark
of a beech tree, with all the modulations
for the pipe properly marked.
But before you call Amyntas
or anyone else to challenge me, listen:

"Daphnis died, and the Nymphs mourned him
as one of their own–you hazel-trees and rivers
watched them weep–while his mother, absurd
with grief, still clutching her son's corpse,
damned the gods, and damned the cruel stars.
On that day, no one drove his pastured cattle
towards cold waters; no animal at all
drank from a stream, or touched a blade of grass.
And the wild hills and the rude woods
rumored that even the African lions
were moaning at your death, Daphnis,

who knew how to inspire a wine dance, or interweave
the mystic wand with softest leaves.
And since the Fates hauled you off,
two gods have renounced our fields: oat weed
and ugly cockle spurt up in the furrows
where we'd planted barley; in place
of soft violet and purple narcissus,
thistle and thorn. So scatter flowers, shepherds,
make shade by the fountain, and let's crown
his tomb with a song: *I am Daphnis,*
famous from this forest to the stars,
more beautiful even than my animals."

Menalcas

Your music's like a nap on the grass
when one needs sleep, or a sweet rill
discovered in thirsty summer. Not just your playing–
a voice to match your master's as well.
You'll be the next him, after him.
Now here's a small strain of my song, which finds
dead Daphnis at the fringes of the stars.

"Tentative at the threshold of Olympus,
Daphnis glows and watches clouds crossing
under his feet. And, all at once, sharp pleasure

seizes the woods, the rest of this world,
shepherds, and Pan, and the Dryad girls.
The wolf abandons his nasty plan for the flock.
No nets will trick stags any more,
for Daphnis commands peace. I'll set out two cups
foaming with fresh milk, two bowls
of olive oil, and I'll brighten the banquet–
by my fireplace in the winter, or, in summer,
in the shade–with wine strained
into goblets out of strange nectars.
This will be your ritual, Daphnis, you'll be recalled
every time we pay our contracts
to the Nymphs, whenever bloody sacrifice
cleanses these fields. As long as the boar
adores his mountain and fish live in streams,
as long as bees feed on thyme
and cicadas drink the dew, so will your name,
your honor, and praise persist.
Just as they do to Bacchus and to Ceres,
farmers will now vow wild things to you;
make them keep every last promise."

Mopsus

What can I say, how could anyone repay
such a song? The south wind bustling

in early spring, fantastic breakers

shaking the beach, or faint runoff down rocks

in glens–none have sounded sweeter to me.

What can I give you in return?

Menalcas

First, boy, for you: this tender

old hemlock reed. It's the same one

that learned to play the tunes "I'm not *that* ugly"

and "You beat Damon? You actually outsang him?"

Mopsus

Accept this sheephook, Menalcas.

Though Antigenes always begged me for it–

and this was when his looks deserved the gift–

I never gave it up. It's pure brass,

crafted so there's equal space between the knots.

Against Epic

From Eclogue VI

Kings and complex battles–starting out,

I only liked a certain kind of song.

But then Apollo got me by the ear:

A shepherd should keep the flock fat

but his lines refined, like exquisite thread.

So now I woo a rustic muse on this compacted reed.

Don't worry, General Varus, you'll find plenty

of poets begging to construct your epics;

it's simply that I no longer sing

what doesn't simply come to me.

Once two shepherd boys stumbled

upon famous Silenus, splayed out in a cave

and snoring, his garlands discarded,

his two-handled drinking cup

still dangling from his fingers. They grabbed him

and tied him up with his own things–

for often the old man had teased them,

but they'd never gotten to hear him sing.

A nymph named Aegle showed up with mulberry juice

and rubbed it all over the poet's face.

When Silenus woke and saw the trick, he laughed:

"But why keep me tied? You'll get your songs,

and Aegle will get me whenever she wants."

Then suddenly the great Silenus is singing.

You can see Fauns and fierce beasts
all keeping time, straight oaks
that can't help shaking at the crown.
Nothing's moved the woods like this since Orpheus.
For Silenus sang first of atoms–
seeds of the land, sea, and burning planets–
gathered dancing across the deep; sang how,
from these elements, everything would grow,
even this young orb called the earth,
spinning dry, hardening, until things slowly
owned their forms. The first sunrise stunned
the land, and the clouds, he sang,
now set above, apart, released their rain.
Pine forests started popping up.
Unaware of where they came from
or what they were, animals
rambled across the mountain ranges.

Silenus sang of causes and first things,
the stones that Pyrrha threw, Saturn's reign;
how Prometheus ended up with fire,
the eagles that then fed upon his liver.
A song to comfort Pasiphae, relentless,
in love with a bull and doomed to wander.
A song to twirl bark and moss

around Phaeton's sisters, turning them all
to weeping alders. A song recalling how Linus,
vatic shepherd, his hair arranged
with bitter parsley and flowers, inducted Gallus
into the order, "with these same reeds
the Muses gave Hesiod, whose songs lured
hard ash trees down from the mountains."

And then the old story of Scylla,
monsters growling out of her bright groin
as she seized the Ithacan ship and made it shake
until, in the sea's swirling depths,
her dogs had ripped apart each fallen sailor.
Or the legend of Philomela,
one day preparing for a wedding feast
then returned, horribly, a bird,
hovering above the roof of her old home.

Every kind of song that Apollo knows,
that the river Eurotas ordered its laurels to learn:
the valleys reverberate with them now.
And though the evening star–it was time
to drive in and count our sheep–
had begun to sweep through the reluctant sky,
Silenus could have kept singing.

Remembering Another Contest

From Eclogue VII

Meliboeus

Daphnis chanced to be just leaning back
beneath a particular whispering holly
when two shepherds arrived together,
Thyrsis leading his sheep, and Corydon
with his swollen goats: two boys
in bloom, Arcadians each, eager to sing
and listen and match each other's singing.

And it happened that, as I was wrapping
crape myrtles against the coming cold,
my he-goat wandered away from his wives
and ended up beneath this same holly tree.
Chasing after him and my scattering flock,
I bumped into Daphnis. "Take a minute, join me
beneath this shade. Your goats will be fine,
your steers will guide them*selves* to these slack waters
where low reeds meter the banks

and the holy oak thrums with honeybees."

And why not stay? I had no slave at home
to watch my just-weaned lambs,
but I weighed the value of my work
against this chance at play, this once-in-a-lifetime
contest of Thyrsis versus Corydon.
And so, switching verses, they began to sing,
Corydon, then Thyrsis,
as the Muses commanded the lines to come.

Corydon

"Mossy springs, grasses deeper
than sleep, my strawberry tree's
basic shade: defend my flock
from this noon heat. Buds are swelling,
insipid summer's coming. I can tell."

Thyrsis

"Here where the doorpost gathers soot
around the tang of smoky pitch,
a fire's always going. We fear the winter
as much as a wolf troubles to count a flock
or a torrent bothers about its banks."

Corydon

"Majestic junipers straight up and down,

prickly chestnut trees, and under each a skirt

of fallen fruit: the entire landscape smiling.

But if my Alex abandoned these hills,

you'd see the rivers themselves dry up."

Thyrsis

"The fields are parched, grass sucks

at the tainted air, Bacchus has wiped his vines

from every hill. But when my Phyllis

comes back, each tree will go green again.

Jupiter will descend, wrapped in happy showers."

Meliboeus

–And that's as much as I remember:

Thyrsis beaten, but singing hard, still trying to win.

That was the day Corydon became Corydon.

Nate Klug's *Rude Woods*, Passages from Virgil's Eclogues, is forthcoming this summer as the third full-length book from The Song Cave. Recent poems have appeared in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Sea Ranch*, and the *Threepenny Review*.

VIDEOS

TODD CRONAN AND SIMON CRITCHLEY, "THE ONTOLOGY OF PHOTOGRAPHIC SEEING"

TODD CRONAN

Video of Todd Cronan and Simon Critchley in conversation at The Photographic Universe II, April 10-11 at Parsons The New School for Design.

Todd Cronan is Assistant Professor of art history at Emory University. He is the author of *Against Affective Formalism: Matisse, Bergson, Modernism* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2013); *Matisse* for Phaidon (2015); and articles on Brecht, Merleau-Ponty, Santayana, Simmel, Valéry and Richard Neutra. He is currently at work on two book projects. The first, *Seeing Photographically: Photographic Ontology and the Problem of Audience*, looks at photographic debates around the concept of "previsualization" from Alfred Stieglitz to Minor White including new considerations of the work of Weston, Adams, Callahan and Siskind. The second project, *Art at the End of History: Painting/Photography/Architecture/Theater/Film in the 1920s*, examines the claims and results of a vision of art after modernization had achieved its ends. At the center of the latter are the intense debates over which artistic medium was thought to best express the realities of a post-historical world.

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