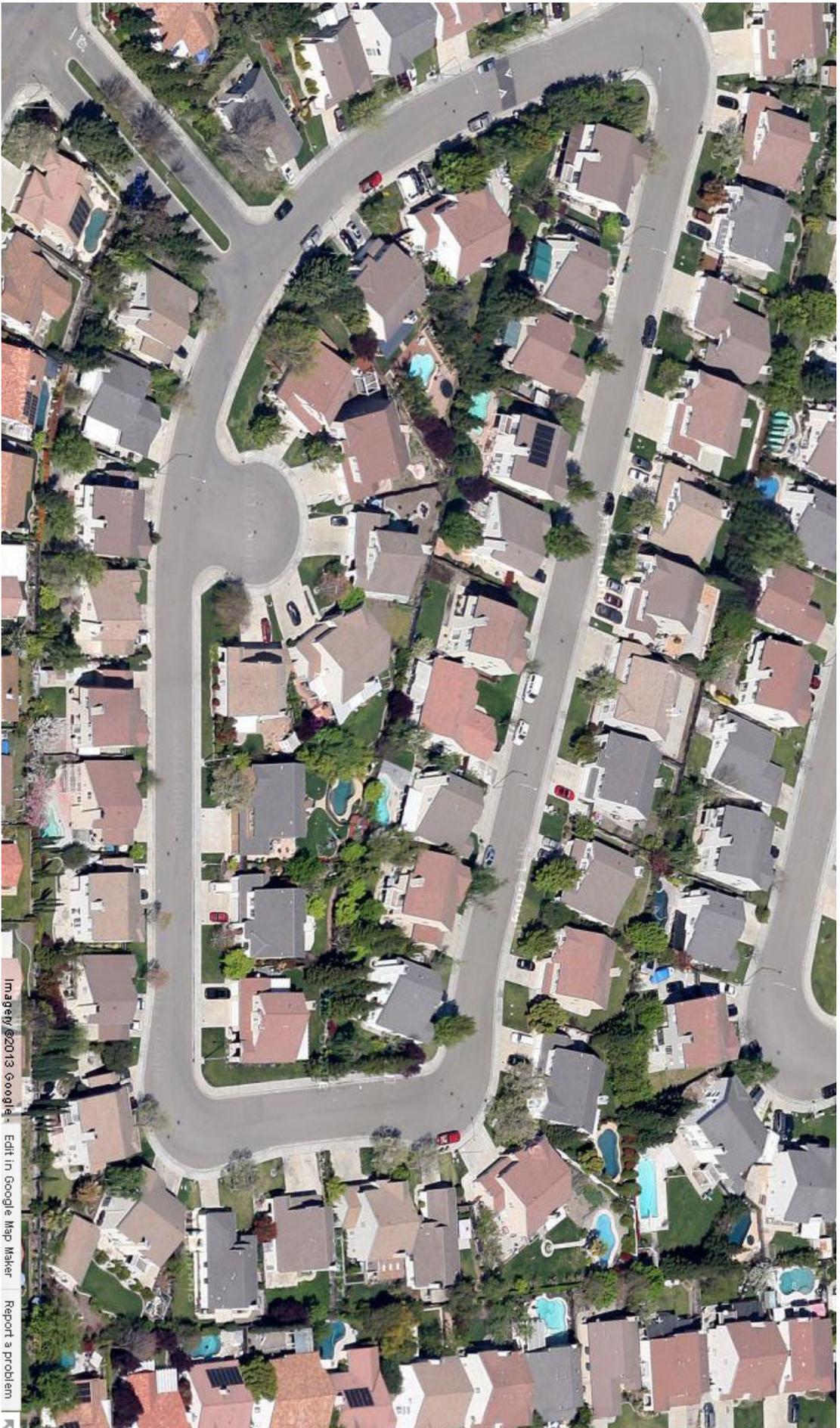




Current conditions of capitalism often appear to be at a moment of impasse; envisioning that which exists beyond, without, or unbound by capital influence is rather incomprehensible, as one can verify through degrees of Marxian study. We've proposed to our contributors, quite plainly, the *idea* of 'vacancies of capitalism' as a site of ignition, or of aggravation unto bedrock Marxian texts from which much succeeding contemporary philosophy draws. The idea is not to reject or even to challenge the lineage of Marxist ideology, *per se*, but to consider wherein such a perplexing uncertainty might actually be visible, applicable. It is not, after all, impossible for lateral definitions of 'vacancy' to surface in desultory settings and raise new questions concerning venues of immaterial labor, or indoctrinated entanglements between wildly disparate industries and economies (such as the pharmaceutical advertisement economy, for instance.) The goal is not to point directly at chasms in which something is pure and untouched, or abandoned, or even truly *vacant*. Rather, the prompt

was initiated as an opportunity to perform micro-elucidations of unforeseen resonance within nooks of capital structure-form, and has thus pulled forth a diverse set of threads from a fairly complex fabric. Through this series of texts and images, all of which were conceived as a response to the prompt, the publication hopes to represent a colorful spectrum of considerations on the topic. This includes personal opinion pieces, graphic fictional scenarios, pseudo-conspiracy pamphlets, academic prose, visual novellas, and so on. Amur Initiatives is honored to bear such an exciting *mélange* of access points from which to interpret our contemporary relationship with, or potentially without, capitalism.



The suburban nightmare pertains to placelessness. It is within subdivisions where individuality, desire and freedom homogenize to form a synthetic reality. As one dwells in this maze, a false sense of freedom delineates all that is true. From the confines of the office cubicle to the sovereignty of the home, urge is suppressed and ennui sets in. Relief is found in leisure but the temporary escape is nothing more than a cul-de-sac; placing one right where they started.

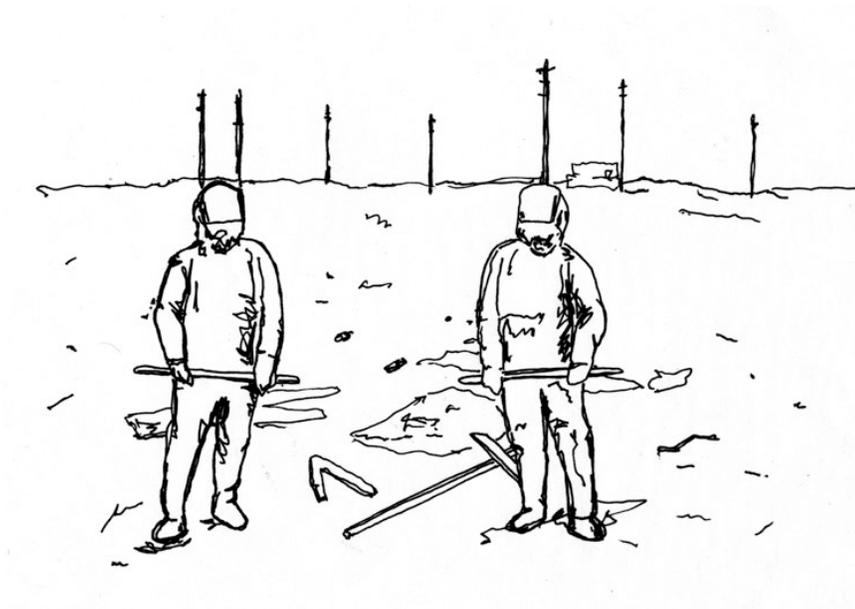




[What follows is an attempt to figure something out on paper about the places that seem free and open but are really still mediated by the reach of our productive economy.]

A motel's neon sign can signal an invitation or a closed door, but either way its letters always say the same thing: NO VACANCY. Its message is a question of selective illumination, built to facilitate the perpetual turnaround of rented time and space; nothing is completely free. Increasingly there are fewer rooms available for those who want to opt out or to practice resistance to the flows and goals of capitalism. We're all involved by degrees despite our frequently emphasized freedom of choice.

One could assume that a vacancy of capital implies a void or an outside to the totality of capitalist logic and structure. And, though we have experienced situations that feel like temporary escapes from the dictatorial determinants of productivist ethic and profit logic, it's dangerous to think these areas (as they often are thought) as true breaks in the system—blank places, unmediated by the totality of capitalism where a new world might be built. Even if you were able to secure a free and vacant room for awhile, you're still staying at the same hotel. Overstay without paying and you're subject to the threat of force.



There are many ways to simulate the feeling of being outside, and these pseudo-exteriorities to the dominant economy play an important role. Within the expansive hotel we find rooms full of sunlight lined with forest-clad wallpaper; complementary breakfasts, lotions, and open

wi-fi that all tell us a story of free-ness. Leaving the hotel metaphor behind, we can find other sites and processes in society that often get categorized as being beyond or outside of capitalist logic such as: gift economies, public spaces, the sphere of the home or family, as well as fields that are ascribed transcendent qualities like spirituality, religion, scholarship, or the arts.

Making a home and caring for our children, for instance, are activities that unfold according to a different set of processes than working 9-5 in a factory or office job. Largely, homemaking and childcare are seen as non-value-producing forms of labor because they “take place in a sphere of the capitalist mode of production [that] is not directly mediated by a form of value.”¹ They are fundamentally *re*productive rather than productive, taking place in a more indeterminate and private unwaged sphere, not one regulated and recognized by pay. But these reproductive processes, despite their lack of direct relation to monetary compensation, structure the negative space (the pseudo-outside) through which capitalist production acquires a solid shape. Just as “there must be an exterior to value in order for value to exist...for labour to serve as the measure of value, there must be an exterior to labour.”²

Silvia Federici and other Autonomist Feminists, who were integral in the 1970s Wages for Housework campaign, saw this to be true. They brought a new awareness to homemaking and care *as work* and as an integral part of the productive economy. Originally working from Mario Tronti’s claim “that at a certain stage of development capitalist relations become so hegemonic that every social relation is subsumed under capital and the distinction between society and factory collapses,” Federici and others saw clearly that this so-called ‘social factory’ “began and was centered in the kitchen, the bedroom, the home—insofar as these were the centers for the production of labor-power.”³ The Autonomist Feminists also made a strong critique of Marx, pointing to his lack of attention to the role of (heavily gendered) reproductive labor in his canonical analysis of the political economy.

Since the origins of capitalism, it is this sphere of reproduction (both literally and metaphorically) that has been the distinct domain of women’s unwaged labor. Male workers sell their time to produce commodities that can be sold for profit, but women have been the ones to produce and continually reproduce the workers themselves birthing, feeding, and clothing them. Looking at the provocative critique of the 1970’s feminists, we can see how all the life-giving activity that we do to prepare for our jobs (like working-out, making dinner, going to bed early, taking vacation etc.), is tied up in the loop of capitalist production.

¹ Endnotes, “The Logic of Gender,” in Endnotes 3: Gender, Race, Class and Other Misfortunes, (London: Endnotes, 2013), 62.

² Ibid, 62.

³ Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 8.

Using the example of unwaged reproductive labor in the home also illuminates how certain kinds of work become obscured in terms of the productive economy. What appears to be a sphere outside of capital really is at the center of its circulation. Housework was made invisible through its naturalization: a woman's care for her family was assumed to be a biological inclination—a natural calling and purpose. As such, it wasn't recognized as work and therefore didn't need to be compensated by a salary. The crucial thing about Wages for Housework was that it was a demand made not to literally find an appropriate wage that could be equivalent to the task of making a home, self, and family, but to expose the home as a site of necessary labor for the production of surplus value (capital) and to suggest that's its maintenance is not comparable to *any* wage. It was also important at the time to reject the assumption that a women's natural profession was to make and raise a family in the first place. Many of these women demanded a wage in order to refuse it.

The same naturalization process that made housework invisible as work unfolds in other terrains as well, constituting the image of a vacancy. Work that comes naturally or is personally satisfying slips out of the waged sphere of labor, supported by the logic that if one loves what they do, then they would do it regardless of getting paid. This is an especially common expectation when it comes to artistic labor. But “emotionally satisfying work is still work, and acknowledging it as such doesn't undermine it in any way. Refusing to acknowledge it, on the other hand, opens the door to the most vicious exploitation and harms all workers.”⁴

In an article in *Jacobin* magazine Miya Tokumitsu writes about how ‘do what you love’ (DWYL) has become the mantra and mentality of a large sector of today's workers. She describes how detrimental this mindset has become for labor as a whole. Specifically she pinpoints how DWYL “reinforces exploitation even within the so-called lovable professions where off-the-clock, underpaid, or unpaid labor is the new norm.” She cites publicists tweeting on the weekend, reporters doing the work of the photographers who have been laid off, workers checking email on sick days, and academics accepting non-material compensation for working overtime and without contracts as some of her evidence. Perhaps more important are the implications for people who do non-lovable forms of work. “DWYL denigrates or makes invisible vast swaths of [their] labor [—labor that allows] many of us to live in comfort and to do what we love.”⁵

Partly, what Tokumitsu is describing are working conditions under increasing austerity and crisis where privatization and corporatization have resulted in the contracting of budgets, and workers have found themselves laboring over previously paid jobs for free. The perpetuation of life as we know it depends on the growing sphere of what the Endnotes

⁴ Miya Tokumitsu, “In the Name of Love,” *Jacobin Magazine*, #13, Winter 2014, 14.

⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

journal calls abject labor. The sphere of the abject includes forms of work that were waged at some point, but have become too costly for the state or for capital to continue including in a direct, waged-market sphere. These forms of labor are not intrinsically abject; they are abject only because capital has deemed them so. Welfare and education are good examples, where at one point in time the State was willing to foot the bill for the public good, but is now rationalizing its retraction of fiscal responsibility. Low-income families, teachers and students are suffering the consequences of not only diminished resources within the home and classroom, but they also must live each day with the knowledge that they've been cast off by the very system they're expected to belong to and work successfully within.

In some ways it isn't a surprise that the DWYL mentality is on the rise considering the powerful encroaching nature of capitalism. The spheres of work and non-work are made to seem collapsed in the world of the worker who does what she loves; she is always working because she loves it. The danger of this rampant positive mentality is that it masks the historic antagonism and separation between work and non-work.

...the antagonism between the two is as significant as their separation: Since capital is the production of surplus value, and since this production implies the constant expansion of labor time within society, the tendency within the mode of production is the constant encroachment of surplus labor time on the worker's time away from labor. Capital is a totalizing process and seeks to consume the whole of the worker's day under its logic.⁶

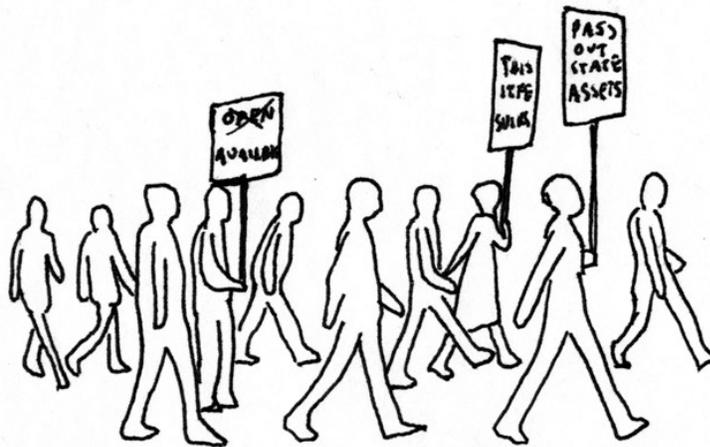
Entrepreneurism (such a big part of the DWYL worklife) is a way to convince individuals to adapt their wills, desires, and goals to profit logic—to the will and blindly replicating desire of the market.

These trends toward increased privatization, the rise in rhetoric around entrepreneurship, and the neoliberal dream of autonomous self-employment have to be seen in the context of resistance—as a response to worker struggles of the past. The terrain of work and production have changed so that worker solidarity and organization have become difficult, if not impossible, to establish. When so many people are self-employed, precarious, just-in-time, free-lance agents, certain tactics like the work strike become unrealizable. If so many workers are their own boss who do they withhold their labor from? These new confusions about what constitutes *work*, who profits from it, and how to resist its more exploitative forms have to be asked anew, whilst acknowledging that less flexible forms of exploitation,

⁶ Jehu, "Notes on the essay The Logic of Gender," *The Real Movement* accessed March 27th 2014: <https://therealmovement.wordpress.com/2014/03/24/notes-on-the-essay-the-logic-of-gender/#more-1501>

i.e. the factory, still persist.

If we are willing to acknowledge that there is no true exterior to the political economy then this opens new terrains for critique and struggle. We aren't limited to organizing on the shop floor, but like the Autonomist Feminists did, we can organize across our kitchen floors and in classrooms, libraries, and fitness clubs—the places where we as future laborers are constructed. But we won't accomplish anything if we can't first recognize ourselves and each other as fellow workers.



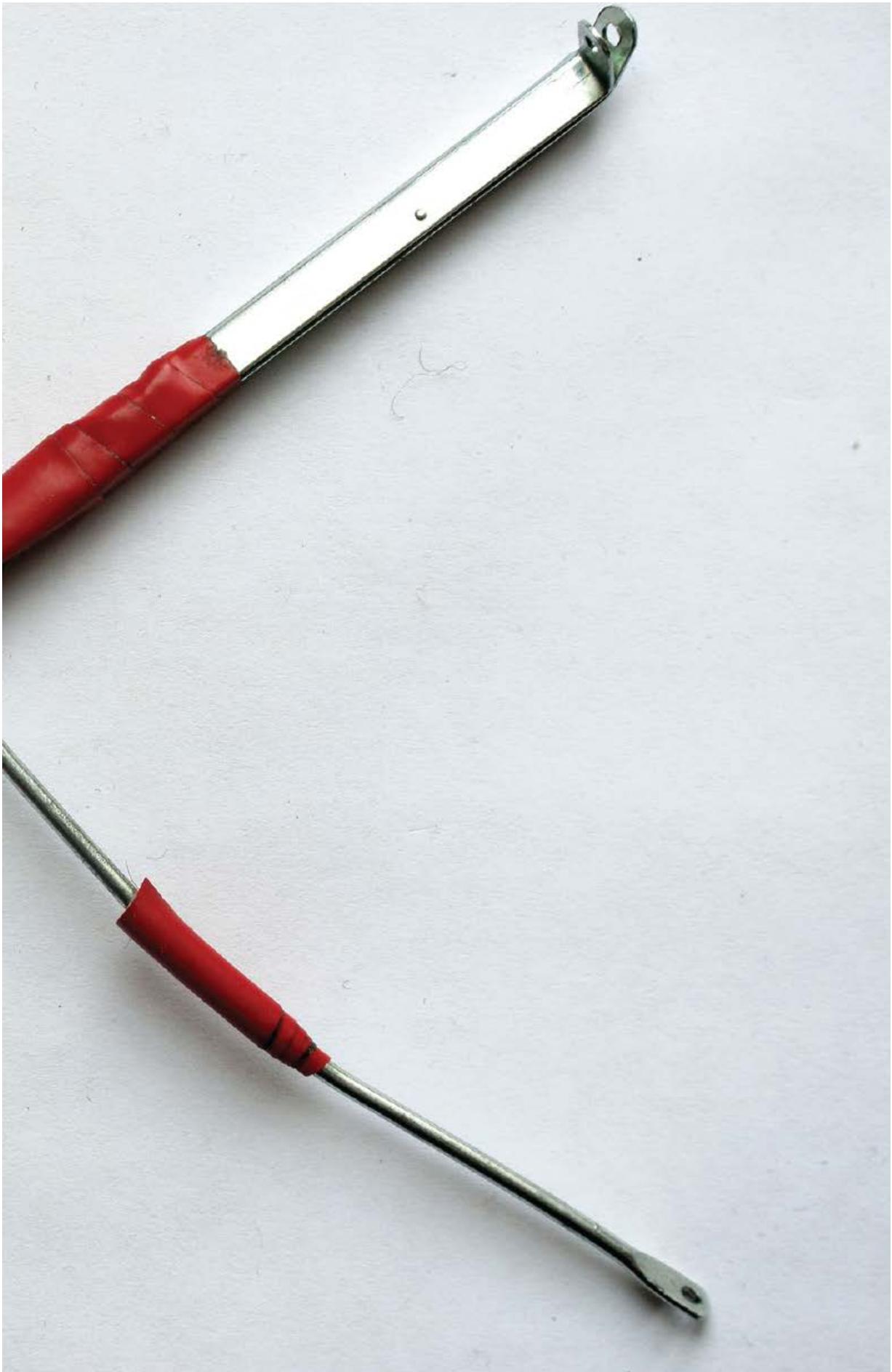
Our resistance has to reckon with the fact that power inscribes and orders the language we use to speak our lives, perform our authenticities, and map our future worlds. “Each gesture and each constructive activity in which we invest ourselves has a counterpart within the monetary economy or the libidinal economy.”⁷ At every turn we can ask how working out, doing our laundry, giving away free art, or performing a particular identity are good for capitalism and the state. Once that is realized, we can figure out how to organize them differently so as to be non-compliant, to make an interruption, an opposition to what power suggests.

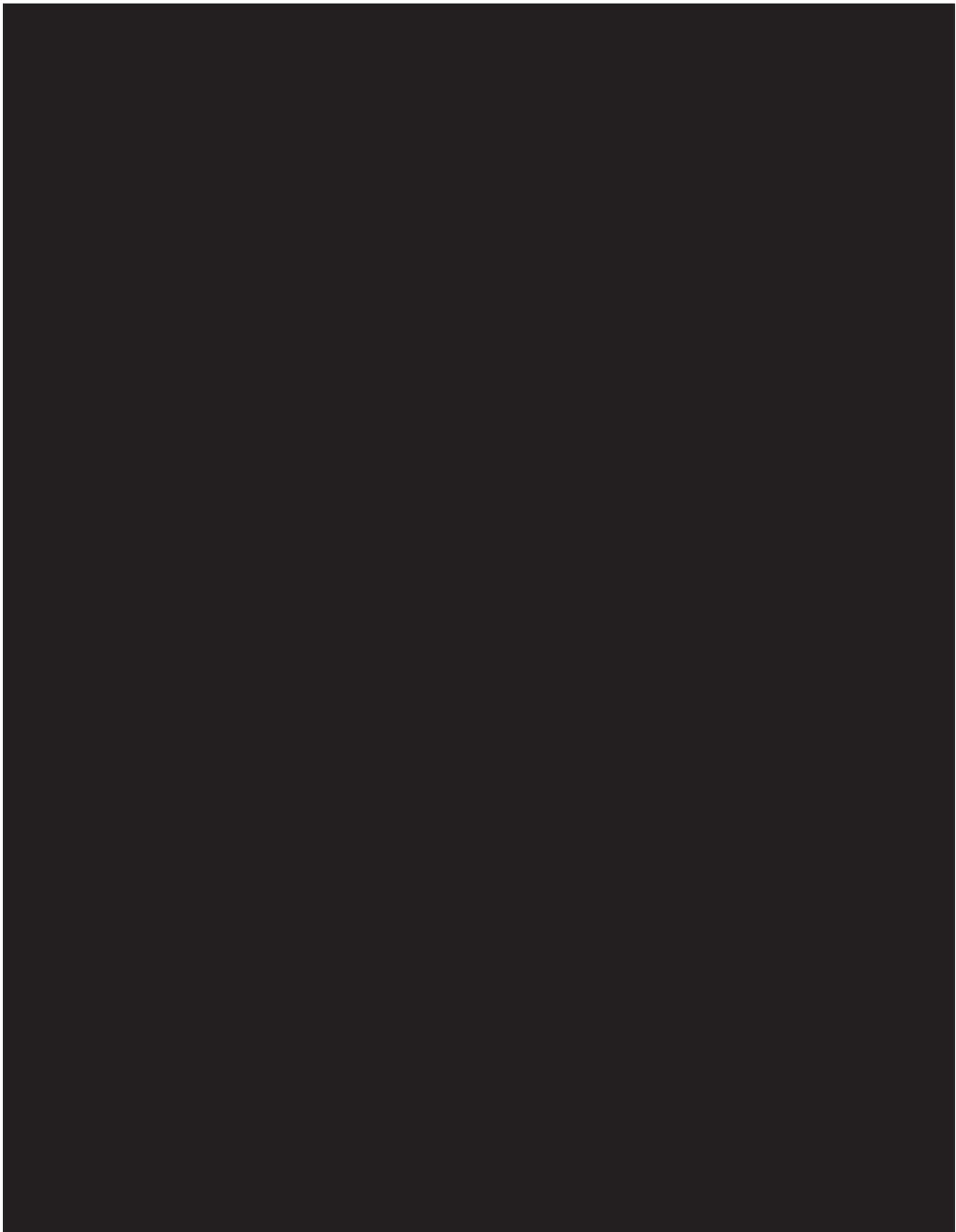
We must organize and agitate from all spheres of life, perhaps even more so in the spaces where capital seems absent or obscured (again the home, the relation of bodies, the public park, the DWYL artist's studio). These are the sites where the contradictions inherent in

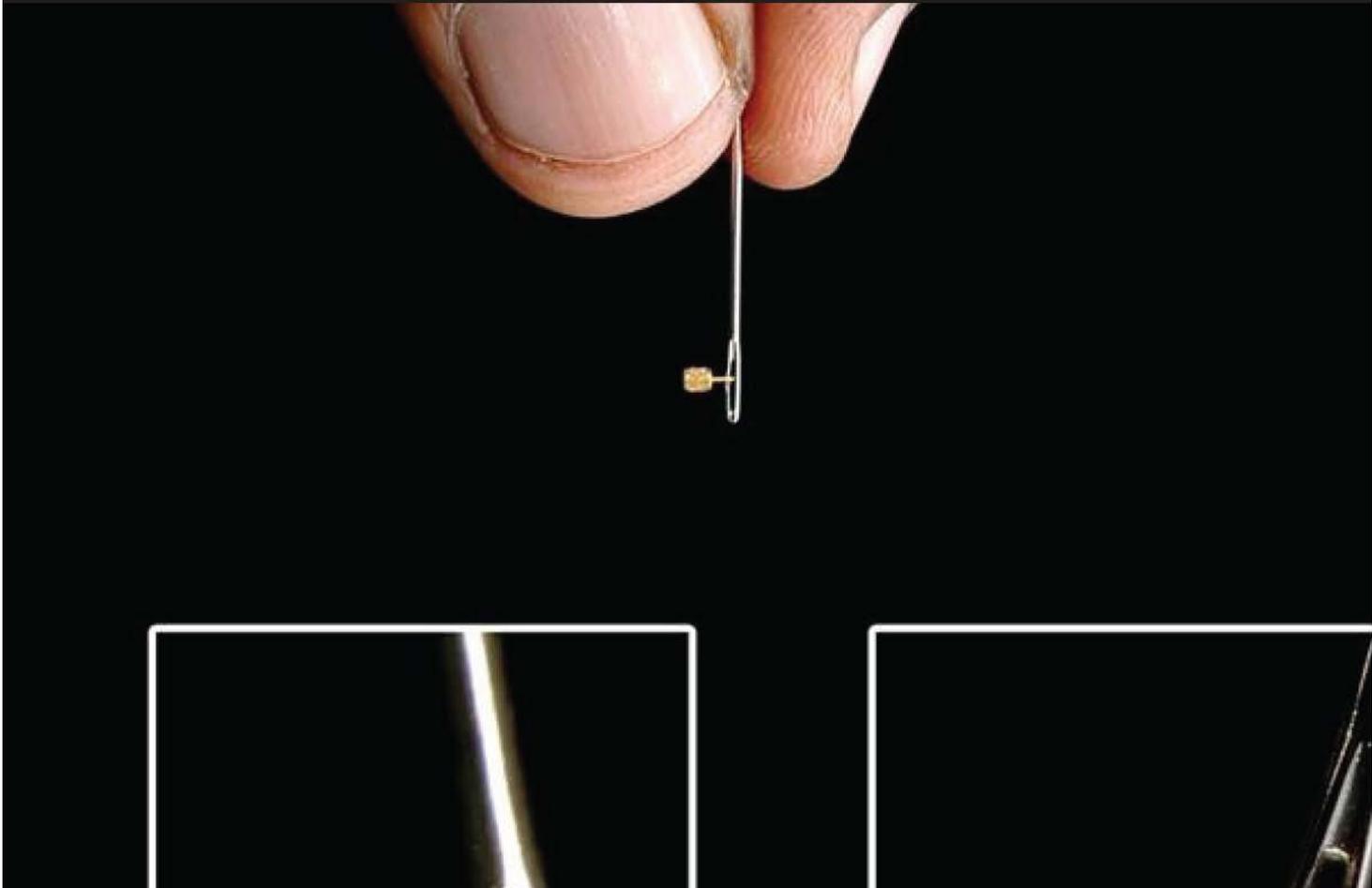
⁷ Claire Fontaine, *The Ready-Made Artist and Human Strike*, translated 2005, http://www.clairefontaine.ws/pdf/readymade_eng.pdf.

capitalism can be uncovered and drawn into visibility through refusal, provocation, and re-
imagination. Looking back on the 1970s campaign, Federici describes how the sphere of
reproductive labor doesn't need to be negated, but revolutionized—commoned—but it
seems that in addition these experiments into new ways of living and working together must
also be enacted as confrontations to the clean flows of capital.

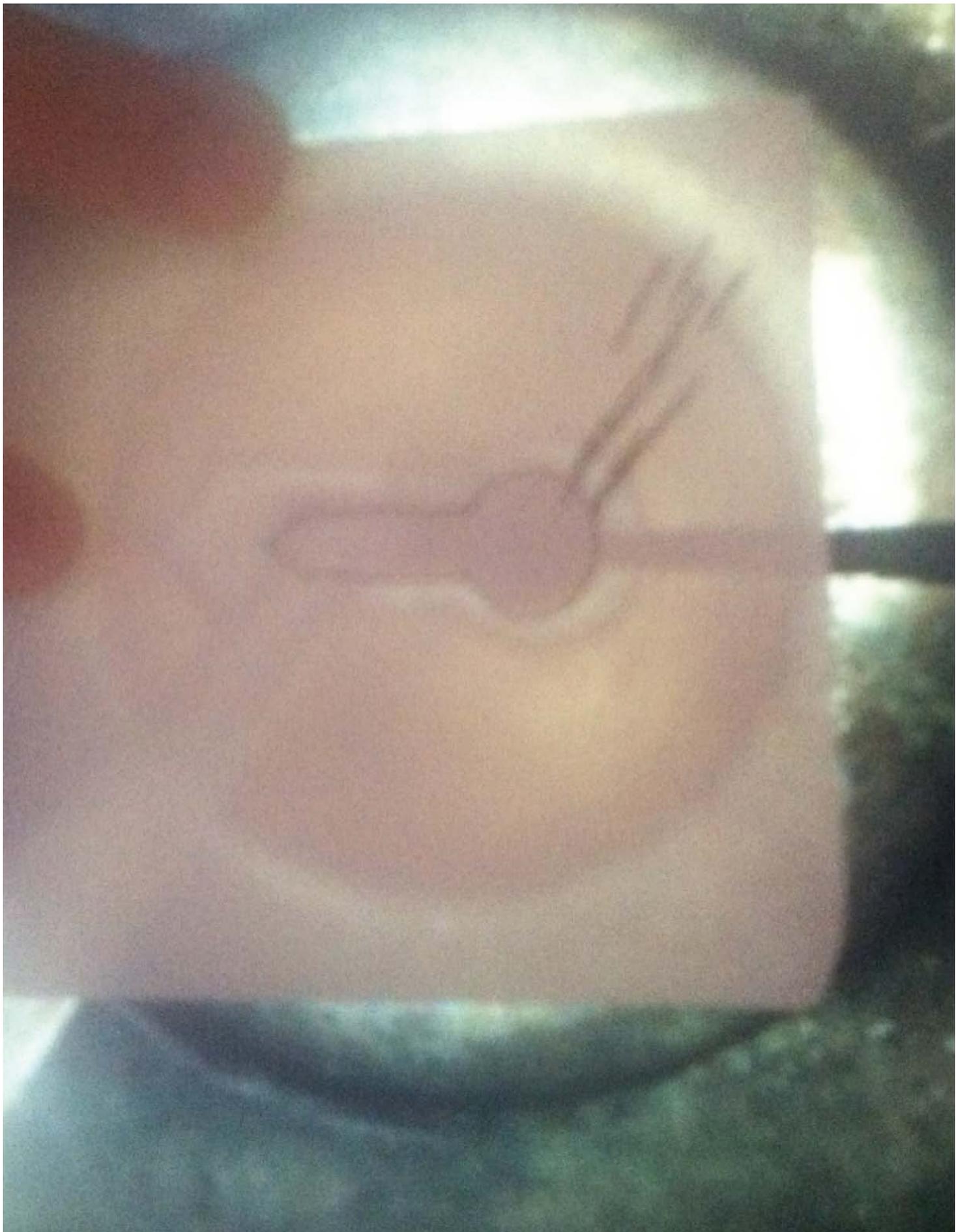




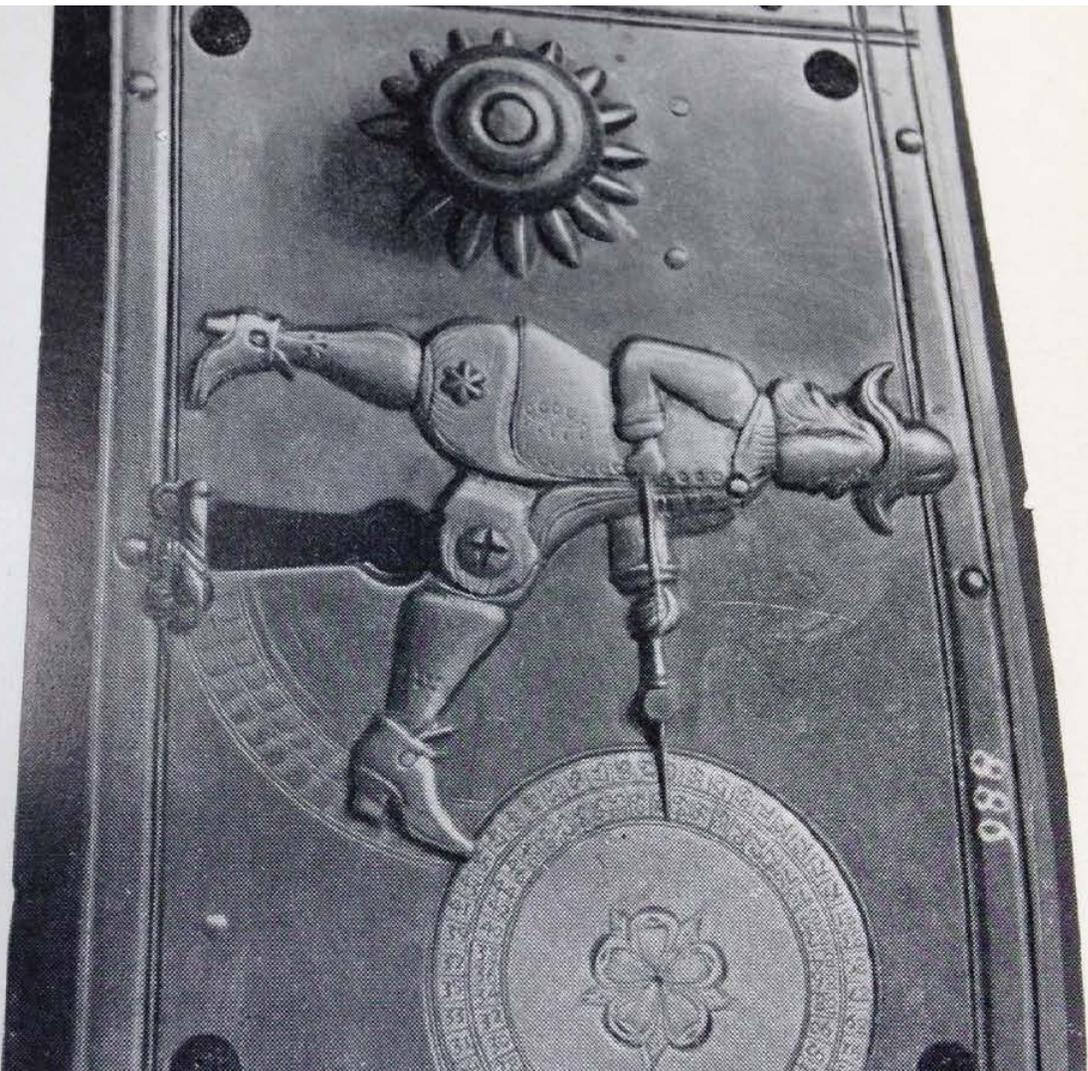


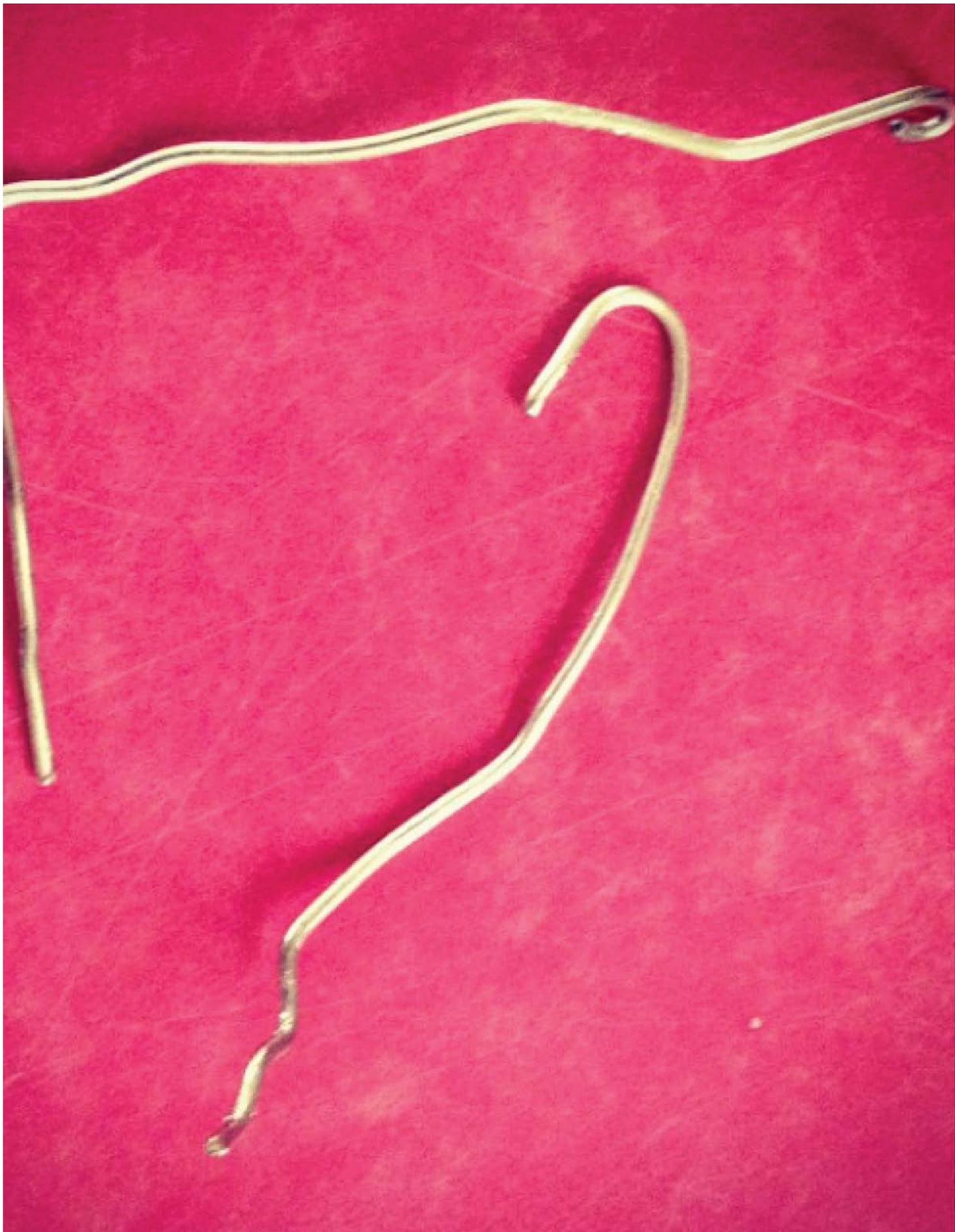






at door lock in the 17th century of the "Mauritshuis",
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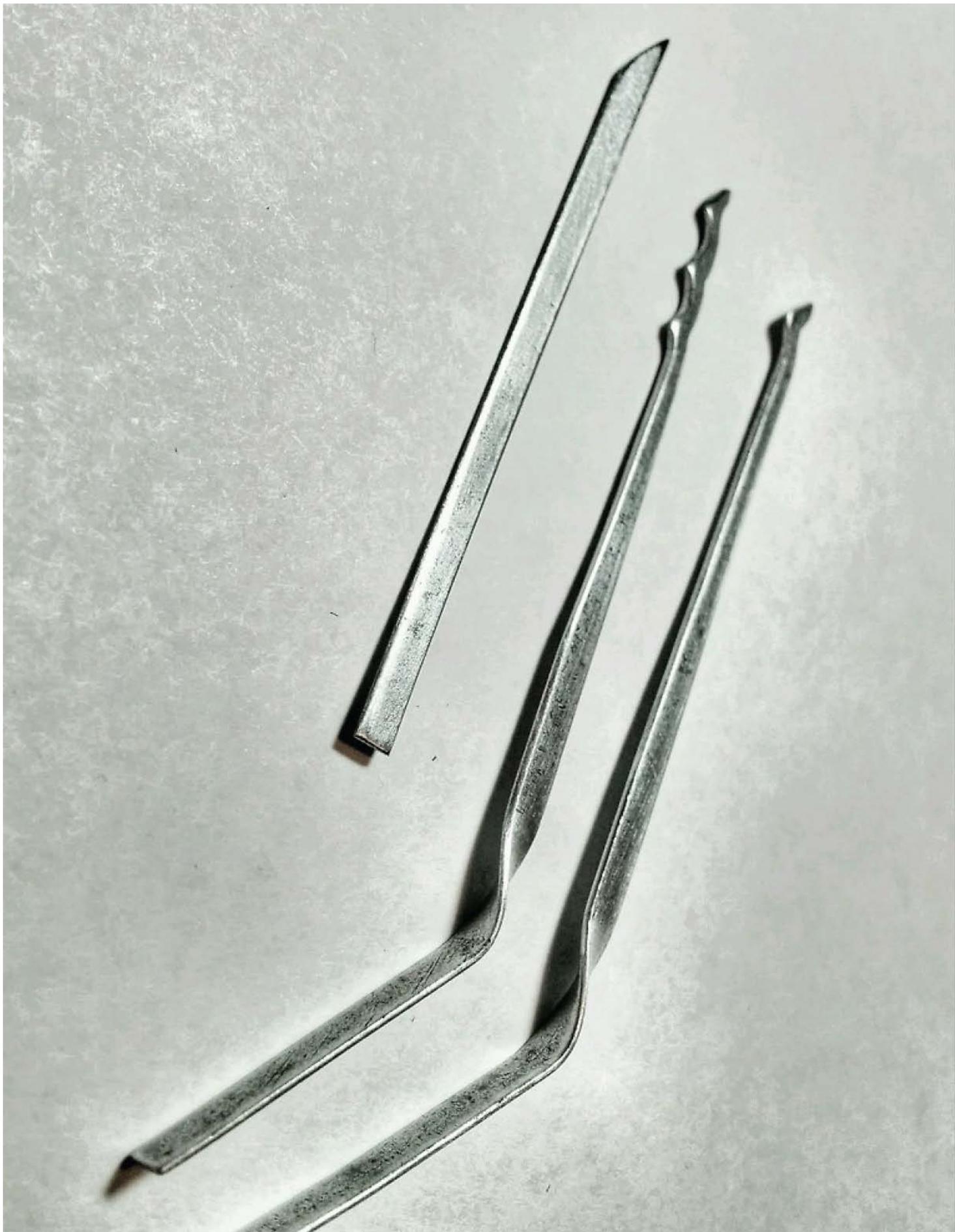




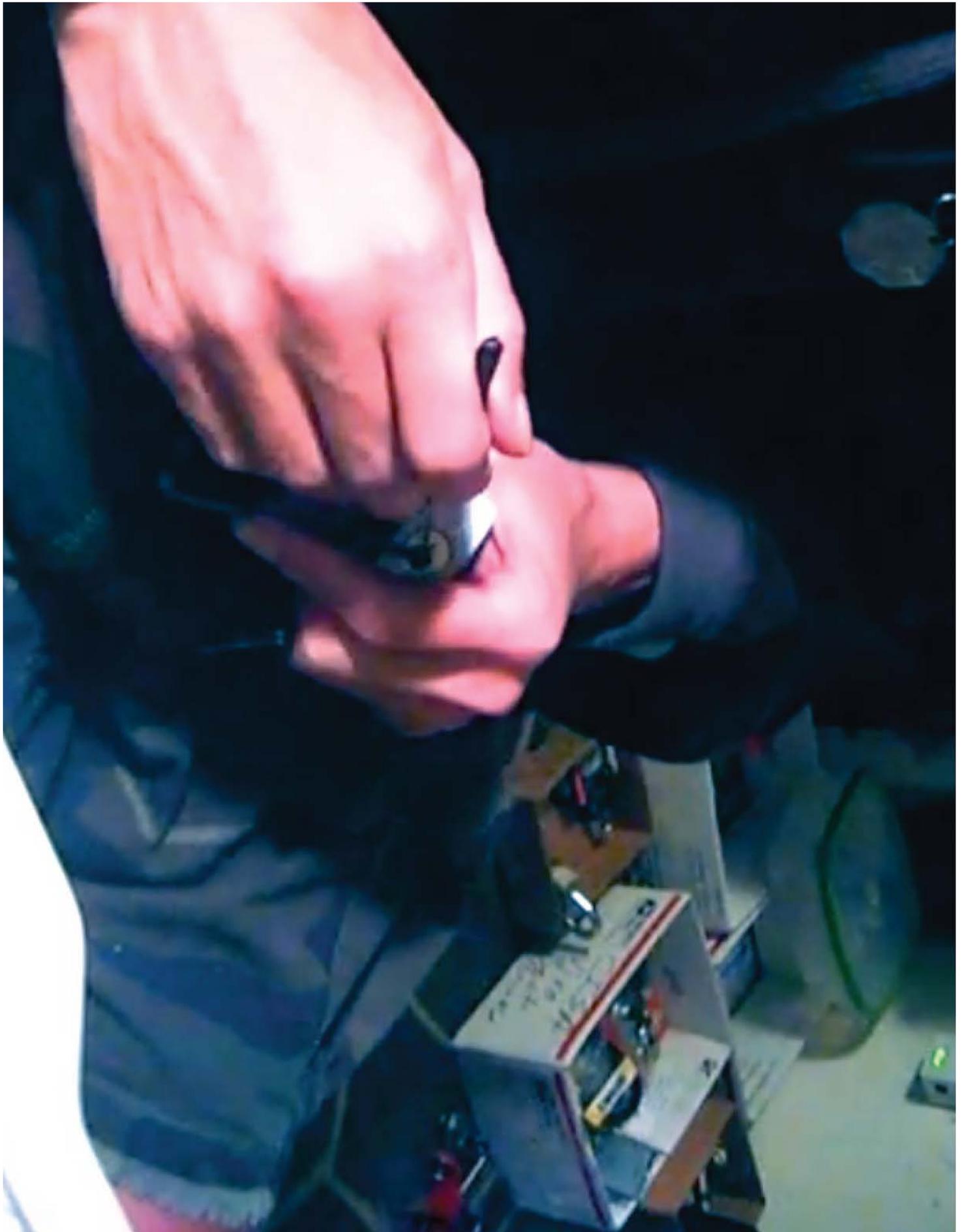


Scanned from original
German nuclear shelter
Inventory by spooze.com

















Enjoy this 2 question interview (!) I did with John Maus when I was 18. Also, pussy mist.

me: Why are critics a bunch of haters when it comes to your last CD?

John Maus: We cannot rightly call unthinking commentary criticism. For if by criticism we mean a real decision or separation, then this unthinking commentary is precisely that which criticism would separate or cut (*caedere*) off (*de*) from, i.e., everything which is unfree: the situation's imperative to consume, communicate, and enjoy.

Most of what is called criticism in our situation seems a synthesis of the following:

Firstly, the so-called criticism which insists upon its object only in its similarity to another, supposedly well-known object: where this is like that, and it is valued as such. Secondly, the so-called criticism which insists upon its object only as the cause of subjective affects: where this makes me feel like that, and it is valued as such. And thirdly, the so-called criticism which insists upon its object as only an object: where this has this or that attribute, and it is valued as such.

Because the singularity of its object is lost in its identification with supposed well-known objects, the first sort of so-called criticism is not critical. Because instead of the singularity of its object it only brings-forth subjective affect, the second sort of so-called criticism is not critical. And because the singularity of its object is not in the identification of this or that identifiable attribute, the third sort of so-called criticism is not critical. Indeed, what are these so-called criticisms if not *identitätsdenken*?

I suspect that the so-called criticism which insists upon its object only in its similarity to another, supposedly well-known object, functions as a reification and legitimation of the cultural economy: where the that which this is thought in terms of is not only supposed as such, but supposed as, and thus made over into, a staple of the cultural economy. Moreover, it is a privileged space wherein the payment of cultural capital as a means of subjectivization can be encouraged and accomplished. I suspect that the so-called criticism which insists upon its object only as the cause of subjective affects functions as a reification and legitimation of the *sujet supposé savoir*, the liberal democratic idea of the abstract equality of all human beings, and the definition of art as mere catharsis: where this makes me, and I am supposed to know, feel like that, and so will make you feel the same way, as you and I are exchangeable, and that is all it is or should be anyways, the evocation of a feeling. I suspect that the so-called criticism which

insists upon its object as only an object functions as a reification and legitimation of art as mere object: where everything can be grasped in terms of attributes with one is already familiar.

There are, of course, innumerable intersections, and mixtures between these three so-called criticisms, as well as the functions they serve, many of which can hardly be addressed here. Nevertheless, it seems the central aim of all three cover up freedom and singularity, i.e., is to arrest real criticism. And so, even if I believed these so-called critics were still capable of something as magnificent as hatred, they are not about what concerns me nor about what concerns genuine criticism, i.e., something that can interrupt the endless and meaningless regime of circulation, i.e., our situation in all its untruth.

Criticism must examine the possibility of a point of interruption – not because all this must be interrupted – but because thought at least must be able to extract itself from this circulation and take possession of itself once again as something other than an object of this circulation. It is obvious that such point of interruption can only be unconditional; i.e., something with no other condition than itself and which is neither exchangeable nor capable of being put into circulation. This does not seem to be the aim of anyone who has written, whether 'positively' or 'negatively' about my album, and so I cannot rightfully call it criticism.

me: Tell me a story that has to do with violence while touring.

John Maus: I have the perfect story, though it is long and I will surely be terrible in telling it.

I came to this place once while on tour, it could have been in New York, or Berlin, or Paris, I am not sure. Though it was definitely no place small and quiet, no place without many people.

It was a room. The earsplitting dark and neon room had more than a trillion angles, corners, curves, proportions, and so on. Each of these dimensions was hidden behind a thick cloud of drug smoke, pussy mist (menses, water, pyridine, squalene, urea, acetic acid, lactic acid, complex alcohols and glycols, ketones, aldehydes, and so on), magazine racks, and other various visual obstacles too numerous to begin pointing out.

The only source of vague light, which scattered across the enormous blackness

of the room in all directions, was the millions and millions and millions and millions of television screens – stars, winding stars, back and up like coral, arterial, going back and up, tunnels, up and back and around. The blackness underneath the electricity of these television screens was monstrous and foul, if it were not, it would have been just like the darkness in any video arcade or movie theater, but things seemed to move in this darkness, throb, only not really, rather, they seemed to anti-move and anti-throb, that is, neither remain still nor move, but something else, something wrong.

One could only enter the room through their own entrance, and at that entrance one did not really physically enter, rather, was assigned a kind of stand-in for oneself: a photograph with some information beneath it, something the room called 'the 2D-ID'. There were different themes you could chose for the photograph, to look like this or that well-known figure, you could also paste your face (but it wasn't really your face) onto one of the magazine images floating about the room, but creating your own 2D-ID was not permitted. Underneath the photo, was a space for your name, but your given name was not aloud there, rather only a list of the products you used, cultural or otherwise, this helped the room, which also had dozens of censors reading the 2D-ID's, guide you to the appropriate corner, it was hard to navigate through all the opium smoke and noise, let alone all the naked women who tapped on the air towards you.

(You quickly learned not to follow these women, for if you did they led you to spend what little money you had on this or that thing, they kept promising they would love you, but as soon as you bought whatever it was they wanted you to, they led you to buy something else).

At my entrance, I refused to put on a 2D-ID, not, because I was better than those who had, but because I was a million times worse. This cannot be stressed enough my friend, as I recount the story of violence, know that I am million times worse. I was stupid enough to hold onto the idea that this ID could not represent me, that is, that I was something more than or even other than this ID. I was stupid enough to think I was more than the pulsating flux of blind libidinal energy that was this room.

Now, you might say, 'No. In this room, where everyone is so beautiful and strong, your weakness and worseness make you singular, thus, in fact, you ARE really saying you are better to the extent that you are insisting on your singularity.' But worseness should never be confused with novelty, worser is worser not better, it

wasn't that my worseness came through as beaming radiance or humility, for would that even be worseness? No... It came through as pettiness, as fear, as stupidity. The room scared me, it made me feel sad for myself and insecure, it made me resentful and selfish. In other words, I was no Saint Francis of the room, I did not amass the others to myself and lead them away from the noise and televisions towards a simplicity and genuine happiness, or something like that, no, no, I insisted that the room should heed my presence in the most passive aggressive way, with no proof as to why it should, with no reason... It wasn't that the room was too stupid to pay attention to me, that it should have paid attention to me instead of everything else in it. It was, indeed, that I was not even worthy of its attention, I was a million times worse, a million times worse.

Now. Before I continue, allow me to explain a little bit else of what the room contained, for I saw figures in it that I for some reason recognized, though I had never met these figures before. Imagine that!

The celebrated American photographer Terry Richardson was there, his tongue hung from his open mouth and his eyes throbbed in his skull as he photographed two eleven year old girls in purple bathing suits, he bit his bottom lip and grabbed at his crotch like a maniac, his mouth, his awful mouth, which I could smell, called the little girls buttocks to attention.

The singer and songwriter (in a scene that has been described as psych folk, New Weird America, and freak folk, and other labels) Devendra Banhart, sat side-by-side with the American harpist, pianist, harpsichordist, singer and songwriter from Nevada City, Johanna Newsom. They sung quietly and weirdly about how we are all one, their audience looked up at them as children might look during story time, they seemed not to notice that the quiet piping of Dev and Jo failed in any way to drown out the incessant noise of all the televisions and magazine racks clattering, that is, though you could hear them, you really couldn't hear them.

Just then, the Italian film and television actress and director, Asia Argento entered together with the American movie actor and director Vincent Gallo, who is also a recognized painter, male fashion model, musician, motorcycle racer, and break-dancer. Their costumes were splendid and amazing, seeming, for a moment at least, though not at all, to fill the infinite blackness of the room. The costumes were made from gold and ivory, from surfaces, but also from pieces of poor people (ears, tongues, eyes, hands, and the rest). Obviously, sir Vince and

miss Asia had done these people a favor, giving them bread for a day in exchange for these parts of themselves and all to make a costume that would fill the room with splendor. Moreover, we should add, the poor people from whom these costumes were made, were not really people at all, as there are no people, but only the seething and furious sexual intensity of the room. I was amongst the only people in the room stupid enough to think otherwise. Anyways, these two came in, shuffling both quietly and loudly.

In another corner I saw Wolf Eyes, a noise rock band from Ann Arbor, Michigan, and the Black Dice, a noise rock/experimental band based in Brooklyn, New York. These, together with Christian Marclay, a visual artist and musical composer based in New York, who explores pattern languages connecting sound, photography, video, and film, as well as others, took turns crapping on musical scores by Cage, Lucier, and Wolf. One of the members of Wolf Eyes was actually masturbating on the 'Complete Recordings of Varese'. I noticed as well, though I am not sure, a tiny little tiny light, which pierced through everything if you paid attention. I thought it was ghost of Webern, but I couldn't pay attention to it because no one else was.

Sonic Youth, the seminal American alternative rock group, formed in New York City in 1981, were there too, singing music about how fascism is bad. I listened carefully and this music formed an amazing consonance with the sound of the Televisions, with their chatter, almost so consonant that it was inaudible, so that you couldn't really hear it. The American singer-songwriter, composer, and actor , Thomas Alan Waits, together with Nicholas Edward Cave, an Australian musician, songwriter, author, screenwriter and occasional actor, best known for his work in the rock band Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds and his fascination with American music and its roots, and the American singer songwriter who led the rock band Oingo Boingo from 1978 until its breakup in 1995, Danny Elfman, all sang together about pumpkin patches and ghouls coming out on Halloween night.

There were many other figures I recognized, but perhaps this is tedious, anyways, all of these figures were surrounded by anonymous shuffling people, who paid them attention with envy – this was the room, and somehow it took notice of my worseness, and in a way I could hardly explain, it ignored me as well, in the most violent and inhuman way.

It doesn't always do this, for instance, it ignored my friend Ariel Pink by paying

him attention, rather than paying him attention by ignoring him as it did me.

Granted, I deserved this, this non-attention. Or, perhaps I didn't even deserve this, but something worse, because I am a million times worse. That they could even use their strength, beauty, and importance to ignore me. That they could even use their cash, their cleverness to belittle me. That they could even be oblivious to me was an insult to them.

Yes... They ignored me, but somehow, in ignoring me, they managed to do violence, Dev ignored me by sitting on my face naked, his hippie-butt hole rocked to and fro against my nose and mouth, laughs and cheers filled the room. Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth muttered to Kim Gordon of Sonic Youth 'Yo. Yo. Yo. That is wicked! Stop the hate! Mother fuck Jesus!' His gold-teeth glittered underneath his black eyes as he said this.

The Beastie Boys, a musical group from the New York City boroughs of Brooklyn and Manhattan, sang 'Fight for your right to party!' while Dev continued rocking on my face, Jo, nearby clapped. 'We are all one' Dev said, now rocking in fast motion, his sweaty hairy asshole wearing away at my ugly face.

'You know you deserve this?' whispered the electronic Canadian musician, best-know for her song 'Fuck the Pain Away', Peaches.

'Yes...' I managed underneath Dev's ass, knowing how unworthy I was to hear her speak, especially to me.

I should add that, though none of this is imaginary, they were in fact ignoring me while they paradoxically seemed to pay this attention, Dev rocked and rocked, like a horse-rider, his reeking little nut sack bouncing against my chin. I started to cry for myself, and this elicited the rightful fury of the room as it ignored me.

'You cry for yourself like a woman! You are not worthy to be in this room! You are not worthy for my strength and beauty and power! You are not worthy you monkey-nigger, to see my films or hear my music! How small and silly you appear! How jealous and bitter' cried Vince, in his beautiful costume, with Asia on one arm and American actress Chloe Seingy on another.

'I know' I cried miserably 'I know...' And I was not being sarcastic, I really was not as strong or wealthy as him, I really did, and in the pettiest way, envy the

applause the room gave him in the smallest and most unthinking way.

As Angelica Taschen, of Taschen publishing, who has been a noteworthy force in making lesser-seen art available to mainstream bookstores, including some fetishistic imagery, queer art, historical erotica, pornography and adult magazines, squatted, in her dress made of gold and diamonds, and began peeing on my face, I thought to myself, 'Vince is right... I am just jealous and small... I am just sad that there is nothing worthy of attention in me' but my thoughts were interrupted. You see, Taschen's piss was nice at first, a lubricant against the nastiness of Dev's incessant rocking, but then it went in my mouth, and the taste of salt was sickening, rancid, awful even. Especially when mixed with the pot smell and the fumes of the Beethoven and Handel scores being burned over in another corner, next to Mozart scores, an enormous fire were the Mozart scores underneath a sign that read 'His music sounds pussy and pretty.'

I heard somebody say 'I like Satie'.

I heard another somebody say 'I don't need a God... All this is God enough for me!'

I heard another person whispering 'Gwen Stephani's new album and Destroyer's Rubies, and The Arcade Fire, and the Arab Strap, and Ghostface Killa...'

Secretly, though I hated them all in my unworthiness before them, I wished it was my name on their tongues.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Jim O'Rourke, American musician and producer long associated with the Chicago experimental and improv scene, rise from the activity of shredding the collected works of Conrad, Young, and Feldman. He quickly came over, squatted behind Dev, and began punching my scrotum as hard as he could. Everyone applauded, and Beck, the American musician, singer songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist, started break-dancing. They all ignored me, yes, and rightfully, but in some way they also took approving notice of my mockery. Sophia Coppola, for instance, the American director, actress, producer, and Academy Award-winning screenwriter, led a fecal orgy in honor of my mockery.

Swine filled the room, running off somewhere, off a cliff, squealing, they ran

passed, and just then Peaches screeched into a distorted microphone dripping with delay 'Smoke dope and make beats! Fuck the sick, the poor and the weak, let's have a party!', it made my puny ears bleed.

And so there I was, Dev rocking on my face, Jimmy punching my scrotum, Taschen pissing on my face, and I I felt, for the first time, the blackness rising inside me.

With each passing instant, a fear that I had never known strengthened itself within me. Holding my guts, I cried out at my finitude. The cries only resounded against this limit, further marking-it-out and feeding the blackness, affecting its increase.

'You are not contained in this pitiful limit' I told myself in agony, 'you always soar beyond it.'

The blackness persisted in its rise; I searched my memories as best I could for merely one example of my being outside this limit, there was none. Every time I saw something further, I understood it was not me, neither was it of me. I saw I could not give word for anything beyond this limit. I could neither say nor think it with all of my might, it was nowhere in me. What I saw then was this limit mocking me, an ugly mocking face – the dragon in a Chinese parade – twisting its gantic head from side-to-side, bawling relentlessly against what I am in showing-off what I could never be, I am precisely the inability to be that.

The thick blackness had now taken shape, it had filled my large intestine, and it was spilling its way into my stomach backwards through the sphincter. I would gnash my teeth back at the ugly gook-dragon. I would make its big stupid eyes cower as I chewed my bloody teeth. I would make the ruthless twisting of its gantic head from side-to-side pause in confusion as it watched me eat my lips. 'No' I told myself 'I will do none of this.' I heaved over in pain as I saw I could do no such thing; I lacked even the courage of a wimpling masochist. The blackness began pumping its way up my throat pipe as I saw that especially this – my grief and despair at the limit – is its most vital component. Grief and despair establish the limit once-and-for-all meaning I can never be more than what I am.

Out the blackness came, a heavy sparkling burst of rank sewage, darker than the new moon. It sprayed all over the room, gallons and gallons of it without end, spurting through my mouth with all the force and pressure of a fire hose. The

noise it made was something like an anus during a fit of diarrhea, when it is all out of feces yet insists still on pushing nothingness out of itself.

What mattered most of all was the smell, the smell of it was so horrible that it cannot be transposed into any thought or language within this limit, thus something from within me – the stink of the blackness – had moved outside the limit.

As I lay there in unspeakable shit smelling foulness, amazement came over me, a strange certainty that anatomically impossible as this experience was, it would not kill me. I had never heard of such a thing, 'who sprays black shit out of their mouth' I wondered, gently wiping the muck from my chin as I laid back.

Dev ran away from me and disgust, as did Taschen and Jimmy, the room cleared around me.

I had vomited, of course, many times before: from flu, from bad food, from dizziness, but this was not vomit, neither was it liver bile, it was more like sewage of some kind, feces-like, yet with the appearance of crude oil or fresh tar, pure shimmering blackness, pure liquid, pure rockets, without even a suggestion of clumping or chunks.

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, looking directly at the camera. She has dark hair and is wearing a light blue top. The image is overlaid with white, hand-drawn text. The word "SMILE" is positioned in the upper half, and the word "STRIKE" is positioned in the lower half. The background is dark and out of focus.

SMILE

STRIKE

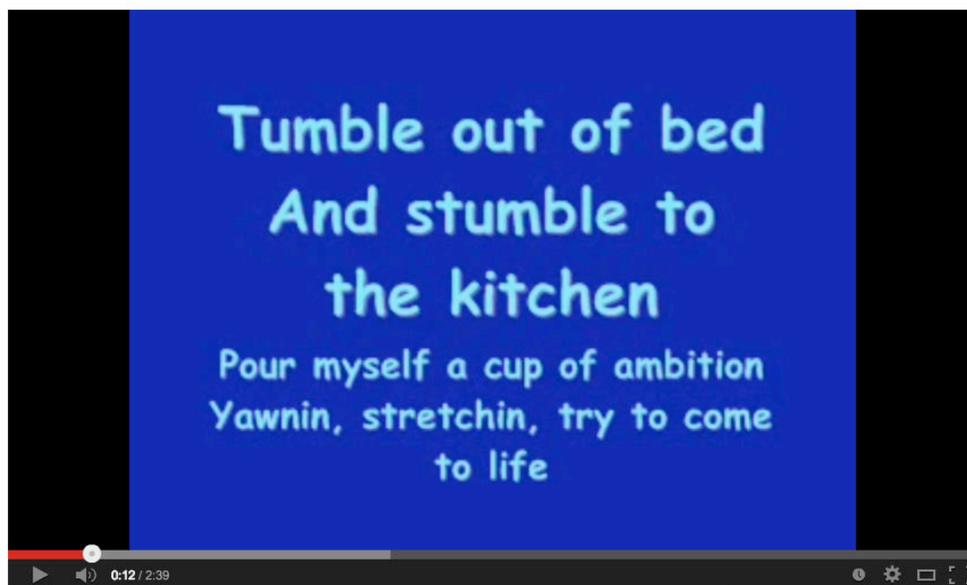
Semantics & Reproduction of Neoliberal Ideology: How 'Labour' became 'Work'

In the dictionary, 'Labour' is defined as, amongst other things:

[P]hysical work, especially manual workers, workers considered as a social class or political force [. . .] *the labour movement* [. . .] the process of childbirth [. . .] work hard; make great effort: *they laboured from dawn to dusk* | *she was patiently labouring over her sketchbooks* [. . .] work at an unskilled manual occupation [. . .] till (the ground): *the land belonged to him who laboured it* [. . .] have difficulty in doing something despite working hard.

'Work' is defined as, amongst other things:

[W]ork as a means of earning income; employment [. . .] the place where one is employed [. . .] be employed in a specified occupation or field [. . .] a task or tasks to be undertaken [. . .] good or moral deeds [. . .] a thing or things done or made; the result of an action [. . .] literary or musical composition or other piece of art [. . .] everything needed, desired, or expected [. . .] be engaged in physical or mental activity in order to achieve a result; do work [. . .] produce as a result [. . .] make efforts to achieve something [. . .] (work on/upon) exert influence or persuasion on [. . .] use one's persuasive power to stir the emotions of.



Generally, we may think of these two words as virtually interchangeable, yet there's a distinct difference between the emphases on each of these words. The deviation of meaning between the two terms is a movement in parallel, and bound explicitly with, changes to industrial labour in the West: our era of post-Fordism. Post-Fordism entails that large-scale mass-production methods pioneered by Henry Ford is of the past, and systems of labour are now geared more towards using small, flexible, manufacturing units. This bind increases reproductive imperatives for 'work' as moral condition within neoliberal ideology.



As stated in the dictionary definition, "social class or political force" is inherent in the word 'labour', which stems from Karl Marx's work on the potential of *labour power* (*Arbeitskraft*), and the commodities produced by said labour force can be read in Marxian terms through the *value-form*: the relationship of *worker* and material production with its economic and social value. Following from Marx, we can (simply) visualise the function of capitalism as an operation of production and consumption.



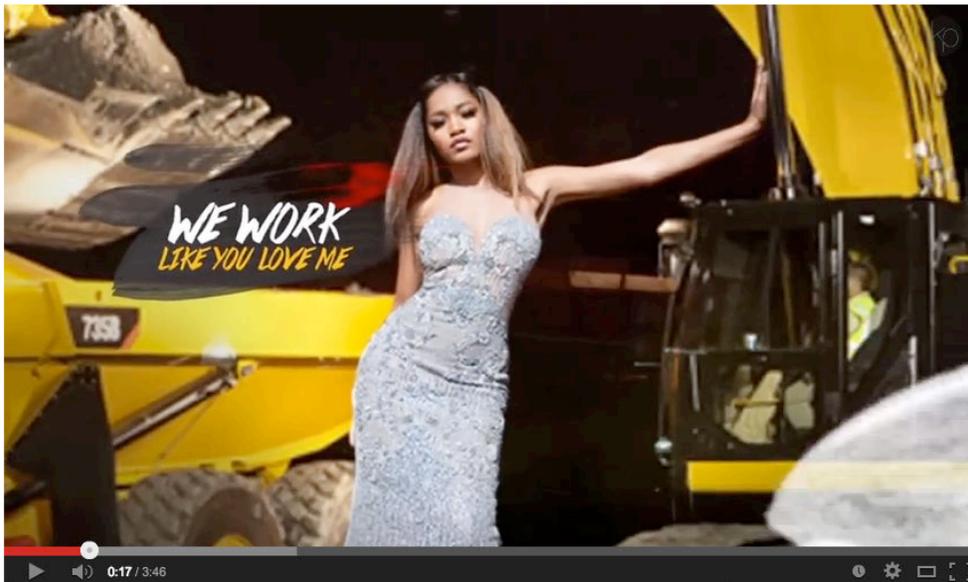
There have been recent nods to the complexity and blurriness of this relationship, demonstrated in terms beginning as buzzwords and becoming staples of description for current systems of capital; terms such as 'prosumption', which alludes to immaterial laboring (running a blog, working in a call centre, as IT support at a company, and so on and so on), and the less definitive collectivisation of labour force – as non-distinct from the consumer force. Prior to 'prosumption' we have seen that attempts to illuminate the blurred image of labour under capital is most notably undergone in the work of feminist theorists on the place of *reproduction* in Marx's equations. As put by Silvia Federici:

Marx failed to recognize the importance of reproductive work because he accepted the capitalist criteria for what constitutes work, and he believed that waged industrial work was the stage on which the battle for humanity's emancipation would be played.

The shift from 'labour' to 'work', is more than a change in the use of words, it is a marker of the contemporary through its distinct incorporation of capitalism's reproductive demands, which extend further than the production of more workers through childbirth. Reproduction of 'work' is exemplified in the aspirational understanding of *life* under capitalism, the perpetuation of the American dream is central to work's image, and instillation of work-as-ideology. As put by Michael Rynan – describing Cisco adverts from Harry Sanderson's *Unified Fabric* research:

It's clear that this operation is infrastructure and a cultural platform. The video presents an aggressively normalized and aspirational image of American life. A white, affluent, hetero-normative nuclear family are seen pursuing their regular evening activities. The man works at a data centre during the day and in the evenings he is shown spending time with his family, taking his wife out for a romantic dinner and watching the big game in a sports bar with his buddies. As a propulsive and monotonous yet sentimental soundtrack plays relentlessly in the background, the sterile portrait of 'normal' life is accompanied by constantly scrolling sets of numbers: 'life in the data centre doesn't stop when you live your life.'

Leopoldina Fortunati, in *The Arcane of Reproduction*, meticulously critiques Marxian analyses of labour that posits 'production' as separate from 'reproduction', which, for example, serves as a separation of 'labour' from 'housework'. For Karl Marx, the production of goods is the fundamental character of capitalist production, and reproduction is merely supplanted as 'natural production', which we see when he writes: "But the capitalist may safely leave this to the worker's drives for self-preservation and propagation. All the capitalist cares for is to reduce the worker's individual consumption to the necessary minimum".



By noting the necessity of feminist readings of Marx, what I wish to suggest is that the semantic differentiation between 'work' and 'labour', beyond simply echoing the prosumerist, post-Fordist, shift in 'type' of work undergone in the West, also incorporates the affective conditions of reproductive labour and propositions of how we may visualise the structure of production – in the same vein that late capitalism incorporates and commodifies, or, as Tiqqun would put it, 'Young-

Girlifies', counter culture.

Affective Labour, different to the aforementioned 'immaterial labour' – a term most popularised by Maurizio Lazzarato, which diverges from labour of machines into office work, digital art practices et al – is a term most rigorously built by Italian Autonomist Feminists (such as those referenced in this text). Affective Labour is implicitly, work intrinsic to social fabric, creating emotional experiences in people. The rearing of children, the reassurance 'given' to a husband coming home after subjugation as a labourer, was the premise for the conceptualisation of this in the seventies. Now, affective labour is enforced as the saleable commodity par excellence for a labour force – the service class, and further, as prerequisite for ones' ontology.

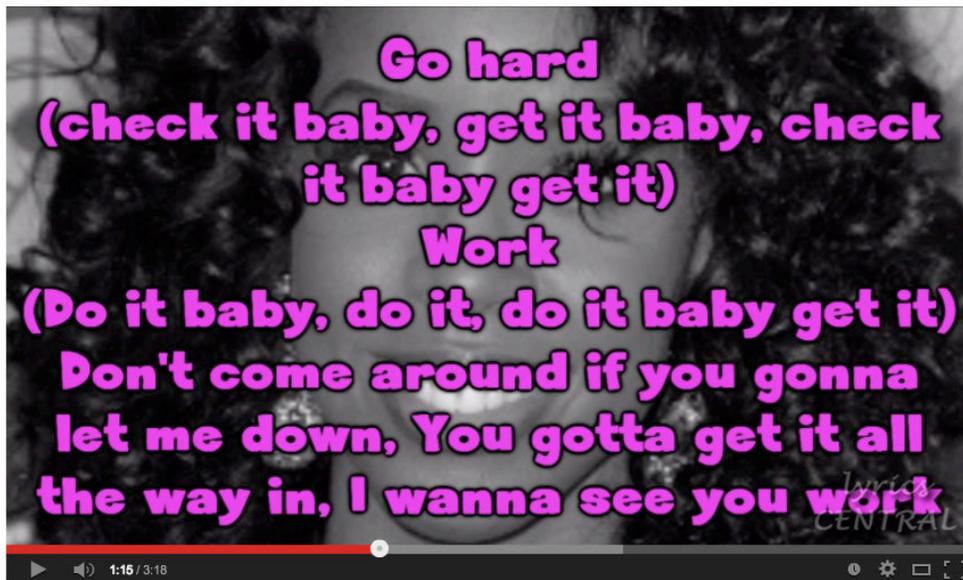


Paul Myerscough's text on the chain Pret A Manger, in the *London Review of Books*, evokes Mark Fisher's earlier description of the film *Office Space*, stating:

Pret workers aren't supposed to be unhappy. They are recruited precisely for their 'personality', in the sense that a talent show host might use the word. Job candidates must show that they have a natural flair for the 'Pret Behaviours' (these are listed on the website too). Among the 17 things they 'Don't Want to See' is that someone is 'moody or bad-tempered', 'annoys people', 'overcomplicates ideas' or 'is just here for the money'. The sorts of thing they 'Do Want to See' are that you can 'work at pace', 'create a sense of fun' and are 'genuinely friendly'. The 'Pret Perfect' worker, a fully evolved species, 'never gives up', 'goes out of their way to be helpful' and

'has presence'. After a day's trial, your fellow workers vote on how well you fit the profile; if your performance lacks sparkle, you're sent home with a few quid.

Further, in the paper *Affective Labour and Subject Formation: Feminist Emancipatory Politics Today*, Svenja Bromberg traces this category of 'affect' as it has been utilised by Hardt and Negri to describe such conditions as epitomised by Pret's *matra* for employment, whilst also proposing its promising characteristic of re-appropriating biopolitical life and formulating radical subjectivities. Not only does Bromberg point out that affective labour is firmly within the global marketplace, she also acknowledges its place in the *reproduction* of capitalist life and its manifestation as a *still gendered* work form; warning against over-essentialism of the (Spinozian) *potentia* that affect alludes to, or can carry, in small quantities. For example, I am most easily employed as a care-giver if I need part-time work, it is no surprise that I am female. 'Care-giver' is a position of employment that has an etymology of something deployed freely out of empathy. Care-giver is used to describe positions very much still associated and restricted to women, due to their 'natural character' and/or propensity, for such empathetic and apparently free labour, such as Nanny, nurse, midwife, and so on.



Affective Labour as necessary asset for waitresses, receptionists, shop assistants, and so on, typifies a type of post-Fordist employment whilst peddling the American dream – of working hard and *enjoying it*; thus reproducing the identity and ideology that constitutes work as a marker of ones' existential validity. Not only must we be aware of feminist reordering of Marx's analysis of capitalism, we must also look out and continue the reordering, as that which the critiques rail

against – the reproduction of capitalism, and forms of affective labour – is increasingly installed amongst all types of jobs and more, identity and ‘private life’.

Work under late capitalism is not a job, it is an existence; a term that reinforces neoliberal ideology and the celebration of structural conditions in which we live *as global labourers*. The separation of work from labour, or ‘departure’ of Fordist-type labour in the West – as an ideology of *what constitutes* work, is embroiled with a type of collective cognitive mapping that furthers huge disparities of wealth across the world, and further still, as Federici notes, the controlled the reproduction of the earth’s resources and primitive accumulation.



In this vein, *Work* as the moral condition of neoliberalism enables the *reproduction* of systems of capital – as it is infiltrated into, and perpetuated by, everyday life. Systems of aspiration, the affectivity required *to be* a global subject, a biopolitical mode of existence – where *Labour* is reserved for Foxconn factories and innumerable forms of mining and agriculture industries across the ‘third world’. *Work* is what we, in the West, should *enjoy* – as governed via imperatives of post-Fordist social order: you’re semantically alleviated from *Labour*, and *you’re loving it*.

[produce as a result [. . .] make efforts to achieve something [. . .] (work on/upon) exert influence or persuasion on [. . .] use one’s persuasive power to stir the emotions of.]



STIMMING

by Andrea Crespo

Stimming is a repetitive body movement that self-stimulates one or more senses in a regulated manner. Stimming is known in psychiatry as a "stereotypy", a continuous, purposeless movement.

Stimming is one of the symptoms listed by the [DSM IV](#) for [autism](#), although it is observed in about 10 percent of young children without autism. Many autistic children have no stims. Common forms of stimming among autistic people include hand flapping, body spinning or rocking, lining up or spinning toys or other objects, [echolalia](#), [perseveration](#), and repeating rote phrases.

There are many theories about the function of stimming, and the reasons for its increased incidence in autistic people. For [hyposensitive](#) people, it may provide needed nervous system arousal, releasing beta-endorphins. For [hypersensitive](#) people, it may provide a "norming" effect, allowing the person to control a specific sense, and is thus a soothing behavior.



Disclaimer

Stims will be used as an extrapolation of certain subjectively experienced phenomena in a capitalist landscape (partially based on my personal exposure to stimming). This discussion is not intended for the purposes of defining or demeaning individuals on the autism spectrum. For those interested, this [blog](#) provides examples, anecdotes, and information produced by neurodiverse individuals rather than a medical discourse (which tends to flatten and pathologize the experiences of individuals living with ASD).

Stims are for everyone. A quick search of “stimming” on ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) discussion site wrongplanet.net will yield anecdotal rather than medical discussions on stimming. One thread of interest described stimming as something that all people (neurotypicals) do, and not just those on the spectrum. Of course the participants agreed that the intensity of stimming and the ability for self-control is variable among different individuals. Another interesting point made on the forums is that of self-stimulation being displaced to objects rather than the body (for example, rubbing one’s cellphone case rather than one’s hands). Some stims are purely visual rather than tactile. One thread, for example, became a hub for sharing stimmy GIFs. Stims can be experienced through multiple pathways of perception, at times synaesthetically.

Stims are trance states without the visionary experience. Like a Hollywood remake of Paul Sharit’s repetitively droning [T.O.U.C.H.I.N.G.](#) Think S.T.I.M.M.I.N.G. Stims produce a “locked in” effect. In a YouTube [video](#), one man describes it as there being a “totality to it”, a sort of meditative absorption, tuning out all other extraneous perceptual or cognitive input. Affective states that emerge from stimming could easily be described as a state of “flow” or “being in the zone” except that they would likely be far more repetitive than the latter states allow for. That’s it, that’s it.

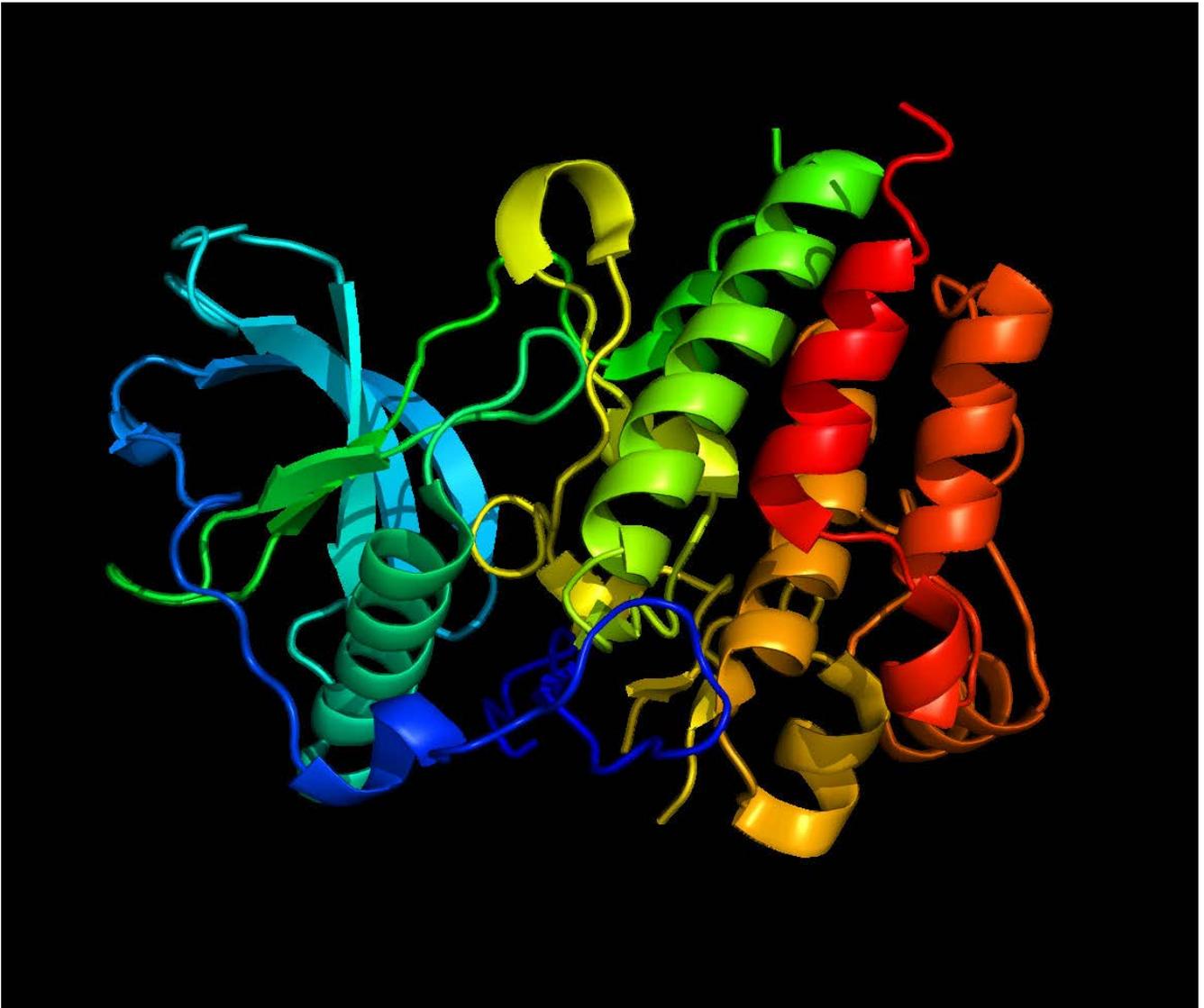
Stims are [basins of attraction](#). Timur Si-Qin writes “Not a balanced and harmonious nature, but rather whirlpools of temporary stability within a chaotic and disinterested maelstrom of fluids, informations, and genes.” in regard to the morphologies of corporate images. The subjective experience of stimming is like a microcosm of temporary stability, caught on loop. Replay, reboot, rehash... all while tantalizing our “instinctual and habitual affects”.

Stims are stimmy, and a good commodity is a stimmy commodity. Sure, an aestheticized commodity is a given in this day and age, but aesthetic experiences that can endlessly reiterate themselves are even better. Like nicotine-free e-cigarettes, objects with stimmy qualities do not need biochemical aids in order incite repetitive behaviors and their ensuing cascades of neuro-bliss.

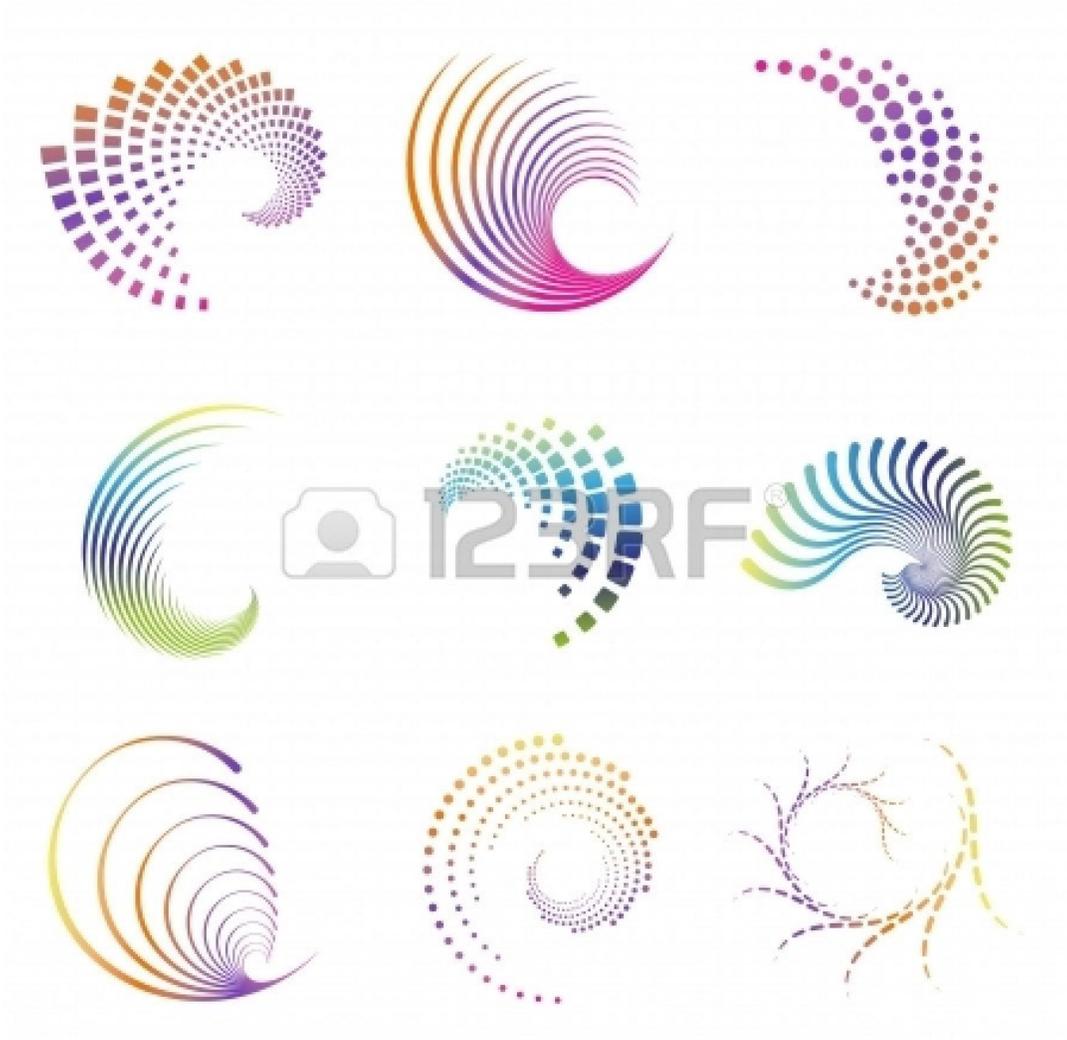




Stims are regulatory
They placate the senses
Calm the mind: Zen



Stims circumscribe affects
Lock them into droning
Predictability and
Excitability.



Stims are excitatory.

What's more exciting than a motion graphics infused experience? That brief moment of affective orchestration when the logo does that cool thing. That commercial jingle that incites hyperactivity.



Stims are produced by immaterial **labor** as much as material **labor**.

Not all stims are object-induced.

Service with a smile, performative one-liners.

What spells giddy upwellings as much as affective **labor**?



Stims
lubricate the
experience
economy.
Some
experiences
are hard to
replicate, so
you just
replicate the
ones that
aren't...

**Ad
Nauseum**



Stims propagate attention economies too!

Buzzfeed listicles

Stimmy GIFs

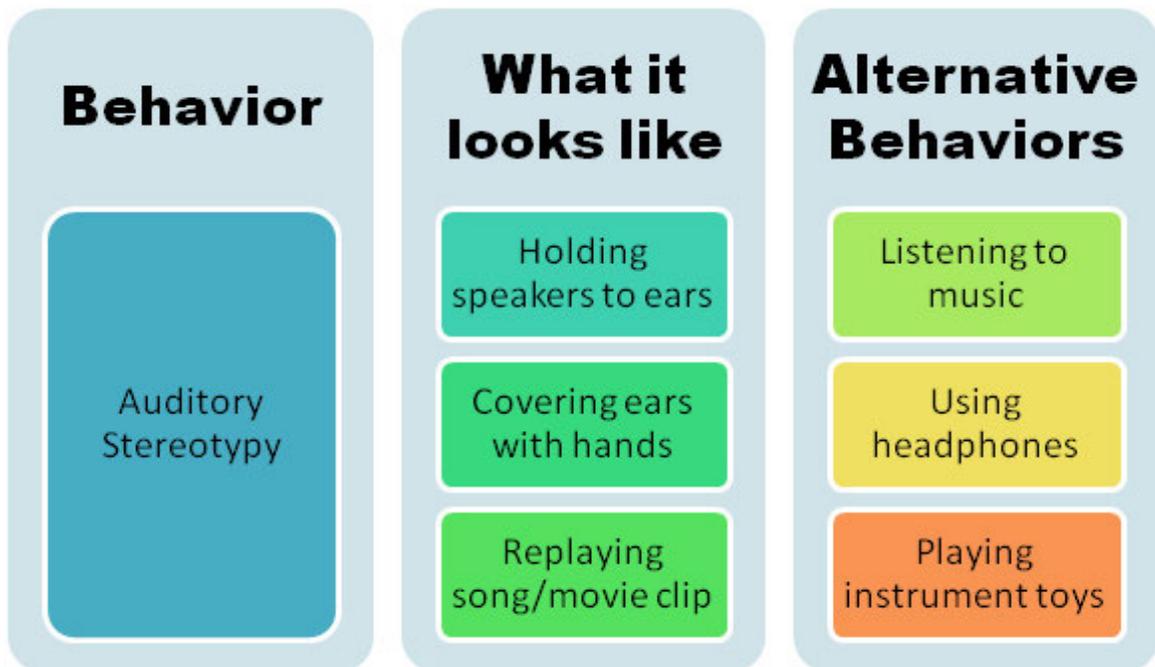
Modulate eyeball traffic

(GIFs might just be the hallmark stim of our era)

Good enough for me, good

Stims divert attention like black holes

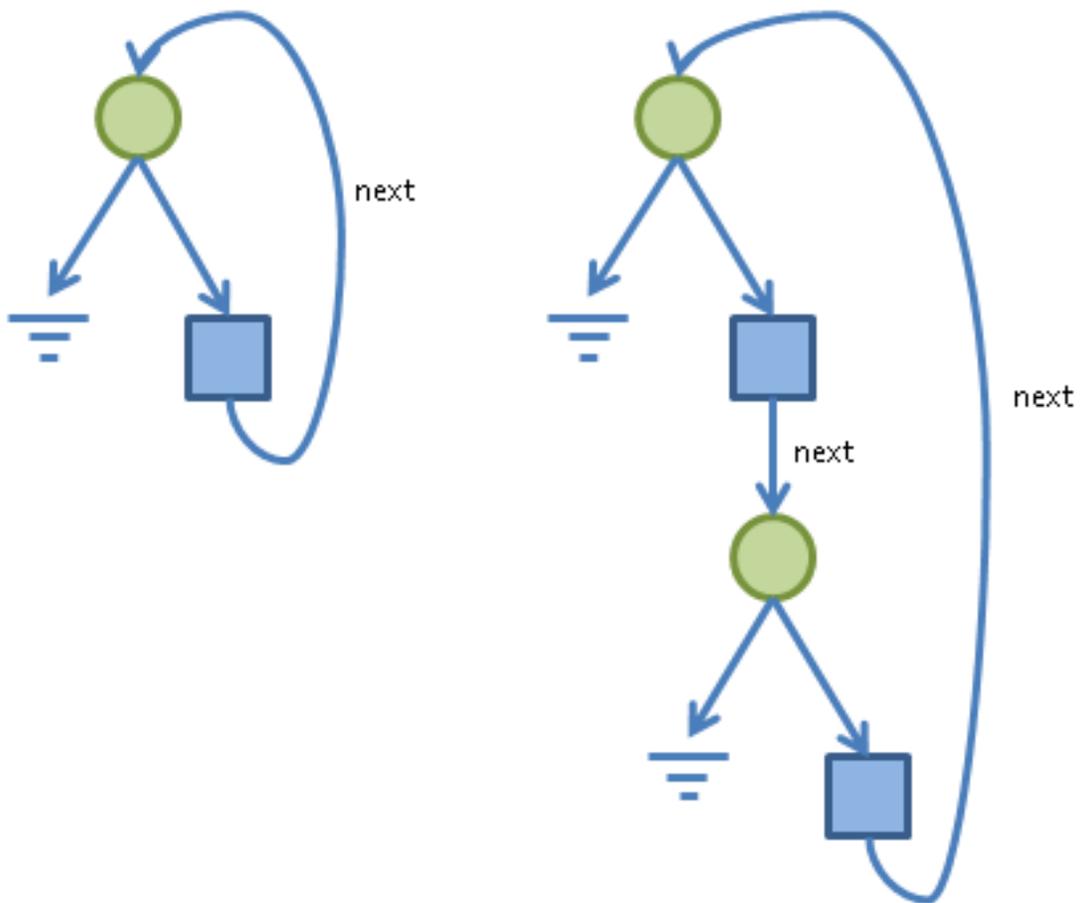
Attractors.....



Stims can be aural and musical. User-interface feedback, click click:
the tune that follows
the progress bar...



Stims have haptic moments too. Slide to **unlock**, **pinch** and **zoom**. That sweater you can't stop rubbing. That cellphone case you can't stop **fondling**. So **gratifying**.



Stims are like:

Vacuous moments, like reality television in slow motion with an aural accompaniment, reaffirming the moment. Oh no she didn't.

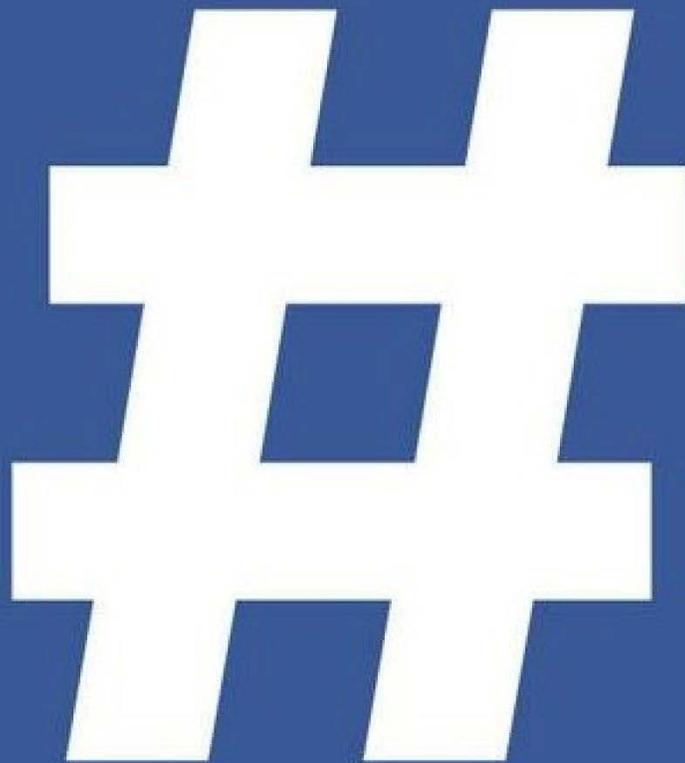
Yes she did, watch it again.

DVRs should be called stim-catchers.

Tautological sensory experiences.

Stims are instantiations of fullness
Oneness of being
All your faculties arrested
A privatized sublime





STUDIOPOKIT/TWITTER

Stims are recursive swag. Cool like Riff Raff [witticisms](#) or a repetitious Chief Keef ([rumored](#) to be on the spectrum himself) [music video](#).

Stims are recursive swag. Cool like Riff Raff [witticisms](#) or a repetitious Chief Keef ([rumored](#) to be on the spectrum himself) [music video](#).



Stims are memetic. They replicate and disperse through any medium at hand. Whether it is transmission through echolalia or dispersion through broadcast each stim finds its way!



Stims anchor experience, situate the body. Sometimes they do the opposite and you lose your body. Sometimes they secure or placate an otherwise chaotic maelstrom, like the repetitive yet creepily ecstatic Agent-Cooper-sniffing-his-coffee moments. Stabilization pitted against the turbulent...



Stims can be like movie soundtracks composed by John Williams. His [theme songs](#) are accompaniments that take on a **life of their own.....**



Stims are **animistic**

Input and output with agency.

Productive flows on over-drive.

Fetishes crystallizing Synthetic
intelligences.



Stims are cyborg affects with a cinematic touch.
Technical automatism for the desiring body.



Stims are hot...

Like pharmaco-pornographic deviations, synthetic titillations. Like a multi-tendriled abomination straight from a neuromarketing agency, it violates your sensibilities, and you like it!



STIMMING
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STIMMING
STIMMING
STIMMING



Ideal Forms

By Marc Jones

Last year was the first time my work was installed at the Miami Basel art fair. I had gone down there one time before—a few years ago. I just went on my own—well, I didn't mean for it to be on my own, but that's the way it happened. I don't know why I went, honestly; I didn't know much about art or the art world at the time, but I guess the idea of being in Miami sounded fun. I went to a couple of the fairs, but I didn't see anything that I liked. I mostly spent a lot of time by myself. I masturbated in this little hotel room that wasn't near anything in Miami, much less South Beach. Originally, I was supposed to stay in the room with my artist friend Michael, but Michael flaked because he didn't have any money. So I paid for the whole room myself and I didn't have as much money as I do now, so I was upset. The one obvious highlight of the trip was that I fucked a blonde. I never get to fuck blondes. Real blondes, I mean. So yeah I got to do that. I picked her up at a bar and we went to her hotel room and she pulled down her jeans. She was drunk. She didn't move when I fucked her, but seeing her naked was enough. I smelled her hair while I fucked her. I jizzed on her pink nipples. I cleaned up the jizz and kissed her nipples and tasted my jizz on her nipples. It felt like I was in a porno. The only thing that was weird was that after we finished she told me that she was really a man. But then ten minutes later she said that she was just kidding.

So, yeah, this past year I was pumped to come back to Basel. My presence would be real—I was a gallery-represented artist; I would know more people; I would probably make real

money. If all went according to plan, I would fuck more real blondes. My gallery told me that I was the featured artist in their booth and I laughed. The work that I was supposed to show, before everything got fucked up in the booth, was really stupid. They were c-prints of tables in white voids. The images were from the Internet—the top Google image search results for “table.” I slapped down red polka dots in random parts of each one for no other reason than it made them look like contemporary art. Then I called the whole series *Ideal Forms*. It was a reference to Plato’s theory of...Whatever. They’re lazy ass artworks.

So, yeah, my gallery flew me down to Miami and paid for everything. I was put up in a hotel in South Beach. Not the nicest hotel, but nice. In return, I was supposed to be on my best behavior and meet collectors. But it never got that far. That first morning, I emailed Richard, the assistant who was overseeing everything, and told him that I wasn’t coming to the install because I was sick. I wasn’t sick; I just wanted to meet up with Michael, the guy I mentioned before. Michael was at Basel, too. Like me, he was no longer poor; like me, he arrived at the fair as a successful emerging artist. I don’t really like Michael’s work, though. He was showing these ‘90s skateboard videos that he’d slowed down to thirty frames a minute so that they last for like the whole day. People project them at fancy parties.

I told Michael there was a decent chance we’d get numbers from hot chicks at the beach so we should go down the beach. I told him that if even if we didn’t get any numbers, then at least we’d see some naked tits because they allow nude sunbathing in South Beach. “It’s gonna be sick, dude,” I said. “Just fucking trust me.”

But when we got there, it was too early. There weren't many people on the beach—and the ones that were there weren't hot naked chicks; they were just old people or families building sand castles.

"Whatever, man, this sucks," I said. "Let's go get some bacon, egg, and cheese sandwiches."

"Oh, no, dude, look," said Michael. "There're some topless bitches over there."

I looked over to where he was pointing. They were kind of far away, but he was right. And they were hot—at least from a distance. And, oh shit, one of them was blonde. And, oh fucking shit, they both had huge fake tits sticking up like mountain peaks. "Let's go talk to those bitches," I said.

As we were walking over, we realized they weren't girls, but women—cougars in their late 30s. One of them, a brunette, sat up, and I swear to God, she rubbed sun tan lotion over her blonde friend's fake tits. I stopped Michael and we watched, amazed. My phone vibrated. Someone texting me. I'd deal with it later. But wait, I thought, what if it's important? After all, who would text me so early in the morning? No, I thought. Fuck it. This is more important. These cougars are hot.

I re-focused on the tits. To get back into the moment, I came up with this intense fantasy.

This is how the fantasy went:

The brunette rubbing lotion on the blonde's tits giggled and said, "Wait one second." She turned and crawled over to her beach bag, her thong disappearing inside her tanned ass crack. She rustled through the bag and came back holding two little feathery/metal doodads that

looked like dangly earrings. The blonde laughed and said, “Oh my God, yes...” She presented her tit to the brunette and the brunette proceeded to apply the object—I realized it was a nipple clamp—onto the blonde’s nipple. “Ooohhh, make it tighter,” said the blonde. The brunette tightened a little metal knob and the blonde said, “Yes, that’s good.” She leaned up, put out her palm, and accepted the other clamp. “Are you ready?” asked the blonde. The brunette nodded and the blonde moved to place it on the nipple of the brunette’s right tit. It didn’t want to stay attached. The blonde wet her fingers and played with the brunette’s nipple until it hardened. “Okay, you’re ready now.” She clamped it on and the brunette ran her hand up and down her body in ecstasy.

So that was a fantasy; the reality of what was in front of us was more banal, but not by much: with the fake tits and the lotioning, these cougars were presenting us an insanely pervy scene. We walked toward them and I steadied myself. I imagined I was in a porn video and I was approaching these bimbos, making jokes about sausage pizzas. I could see the brunette better when we got within twenty feet or so. Her face was average—she did a lot of shit to make herself look hot—she was tan, that helped. Mostly, I just looked at her fake tits. When I heard her voice, it annoyed me. She had a slow cadence. It sounded like she grew up around affluence and was simultaneously over-educated and vapid. The other one—the blonde—I couldn’t quite see. Her voice was less sexy than I wanted it to be, too. Not because it was so annoying. It was more that it reminded me of someone else. I couldn’t figure out who, though. I zoomed into her fake tits. They jiggled and my cock stiffened. I didn’t know what to do about that. My cock is big and thick and it’s clearly visible when I get a hard-on. If we went up to them, they would see that I was aroused. That might be cool, though. They might have

thought it was hot. Cougars are down for whatever; they're not shocked by much. Or it might have been creepy. What kind of girls were these? I got another text, must have been the twelfth since I arrived at the beach. I decided to look. I opened up the message app on my phone. "WHERE R U?? EMERGENCY. COME NOW-Richard." Emergency? What the fuck does that mean? Well, either way, this interruption was stupid enough for me to lose my hard-on. I felt sort of melancholic for it all of the sudden. I wanted to will my passion away, not have it droop on its own.

"Ah, excuse me, hello, girls," said Michael as we came within a few feet of the cougars. I looked over and Michael's dick, which is even bigger than mine, was making a camping tent out of his bathing suit.

The brunette saw it. She didn't say anything. I looked at her face again. I wasn't attracted. She looked like a sad person. No, the blonde was the one I wanted.

The blonde finally turned our way and before she saw me, she noticed Michael's hard-on. "Oh, my God," she said. "It's as long as a lily!" I still couldn't quite see her face, but as soon as she said that I knew who it was. Fuck, was all I thought. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

"Fuck," I said. She looked over to me and I was right.

"Marc?" she said, hurrying to put on a white t-shirt. "What are you doing?"

I couldn't say anything.

Catching the urgency of the situation, the brunette covered herself with her beach towel.

"I...I didn't know it was you, Carol."

“Tracy,” said the blonde to the brunette, “this is my cousin Marc.”

“Hey,” said Tracy. Her eyes scanned down and now my cock was as hard and visible as Michael’s was. I tried to adjust my shorts, but it just called more attention to how big my cock was. The thing was, I wasn’t even thinking about sex. I was just freaked. I think the intensity of seeing Carol got my blood pumping. Carol was this older cousin I grew up around until my Aunt Rhonda and Uncle Wilson moved down here to Florida because Aunt Rhonda’s health was getting worse. I’d heard a rumor that Carol had dyed her hair blonde and gotten implants after she turned thirty, but I didn’t know how big she’d gotten them.

“Are you here for Basel?” she asked me.

“Yeah. Did you know I’m an artist?”

“What?” she laughed. “You?” My erection wouldn’t go away. It pulsated. I tried adjusting my shorts again.

“I mean I’m not a real artist. I just...act like one and I figured out how to make money doing it.”

“Oh...” she said. “That sounds more like you.”

“You guys are cousins?” said Michael like he was stoned.

“Yeah...” I said.

“I heard about you before,” said Tracy. “Carol mentioned you. She said you were her only attractive cousin. Attractive for a guy, at least.”

“What the fuck, Tracy?” Carol stood up. And then...I couldn't help it. I checked out my cousin's ass. I hated myself for doing that. She looked down to me and said, “So this is kind of weird...”

“Yeah,” I agreed, adjusting my shorts.

“I think we're just gonna go.”

“Ah, a-hm, yeah.”

Carol got her bag together and Tracy did, too.

“Don't tell anyone you saw me with a girl,” she warned me. “No one else knows.”

They left.

Wait, what, I thought. Is Carol gay?

As they walked away, I couldn't help myself again. I checked out Carol's ass.

“Dude, that was so weird,” said Michael.

I shook my head and adjusted my shorts once more, trying to hide the erection that wouldn't go away.

“Yeah,” I said. All of the sudden, I felt incredibly guilty about not being at the install. My erection went away. I ran away from Michael and told him I'd text him later.

When I got to the fair, I felt even more fucked up about the whole thing with Carol. I wanted to seriously avoid seeing her at future family things.

“Marc, I thought you were sick,” said Richard. “You hardly look sick.”

“Yeah, I am, actually,” I replied with zero effort to feign a cough or anything.

“Well, look...”

He brought me into the area with all of the booths. Someone had apparently broken in the night before and spray-painted over everything in purple. Crews were everywhere wiping it all down, but it was tough to clean and there was so much of it. It was all vague anti-capitalist messages—stuff about the 1%, pigs, etc. In my booth, my work had been unpacked. The frames were smashed and the prints torn-up. Someone had spelled out “POSER” on the wall where I was going to hang everything.



Between Use and Exchange:

The Commodity-Form, the Work of Art, and Consumption

Is there such a thing as a vacancy of capitalism? If Karl Marx is taken seriously, the answer is a definitive and resounding “no.” Capital has remade the world in its image. The way capital organizes human social life leaves it with no constitutive outside. Capital has infiltrated even the most “private” bits of our existence, our bodies and our sex. We now speak of “human capital.” We no longer have husbands and wives, but “partners.” One is reminded of the scene toward the beginning of *American Beauty* wherein Col. Frank Fitts is welcomed to his new neighborhood by a resident gay couple. The first of the couple, introduces himself and his partner, Jim Berkley. Frank responds, “You said you’re partners, so, uh what’s your business?” To which one Jim responds, “Well, he’s a tax attorney,” and the other, “And he’s an anesthesiologist” (*American Beauty* 1999). The professional success of these gay men has allowed them to assimilate into white US suburban culture, but, as if to vanquish the threat of their particularity, they grab the most “universal” language within reach: the economic.¹

Many professed Marxists fail to appreciate just how totalizing capital actually is. Post-Marxists like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe fault the new social movements for attempting to insert women, blacks, and gays into the hole left vacant by the New Left’s disillusion with the proletariat as the privileged revolutionary agent. What Laclau and Mouffe fail to appreciate in their groundbreaking *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is that Marx never expected mere

Those who are familiar with Moishe Postone will notice his influence throughout this essay. To those who are not, I could do no better than to recommend his *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*. That said I take full responsibility for the views expressed herein.

¹ It is difficult not to appreciate the fact that these two characters share the same (eminently ordinary) name, as if by being so general they have effectively bled into one another. They’re even both brunettes!

revolution to dissolve capitalism. For revolution to be a successful emancipatory strategy, there would have to be some constitutive outside to capital, some point unsullied by its greedy hands. It is through this point that revolution would be enacted, while itself surviving the revolution unscathed. The seamlessness of capital, however, ensures that such purity could never be found. Indeed, Marx directly discusses revolution but once in a short political pamphlet co-authored with Friedrich Engels by the name of the “Manifesto of the Communist Party.”² The impact of this seemingly minor text on the whole of Marxist scholarship has been enormous and devastating. For those seeking to bypass the hundreds upon hundreds of pages composing *Capital*, the Communist Manifesto, as it has come to be called, tantalizingly promises to articulate the core of Marx’s vision. It does not, however, do this. It is not the case that Marx was simply a pedant who wanted to fill in the “fine print” of the kernel of a theory explicated in the Manifesto, which was actually nothing more than a piece of agitation. It is rather evidence of that for which countless other theoreticians have been despised: direct intervention in the struggles of their day.³ Many worn-out Marxist tropes can be traced to this intervention; among them, the reduction of all struggle to class struggle, the messianic longing for revolution, and the vilification of private property. Once the Manifesto is read alongside *Capital*, it becomes clear that capital only makes all struggles *appear* to be class struggles, that revolution is incapable of striking at the root of capital, and that it is capital that spawns private property and not vice versa.⁴ To myopically focus on the issues brought to the fore in the Manifesto is to trade the

² It is unclear to me, at least, how much of an idea Engels had as to what Marx was really up to.

³ It comes as no surprise that it was Marx who all-too-quotably told us, “The philosophers have merely interpreted the world, in various ways: the point, however, is to change it” (Marx 1972, 145).

⁴ We can even see glimmers of this within the Manifesto itself. For example, Marx and Engels stipulate therein, “In bourgeois society... the past dominates the present; in Communist society, the present dominates the past” (Marx and Engels 1972, 485). Rather than reinterpreting the past

treatment of the cause for that of the symptom and it is all too easy to see the appeal in such a maneuver: anyone who has ever been ill knows it is often far easier to mask a symptom than to find a cure.

On the contrary, Marx has but one goal in his mature social theory: to describe the dynamic of capital.⁵ This project begins with Marx's interpretation of the commodity in the first chapter of the first volume of *Capital*.⁶ This was not Marx's initial starting point. The *Grundrisse* (short for *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* or in English, *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*), Marx's so-called "rough draft" of *Capital*, opens not with a consideration of the commodity-form, but instead with his theory of surplus value, something he does not get around to until Part Three of *Capital*. After nearly nine-hundred pages, however, the Marx of the *Grundrisse* has tortuously returned to the commodity-form and it is here that he begins his work in *Capital*. The amount of attention Marx devotes to the commodity at the outset of *Capital* might annoy those who think it is self-explanatory.⁷ Marx was fully aware of this: "A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" (Marx 1977, 163).

or searching for the future within it, both of which are reactionary, communism is always (to modify Jacques Derrida's "democracy-to-come") "communism-to-come." While Marx gives us powerful tools for understanding capital, he cannot tell us how it is to be overcome or what life might look like afterward, at least as long as he is engaging in an immanent critique (more on this later).

⁵ I should say that I am not one of those readers who posit a sharp break between the younger "moralistic" Marx and the older "scientific" Marx. Although I admit that there is certainly a shift between his early and late writings, the moralistic tones are not absent from *Capital*; e.g., its chapter on the working day.

⁶ All references to *Capital* in this paper are to only its first volume.

⁷ Indeed, the "communist schools" frequently skipped over the beginning of *Capital* to the theory of surplus value, where the story supposedly "really began."

The commodity-form presents us with something which is two-in-one. Although the commodity has a single material existence, it takes two phenomenological forms.⁸ On the one hand, the commodity is used, and correspondingly possesses a “use value.” On the other, the commodity is bought and sold, and correspondingly possesses an “exchange value.” It is the strange dance between these two forms that for Marx propels the engine of capital. While the commodity certainly possesses these two potentials, we only see one of them at a time: we are always either buying in order to sell (and only actualizing the commodity’s exchange value) or selling in order to buy (and only actualizing the commodity’s use value).

As commodities possessing seemingly no use value, works of art ostensibly represent the height of bourgeois excess. Although such an observation seems commonplace, it seems to me to be the only adequate way of describing art at our present moment in that such a definition neither succumbs to a nostalgia for aesthetic foundationalism (i.e., an agreement about what constitutes beauty) nor to speculation about the artist’s intent, which seems irrelevant insofar as the entire point of art (and, further, production tout court) is to create an object that is no longer dependent on its maker for its staying power in the world. Yet, Marx is certainly no primitivist advocating a return to a state of healthier engagement with commodities (assuming both that such a condition ever really existed and that there is such a thing as a “healthy” way of engaging with commodities in the first place). Against this interpretation, I will argue that although art may indeed be a byproduct of the capitalist mode of production insofar as it absorbs the excess labor-time freed by the ever accelerating pace of technological innovation, it is ironically one path toward anti-capitalist struggle. In order to make this argument, however, and in the interest of transparency, I

⁸ By “phenomenological” here, I just mean “in practice.”

will reopen a distinction which is collapsed in Marx's oeuvre: the difference between "use" and "consumption."

One of the most remarkable things about Marx is his contemporary relevance with regard to human social life, despite the century separating his time from our own. One source of this resilience is Marx's incredibly elastic understanding of the meaning of "use." Within the framework Marx proffers, it makes no difference whether we actually "need" something (i.e., whether we will literally die if we don't have it) or whether we "need" something the way a seventeen-year-old girl NEEDS a cute prom dress.⁹ Indeed, the insidiousness of capitalism is its ability to create new "needs."¹⁰ One interpreter remarks,

The intense need for the constant expansion of the economy has created a culture that requires both saturation via need creation, or advertising, and new techniques and powers to create these needs. If you had confronted Marx with things like the billion dollar market in diet dog food that exists today, he likely would have thrown up his hands in despair, and justly so. Part of what we are discovering is that there is no limit thus far (Pippin 2011).

⁹ Marx clarifies this on the very first page of *Capital*:

The nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example, from the stomach, or the imagination, makes no differences. Nor does it matter here how the thing satisfies man's need, whether directly as a means of subsistence, i.e. an object of consumption, or indirectly as a means of production (Marx 1977, 125).

¹⁰ I would normally shy away from such personification, but Marx makes it clear that such instances of figurative language aren't mere *façons de parler*. While I don't have sufficient room to do justice to Marx's theory of reification, one can see it articulated in a nutshell in the Preface to First Edition of *Capital*: "My standpoint... can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains, socially speaking, however much he may subjectively raise himself against them" and he elsewhere compares his engagement with classes to the character masks of ancient Greek theatre, which dehumanize the actor in order to allow her to portray cosmic forces (Marx 1977, 92). On this point, *Capital* is not altogether at odds with the Manifesto, wherein, "Capital is... not a *personal*, it is a *social* power" (Marx and Engels 1972, 485 emphases added). There is, however, a glimmer of agency in Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach": "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself" (Marx 1972, 144).

I would like to differentiate between the commodities that serve these manufactured “needs” and works of art. No matter how superfluous the desires that come to be reinterpreted as needs in fact are, the commodities serving these need-wants are used and ultimately used up in the course of fulfilling their purposes. This is true not only for our superficial teeth whiteners and baguettes, but also, albeit more slowly, for our houses, cars, and books. All of these things are ultimately destroyed by use. Returning to my earlier example from *American Beauty*, I would even go so far as to claim that capital has permeated our consciousness to such a degree that we have even begun to treat one another as commodities, devouring one another’s time with the same voracious hunger with which we eat to sustain our bodies. Although it is utterly unclear what life is actually good *for*, we seem certain that whatever it is good for, we certainly want more of it.¹¹ This valorization of life as the highest good tout court corresponds to our valorization of the medical doctor as the “good man” par excellence.

In contradistinction to that which is consumed, works of art present an anomaly: one’s “use” (i.e., viewing, listening, reading) of a work of art does not degrade it the way one’s sitting on a chair slowly but surely destroys it. Further, works of art could be called the most “durable”

¹¹ I think a similar process is underway vis-à-vis technological innovation. To continue in the vein of referencing US movies from the 1990s, in *Before Sunrise*, Jesse remarks,

You know what drives me crazy? It’s all these people talking about how great technology is, and how it saves all this time. But, what good is saved time, if nobody uses it? If it just turns into more busy work. You never hear somebody say, “With the time I’ve saved by using my word processor, I’m gonna go to a Zen monastery and hang out” (*Before Sunrise* 1995).

On a related note, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry shows us in *The Little Prince* that technology is paradoxically preventing us from living the life it aspires to actualize, something even children can apparently appreciate. When approached by a merchant selling pills which by quenching thirst would save him fifty-three minutes a week, the Prince muses, “if I had fifty-three minutes to spend as I liked, I should walk at my leisure toward a spring of fresh water” (de Saint-Exupéry 1995, 63).

of all objects, if that adjective even makes sense anymore. Even if we were to destroy every sheet of music upon which “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” is written, we would still be able to sing it from memory. Although admittedly not rivaling the eternity of gods and nature, art has the potential to obtain that very ancient yearning for immortality. Unlike Aristotle, for whom our inescapable mortality is “escaped” through the transgenerational succession of our progeny, the fabrication of art objects adds something potentially permanent to the world of human artifice, which we all enter through birth and depart in death.¹² It is this shared world which outlasts our brief sojourn on earth.¹³

Of course, it is not as if Marx merely forgot about art, he just understands it differently than I do. It is easy to imagine theorizing art as simply another means of advancing bourgeois snobbery. Here, there would be nothing distinguishing works of art from sleek Mies van der Rohe couches (in black leather, of course) as evidence of one’s “good taste”; one could very well imagine an orthodox Marxist objection to privileging art at the expense of other commodities along these lines. Against such an interpretation, I will offer what might be described as an Arendtian qualification.¹⁴ With regard to the vast literature on Marx, Arendt’s reading is not especially compelling, to put it mildly. Despite Arendt’s ungenerosity, I still believe that there is

¹² Although, to be fair, in Aristotle nature only guarantees the perpetuity of the species, not the individual.

¹³ I am borrowing this distinction between the earth and the world from Martin Heidegger, for whom, “The world is the self-disclosing openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of an historical people. The earth is the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing” (Heidegger 1971, 47).

¹⁴ The aesthetic construction of communal boundaries is clearly not limited to those on the higher rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. One need look no further than punk to witness how social groups are policed aesthetically. We appear, though, to be in danger of losing this connection between aesthetic and subculture. Richard Hell said of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s recent *Punk: Chaos to Couture* exhibition, “It’s treating what was a whole view of the world that had substance to it as a kind of Halloween costume” (Spiegel 2013).

something among her objections that is worth retaining: the contrast in *The Human Condition* between what she calls “labor” and what she calls “work.” While labor signifies the satisfaction of the biological cycles of our bodies, work erects the relatively permanent world in which we live.¹⁵ As previously argued, Marx’s critique derives much of its force from its ability to reduce *all* products to congealed labor-time, but I worry that something is obfuscated in this bargain.¹⁶

If we allow some daylight to filter in between consumption and use, we begin to see that works of art occupy a special position within human experience. Even once these terms are differentiated from one another, we remain within a situation wherein we must obviously purchase everything, meaning that all commodities possess exchange value (i.e., art is no exception). But when it comes to the other side of the coin—use value—the picture becomes a bit blurrier. Marx is ruthlessly consistent and within his framework, art simply serves our needs, just like any other commodity. In contrast, the Marx-Arendt hybrid I am proposing reads the work of art as distinguished from other commodities by its unrivalled endurance. While food and clothing and cosmetics are eventually exhausted through feeding and dressing and beautifying, the work of art emerges unscathed from each and every interaction. Of course, the rates of decay differ between different commodities; while we may pray to the Lord for our “daily bread,” our cars, houses, and chairs are degraded much more slowly. What is interesting about art is that our “use” of it does not damage it. It is not our looking at a painting which causes it to slowly disintegrate, but rather the relentless march of time. This process is only taken

¹⁵ In Arendt’s own words, “Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor” and “Work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species’ ever-recurring life cycle” (Arendt 1958, 7).

¹⁶ Of course, there are also things obscured by my refocusing. All I can say in my defense is that any attempt to introduce or collapse distinctions in the work of another does this.

to a higher degree once art moves into the digital realm; here, it seems there is no limit at all to art's longevity, insofar as it has deftly escaped from the confines of our material existence.¹⁷

Unlike that which is *used*, I am uncertain whether it makes sense to talk about *use* vis-à-vis works of art at all. Could it be that the work of art is that commodity which has somehow shrugged off the use-value side of its phenomenological potential?

This is undoubtedly a very controversial claim and one which I will be unable to defend adequately here. That said, I do not suggest this merely with the aim of being controversial. I have proceeded as I have because I hope to explain how works of art could potentially catalyze anti-capitalist struggle by inviting us to recognize the commodity's historical specificity. Allow me to unpack this a bit. Earlier I mentioned the uncritical Marxists who project Marx's diagnosis of capitalism upon the whole expanse of history, reinterpreting all struggle as class struggle, etc. Another contributor to this misunderstanding is Marx's commitment to immanent critique, the idea that the critique must be internal to the critiqued. What this means is that rather than proposing some radical alternative (which is, strictly speaking, impossible), the goal of an adequate critical theory is to unearth the existing contradictions in society via its own terms and concepts, which explains Marx's intensive study of the so-called "bourgeois political economists."¹⁸ Hence, it sometimes appears as though Marx is offering a comprehensive theory

¹⁷ Yet, any social climber knows that the internet is not the only pathway to immortality; as with "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," all it takes for something to stick around forever is for it to never fade away from our memories by being continually interpellated, as Louis Althusser would say, into our world, by becoming a constantly reiterated point of reference within it.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault is incredibly sensitive to the limitations of radical politics and was perhaps the first to realize that "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault 1978, 95). In other words, it isn't possible to propose a truly radical alternative insofar as it is impossible to fully escape what Foucault described as "governmentality," or the production of a certain sort of subject who is then "ruled." In one of his lecture courses at the Collège de France, Foucault goes

of the entirety of human history, a view at times underscored by his own remarks, such as when he explains,

My dialectical method is... not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it. For Hegel, the process of thinking... is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea. With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought (Marx 1977, 102).¹⁹

Here, it seems as though Marx has merely flipped Hegel in that for Hegel the “causal arrows” run from the ideal to the material while for Marx they run from the material to the ideal. But whereas Hegel is intensely interested in coming to terms with the grand expanse of human history, Marx’s inversion of Hegel does not leave him with a conception of history as totalized as Hegel’s. Hence, Marx avoids that ironic reversal that so often happens when one philosopher claims to have turned another upside-down. For in this inversion, Hegelian history somewhat unexpectedly transforms into the Marxian commodity rather than the Marxian conception of history (which, strictly speaking, does not therefore exist). Unlike Hegel, for whom history has a dynamic, for Marx the only thing that has a dynamic is capital. One of the difficulties in understanding Marx is that he pushes us to realize how capital, a historically specific form, has caused us to retroactively reinterpret the vast expanse of human history through it. Those who fail to understand the immanence of Marx’s critique are hence liable to fall into the very mode of thinking against which Marx sought to warn us: the projection of a unique historical vantage point upon the whole of history. One of the chief difficulties of reading Marx is that his immanent critique couches his argument in the language of the very schemas he is overcoming.

so far as to argue, “The individual is not... power’s opposite number; the individual is one of power’s first effects” (Foucault 2003, 30).

¹⁹ Compare to the Manifesto: “When people speak of ideas that revolutionize society, they do but express the fact that within the old society, the elements of a new one have been created, and that the dissolution of the old ideas keeps even pace with the dissolution of the old conditions of existence” (Marx and Engels 1972, 489).

While his presentation requires us to be careful readers, it is the only way of honestly confronting just how totalizing capital is. This point is lost on those so-called Marxists who analyze all historical conflicts through the optic of “class.”

Thus, if we disagree with Marx and locate the uniqueness of the work of art in its being-good-for-nothing unlike other commodities, in its certainly-not-absent-but-perhaps-attenuated use value, then we might ironically find through the work of art some potency as a result of its impotence.²⁰ While the cruel cunning of capitalism is that it refracts our past back to us through its own seemingly edgeless lens, art has the potential to begin the process of commodity de-fetishization by allowing us to see the commodity for what it really is: a historically localized and hence ultimately surmountable form. Works of art, as products that at least muddy the definition of what “counts” as a commodity, even if they do not entirely escape its orbit, slowly loosen the cold iron fingers with which the commodity-form grips our psyches. Once we see that not everything can be unproblematically subsumed under the arch-category “commodity,” the boundaries of this form might begin to come into focus. Although there is nothing inherently *political* about this realization, at least as long as we hold that politics is “the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter,” without knowing that it is indeed possible to organize human social life along lines not drawn by the commodity/capital, any hope of moving beyond capitalism remains quixotic (Arendt 1958, 7). In conclusion, it seems as though there is one sense in which capitalism is seamless and another in which it is not. On the one hand, capital has violently forced the entire globe to submit to its

²⁰ Obviously, I have been referring to works of art in very broad strokes in this paper. Different ways of making art certainly have different relations to the commodity-form. For a consideration of this vis-à-vis sculpture in particular, see Benjamin Buchloh’s “Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture.”

logic. On the other, works of art *do* occupy vacancies in capitalism by potentially catalyzing the undoing of the commodity form. And these are surely not the only alternatives.

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T H E S I T U A T I O N

you know it!

Some persons make 1,000,000\$ year after year & others ge

The ones with €\$\$\$\$€€\$\$\$\$€ have a stronger presence in

do co-existing with various economic classes of peop

lets admit it and find ways to embrace the best, and at
democratic society / system.

**NO TAXATION
WITHOUT
PRESENTATION!**

but enough summations

BY RODRIGUEZ

A NEW HO

Sparmaßnahmen

Austerity

got you down

?

don't believe in

Wirtschaftlich

**Economic
Stimulus**

or

Wachstum

**Growth
Economy**

Wirtschaft

?

Maybe we are not being well represented in our Governments?

A New Body in Congress.

A New House of Parliament.

THE SITUATION

you know it!

Some persons make 1,000,000\$ year after year & others get by on very little €.

The ones with €€€€€€€€€€€€€€€€ have a stronger presence in Government.

We will be co-existing with various economic classes of people for a long time to come.

Lets admit it and find ways to embrace the best, and at time Utopic, ideals of democratic society / system.

**NO TAXATION
WITHOUT**

REPRESENTATION!

but enough summations

**EVERY
VOTE
COUNTS!**

A New Body in Congress.

A New House of Parliament.

One based on and in the economic realities of the citizenry, rather than our district, territory, province...

Location is not the best tool in determining an effective method for representing the will or needs of the people.
thus:

The population of a nation will be segmented into five units of income or net worth.

The new House will have 200 representatives.

The seats will reflect the percentages of people living within the five units of income or net worth.

How would this break down in your country?

In the USA this would mean:

70 representatives for people
earning **less than \$25,000** a year

72 representatives for people earning
between **\$25K and \$50K** a year

32 representatives for people earning
between **\$50K and \$75K** a year

16 representatives for people earning
between **\$75K and \$200K** a year

8 representatives for people earning
over \$200,000 a year

mini-FAQ

In such a system would the representatives have to be living in the unit of income or wealth for which they are representing?

Would we be able to vote on the representatives who are not in our unit of income or wealth?

Would it be called The House of Classes?

Is this even a good idea?

Are there other ways to pick and determine our representatives in Government?

Should we scrap representational Government all together?

There needs to be major changes in how we govern ourselves and we can't expect those in power now to make those changes.

***Yet, where do we begin?
If you also want to think about these questions
please email or post on the blog.***

The House of Classes
thehouseofclasses.blogspot.com
wenwon@gmail.com



in PERPETUUM

THESE
SOCIÉTÉS
S'ENGAGENT
À
PROTEGER
L'ÉCART

DES
PRODIGES
DE
L'ÉCART



2014





Planes of stillness, crofts of blight

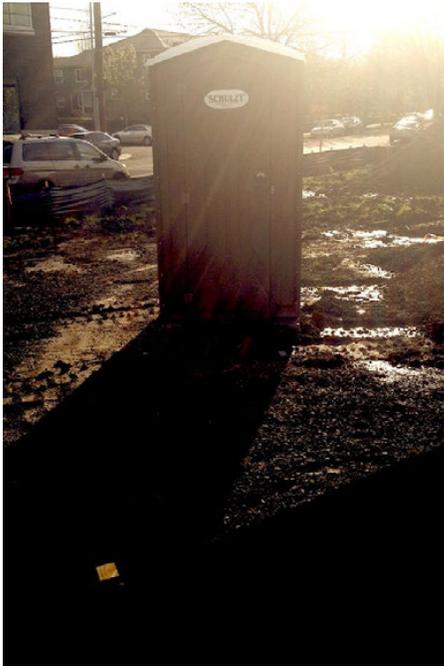
It is barely controversial to champion the importance of growth within today's narratives of economic reality. For example, Christine Lagarde, the head of the International Monetary Fund, can go on TV and warn about lagging international growth rates of 1% and 2%, and the only debates her remarks generate center on whether 3% or 4% is the appropriate benchmark and whether it is too early or too late to expect such growth to manifest. Few critics question the underlying assumptions of a growth-driven mythos. Growth is simply assumed to be desired and assumed to be desirable. However, a careful examination of those periods of history in which prodigious economic growth has occurred reveals that market growth – and its apotheosis, profit – are actually predicated on destruction and exploitation. In fact, 'growth' is simply the obverse and equal manifestation of these annihilating phenomena (cf. slavery, mining, timber). Put more radically, without a certain continuity of new destruction, a market stasis emerges, which, in its stillness, devitalizes the most basic premises of capitalism.



While it has always been an implicit ethos in neoliberal capitalism, there is now an explicit and total commitment to the telos of *permanent growth*; stocks always go up, housing and commodities prices always rise over the long run, currencies and wages always soar ever higher into the capitalist elysium, and this way, everyone wins. Naturally, within the game of capitalism, there are no winners without losers. For growth to persist indefinitely, a new crop of slaves must be found and worked to death every quarter, as it were. And without the spectacle of permanent growth – whether 2%, 4% or double-digit, as in China – the reality-envelope of neoliberal capitalism begins to decay, and other actors with other truths invade and occupy the exposed recesses. So, within a state mythos of obligatory permanent growth, we must expect a reality of permanent and increasingly creative and increasingly desperate destruction. To activate a phrase from Marxist thought, we must expect a state of *permanent primitive accumulation*. Elsewhere, the concept of primitive accumulation has been used to describe a specific, historical period in the past, demarcating the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Marx, himself, used the phrase in this way. However, primitive accumulation can also be thought of as a permanent and perpetual *activity-of-life* for the capitalist form. New bodies, new mountains, new relationships must be found and liquefied to express that dynamic discrepancy in power we measure as growth.



Capital abhors a vacuum, and fills any it finds with fungible overlays, intrusions, and envelopes. All beings and all space must be instrumentalized within the market and animated with the breath of abstract exchange. Infungible entities are enemies of the market. It is not particularly surprising that early speculative gray markets are already parceling out the real estate of Venus and Mars, and that not one of the space-exploration-capable states – United States, Russia, China, the EU members – has signed onto the 1979 international Moon Treaty safeguarding extraterrestrial bodies as non-militarized commons for all humans. The Moon, Mars, and possibly certain Jovian moons, are far too rich a substrate for capitalism's eternal metabolism of primitive accumulation to externalize them as some sort of illiquid communal right.



Nevertheless, from time to time, once-fungible entities manage to terminate market interfaces and return to a precapital pale. However, any such space or being that, through active or passive processes, manages to restore alterity to the market – a vacuum of fungibility – is always at risk of re-liquefaction; indeed, secondary and tertiary waves of primitive accumulation often violate the same entity across time. Within the urban landscape, vacant lots and abandoned structures often mark a locus of iterative primitive

accumulation. Annihilated once, and abandoned to the marginal, alienated subjects of that annihilation – houseless people, non-state forces, barterers, nomads, holy fools – fresh waves of gentrification render these spaces once again supple and vulnerable to extractive appropriation. Under the benevolent neoliberal narratives of infill and walkability, developers, policy-makers, urban planners, and do-gooders have accomplished substantial re-accumulation of these black spaces and structures.

Although this process occurs under the friendly iconography of eco-conscious neighborliness, it is fundamentally one of violence. Indeed, it is only through an alchemy of radical destruction that “re-development” is realized; first, like a priest in a canoe, a guileless port-o-potty appears, and then what remains of the old rooms and mirrors and plants is turned into splinters and expatriated, the land is scraped, the soil is pierced with cables and pipes, and soon – over the white crucifixes of realty signs – shiny citadels for the eco-elite arise, and the process of secondary primitive accumulation is complete. A dangerous stillness in the urban body, once detected, is quickly filled with the bright, violent clatter of exchange.

Vacant lots and abandoned buildings have long been thought of as loci of risk to good citizens; thus, the conversion of these ambiguous, threatening spaces into shiny buildings has typically been greeted with praise. However, this narrative neglects those for whom the vacant lots and abandoned buildings have always functioned as a sort of commons-of-last-resort. Indeed, most empty lots and empty buildings in the urban zone are far from empty. They serve as refuges for those who have been violated by the advancements of the market; spaces for games, clan rituals, extra-market economies, and – ultimately – for rest and recovery for a class of outsider actors and rejected subjects who have few other havens in the rectilinear world. The moss, the crust of foundation, the dangling shingle, the cobweb-softened recesses, these are a commons for those excluded by neoliberal capitalism. The loss of vacant lots and buildings enacts one of many displacements in the life-long chain of displacements familiar to these beings, another enclosure in a life of enclosures. These actors, long excluded from sanctioned economic relationships, sustain themselves on the outside of white markets and gray markets. For them, the condemned factories and churches and the interstitial asphalt plains constitute a barrier against final annihilation in the central engines of growth. The black shadow of a vacant lot – the lack of visibility, the lack of bio-technical incorporation – serves as a buffer against the fast-tracks to servitude and outright enslavement – by incarceration – guaranteed by the conventional economy.



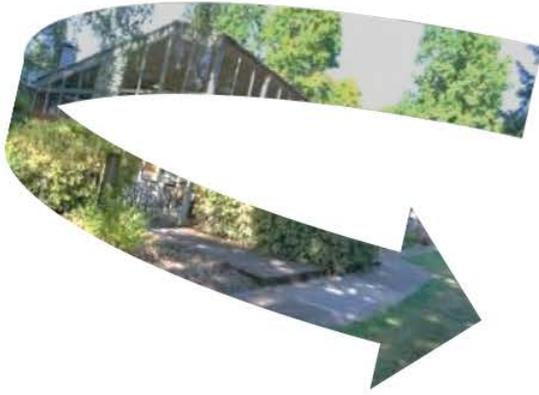
What instruments of resistance are available, then, to those who would act against iterative accumulation within the urban landscape? Are there models in history within whose residua we might imagine a different way? Along which lines can we begin to develop planes of stillness cutting through the heart of the market? Planes of shadow in which rejected actors and communities can subsist? In Scotland, there exists a body of relationships that is likely the oldest codified form of resistance to capitalist land functions. Following the iterative traumas of the Highland Clearances of the late 18th and early 19th centuries – in which tens of thousands of pre-capitalist Scottish peasants were driven from their lands after increasingly profit-minded aristocrats enclosed the commons and converted hereditary subsistence plots into giant industrial agriculture operations – the Crofters' Holdings Act of 1886 was, surprisingly, enacted. By this act, crofters – displaced peasants and their descendents – were granted rights and accesses to communal and familial lands – to plant crops, graze herds, recreate, walk around naked, explore, think, and exist – which could not be readily subordinated to the exigencies of the market. While the landlords still retained certain extractive and transactional rights over these lands, the codified instruments of resistance available to the crofters were – and still are – substantial. The Crofters' Holdings Act resembles, in a way, a much more powerful and wide-ranging form of rent control, such as we see in New York City, where recalcitrant pensioners torment landlords by seeing out their

lifelong leases while the units next door sell for millions of dollars on the open market. Beyond assuring a fair and stable rent for a given land or lands, sufficient in size and variety to offer true subsistence to the inhabitants, the Crofters Act furthermore guarantees access to a network of public commons – fields, streams, shores – where the materials of an open, elective life can be animated. Moreover, these rights are not bound to the lifetime of the individual crofter, as rent control is, but rather are granted in a qualified perpetuity to families, individuals, and clans. They exist outside of a certain capitalist formation of time. In its most transcendent stipulations, the Crofters' Act manifests a set of tangible, communal valuations of land in specific opposition to the expropriative, abstract claims of profit, propriety, and growth. Interestingly, the quaintly radical ideals and instruments of the Crofters' Holdings Act have persisted into the current economic matrix. Indeed, contemporary descendents of the original crofters, still holding tenancy over their plots and commons, have engaged in a number of interesting and dangerous actions: coastal mega-hotels and luxury golfing links developments have been successfully blocked, and, in a more creative spirit, rhizomes of individual crofts have been conceived to form extended sanctuaries of extra-market land. Indeed, both the large estate of Assynt and the entire island of Eigg now belong exclusively to crofters' collectives, representing in spirit, if not in material realities, a perpetuation of a certain precapitalist communal form of living within and upon the land, its waters, its microbes, its plants, its other beings.

Although this set of relationships has never been manifested in any major cities of the United States or Europe, it is not unthinkable that there should arise a sort of urban crofters' act or action, whereby longtime inhabitants and users of vacant lots and vacated buildings – the alienated subjects of the violent economic clearances of the past 60 years – are afforded protected, intergenerational access to these spaces. Naturally, this possibility would interpose a sort of stillness at the heart of the transactional economy that the current growth-driven mythos would reject. The spectacle of capitalism could not allow for such an abatement of permanent primitive

accumulation simply in order to accommodate the abjected dignities of a handful of human weeds. Not surprisingly, the monumental and unique achievements of the Crofters' Holdings Act came only after nearly a century of violent and nonviolent peasant uprisings. Organized land raids, protracted occupations, and outright battles with the British Army – called in to enforce landlords' claims – finally culminated in the Crofters' Holdings Act, a measure of conciliation to the peasants calculated to neutralize a growing spirit of rejection and revolt in the precapitalist clan-based communities of the Scottish Highlands. Is it imaginable that today's abjected nomads and wildlings who make their lives among the shadows could come together and formally and effectively rise up against the sequential waves of market subordination? Is it imaginable – and is it reasonable or natural – for others, for – specifically – the very beneficiaries of the recent clearances, to assume responsibility for advancing the vital exigencies of these urban peasants? In an age of permanent growth, who can act for stillness?





New Immaterial Materialism
Marc Matchak

New Immaterial Materialism

Decades before celebrity cookbooks and the differentiation of microwavable breakfasts, Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer wrote *The Cultural Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*. Concerned with modernist production, the essay aims to locate new technical differentiations in art and media. There was something suspicious about certain projects' affect on the identity of both culture and the individual. Film and radio were in the crosshairs, as a means of production, though each did not always come to disorient identity. However certain projects did construct a false cultural reality of representation and image, content that dispersed a "false idea of the universal and particular".¹ Post-modern media sought to dismantle this idea of the universal, making the particular universally participatory. And yet, what birthed from the initial attempt at cultural unification became further dispersed: movie stars became microwave chefs, pop singers became activists, and the demarcation between object and media collapsed.



Developments within modernism – film, radio, the museum, the university, etc. – attempted to unify art and mass culture. Striated by the consumer economy, this unification created a paradox, an attempt transforming the audience into the individual, which exists only impossibly, modeled after a formulated role or object. Or perhaps the formulation of cultural roles led to the release of new cultural objects. These are objects though, retaining some precariousness as they attempt to navigate an audience through aestheticization and commodity. People feel comfortable when they can share something with one another – to be “in” with representation. And despite this shift in/to objecthood, a precarious divergence still exists under capitalist

¹ Theodore W. Adorno, and Max Horkheimer. “Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso, 1972. Pp. 95

production, which in finding success in a creative projection molds it into an object through further monopolization. Say it “began with an idea” that shed itself onto object form, which then in turn reappropriates this idea into body of the consumer.



What appears today in response to this mass dispersion of culture is a new reterritorialization of knowledge and creativity. As some people will wincingly state, “It’s cool be artsy these days”. There has been a breach in “the mentality of the public” which once favored “the system of culture industry as part of a system, not an excuse for it”.² In the consumer body there is some oppositional participation, those who propose the industry again to be an excuse in the larger economic system. However much the reterritorialization of knowledge and creativity oppose a collective identity produced by modernism, it fails in escaping the position as a tenet of capitalism. The modernist production of media, keenly related to entertainment – or perhaps more disconcertingly, the canonization of those who entertain – has changed the status of an object entirely.

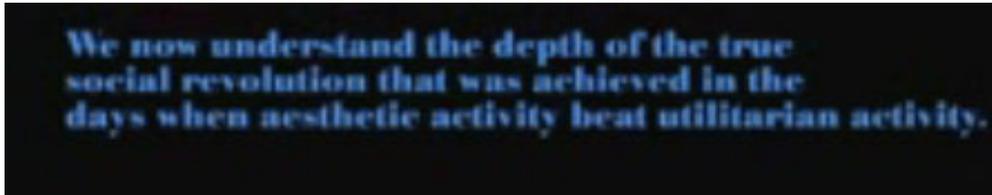
Whether it is an object for the mass market or of exclusive esotericism, it exists as a form of immaterial labor. The consumer is first absorbed by representation, and then goes on to consume. Jean Baudrillard’s *The Ecstasy of Communication* partly examines the object’s new specialized infiltration into reality. Baudrillard seems most unsettled by the ability of the screen to change to the status of the object beyond usage and exchange.³ Consumption now reflects less a desire for ownership, rather an escape from the ubiquity of the object within reality. We now appear in a universe of scenes, where what is on screen becomes “crystalized into certain operation terminals”⁴ for the purpose of reappearing in the experiential. The consumer economy, aestheticized, or a “buy-in” to aesthetic representation. This participation in

² Ibid. pp. 96

³ Jean Baudrillard. *The Ecstasy of Communication*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012.

⁴ Ibid. pp. 24

consuming, which itself escapes certain media projects, remains inescapable in the dialectic form: the intellectualized commodity, the individualization of the consumer and object, the displaced relief in avoiding the mass market.



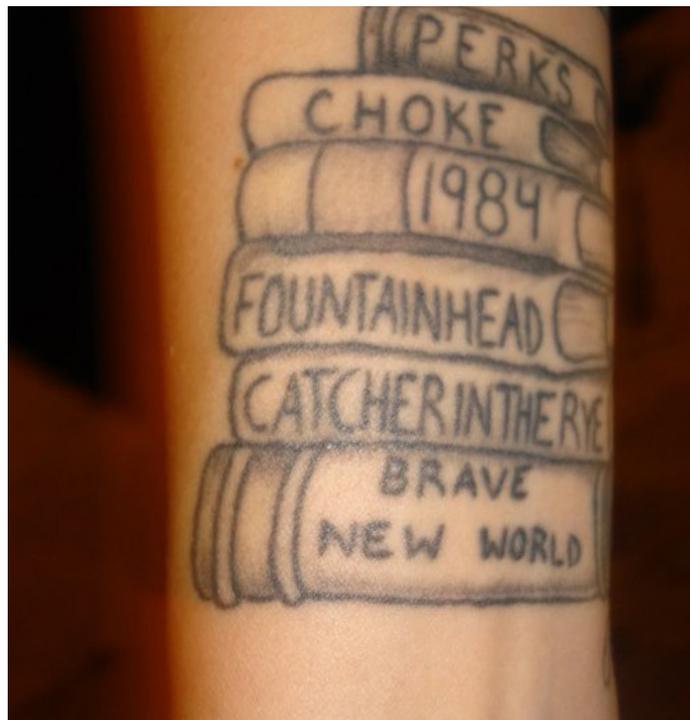
Underground: Trailer for a Book – Luke Gillick (2004)

The concern for individuation of the consumer remains at large. A return to local provisions becomes desired, and afforded by those of a certain class (more often than not, those hyper-educated) in Europe and the United States. While this exodus from the celebritized commodity good may appear as a dialectic form of consumption, it proposes concerns in a different ballpark. Seemingly, as an escape from this participation, these outlets rely on “autonomy as sense of entrepreneurial freedom”.⁵ Returning to class structure posits questions around freedom, or more distinctly, opportunity – where does it now lie? It may exist ambivalently in space, once affording the entrepreneur relationships with inhabitants as a neighborhood, but has developed into sheer economic opportunity – low rents and no competition. Or perhaps space has now expanded with time?



⁵ Gerald Raunig. *Factories of Knowledge / Industries of Creativity*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2013. pp. 34

Gerald Raunig's recent work *Factories of Knowledge Industries of Creativity* examines the striating effect of cognitive capitalism. Raunig writes around knowledge and creativity, appearing in the university where each retains exclusivity through abstracted measurements and ranking systems. Contrarily, once this initial "classroom" exclusivity collapses, knowledge and creativity retain a new currency – maintaining some exclusivity, though, through a different form of aestheticization. Raunig details, "the system of space shortage results in a new quality of subservient deterritorialization."⁶ Like those cultural projections in modernism, the university, short in positions, seeks to maximize its effect through expansive space. The immaterial labor one once exerted in tuning into a program, then buying it into reality, has further diverged in form. No longer is the buyer also the viewer, but the thinker, the protagonist of a story which reality itself fails to describe.



Knowledge has become a social mechanic exchange. The student, while in the university, at one time sat in a space between school and work, may now be faced with little opportunity for either. If the reproduction and sharing of knowledge exists for communication or to instruct, it can hardly be said that this activity reterritorializes anything; granted, the modernist period's intellectual unification and then monopolization within university has been taken into account and accepted. However now, the University seeks, alike to the nature of the factory which Deleuze remarks in *Postscript*, "to concentrate, to distribute in space, to order in time, to compose a productive force within the dimension of spacetime whose effect will be greater

⁶ Ibid. pp. 38

than the sum of its component forces.”⁷ The reterritorialization has created a new creative economy. It pushes the student into public, utilizing a new campus space. If student participation is immaterial labor, then this post-academia campus reterritorializes the immateriality into a relationship between an entrepreneur and the participant, mediated by an all too material projection.



Adam Sandler as Longfellow Deeds delivering his restaurant's pizzas in the film *Mr. Deeds* (2002)

The local business once appeared comfortably local, aiming to serve its community rather than a group of outside participants – the customer group which frequents district, often only to support the retail body. It took into account its place and purpose. Topographic functionality allowed neighbors friendly run-ins and frequent support of each other's practice. The business knew the patrons and their pricerange. Ironically enough, now this romantic buyer-seller relationship seems to appear more in popular film than it does in reality. Perhaps this image of a local business has become out-moded, a form of warm kitsch put out by the same cultural producers who supply the larger economy. Instead of an impossible return to the mom n' pop, this new local economy relies what is gained in the university. Creativity and knowledge have become transparently rebellious in this form, precarizing objects which attempt to bridge the gap between buyer and seller with some esotericism. However these new entrepreneurs attempt at creating clientele, the esotericism in market relationship reduces and confines. It confines those participants to an academic privilege, but reduces the status of knowledge and creativity by each's aestheticization into a new material economy.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze "Postscript and the Societies of Control" in *October*, Vol 59. Winter 1992 pp. 3-7. Cambridge: MIT Press pp. 5

Further, as a departure from the redundant market, those new immaterial entrepreneurs maintain, what Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction*, would call “an ethos of collective distance”.⁸ This entails a producer/participant population who can look past necessity, functionality, and their place in a larger district and onto the aestheticized, whatever it may be. For the consumer within the new cognitive market, “Aesthetic perception is necessarily historical. It is demanded by the products of a highly autonomous field of production, inseparable from a specific cultural competence.”⁹ In the commodification of the art object, the literary, the historical, the new market provides evidence for the dismissal of the aestheticism entirely, which Bourdieu claims is a veiling of certain privileges and affordances. Not only does intellectual representation embrace the class difference, which it often seeks to dismantle, but it becomes reduced itself, now no longer autonomous. The author and artist become marketing strategists, and the relevance of their work collapses, existing now in a new material space that seeks to project no further past shared representation.



Responses to a mass-produced, media-endorsed commodity have created new immaterial materialism. This new market relies on the sharpness of the participatory body, their ability to recognize representation that borrows from a number of different intellectual constituencies and objects. However, the intellectual object, like the that of the celebritized commodity is also demarcated. The boundry collapses, departing from both sheer functionality and an aesthetic representation that filiates its existence. This filiation may appear as an unofficial authorial or artistic endorsement. Though in this project, the intention of the work or position of the artist is entirely separate from the from the object of consumption itself. Any artistic connection only appears in the most fraudulent and sometimes contradictory manner, exhibiting esotericism

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1984. pp. 6

⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 8

and rewarding those who are “in on it” now with option to buy in on it, further propelling the fetishization to represent. The most puzzling relationship in this economy is not the seller’s concern for their audience, but rather the seller’s relation to the creative object. Perhaps this makes these new immaterial producers seem like less iconoclastic, because their understanding of the work concerns not a system of images or ideas? The connection between a gift shop and a short story is surely not bridged by authorial convention, especially with something as grim as Mansfield’s *The Garden Party* – where a bourgeois young girl encounters the death of working class man just outside her afternoon get together.¹⁰ Even more puzzling are those producers who, like film makers, attempt to navigate the consuming body by pastiche alone. This aesthetic remains nameless in regards to artistic specificity. However the entrepreneur borrows from an amalgamation of work, constructing some sort of private language which does not manifest itself as a purely entertaining projection of cultural aesthetic, but rather one that requires audience participation. The ooo-ing and ahhhing of the buyer seems to become shaped by the object, viewed as a piece of the set or role, they choose to purchase.

The dimension for the exertion of immaterial labor is limitless, Arriving with the opportunity to learn is now a different opportunity to exploit knowledge. Returning to a socio-economic lense, an alternative to the continuation of these immaterial commodity networks regards the use of the space, not in the classroom or university, but the spaces inhabited by populants who cannot afford participation in this new market. Space has collapsed, especially for the small business that drive up the cost of rent and draws a population which travels into the district for the means of participation. As the buyer-seller relationship becomes increasingly mediated by the online market place, perhaps a turn to this sort of automation poses less of a threat because the net retains some all-inclusive activity. Sadly what remains unresolved is the physical exertation of labor as a means of production of these goods, and what this essay remains most concerned with, the displacement of the artform. Whether bought online or in person, to consume these new immaterial commodities still questions whether the creative object is of any value past social currency, the immediacy of useless representation, and the ego of the buyer.

¹⁰ Katherine Mansfield. *The Garden Party*. 1922. Reprint, Champaign, Ill.: Project Gutenberg, 1998.

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The Deadbeat: A Fantasy of Curatorial Non-Production

Flynn Casey

About a year ago I began holding on to my receipts. A timidly impulsive spender, I find myself making many small purchases over the course of the day for things I don't need: snacks, cigarettes, bottled water, plants, etc. The detail of the data recorded on the receipts interested me at first, but over time I have begun to think of them as strange, insignificant documents of my actions. Many of the receipts I hold on to actually list the name of the employee that completed my transaction, making these pieces of paper records not only of our transaction, but our interaction as well. The receipt is a confirmation that what happened really did happen, and acts as proof in case you need to reverse the transaction. Over the course of the past year or so there has been a movement in the practices of artists and curators involved with a somewhat similar attempt at transparency in their communications. Emails, checks, money transfers, receipts, and other documents and records are being presented as artworks or supplementary exhibition materials. Last fall, New York non-profit gallery Artist's Space made available on their website a spreadsheet listing out expenses for the production of Aaron Flint Jamison's exhibition at their Greene Street location, an intentionally lackluster attempt at transparency in an otherwise opaque installation. These attempts at transparency show an effort, albeit a consciously abject effort, from the contemporary art community to expose some of the systems that frame the production of artwork, exhibitions, and value in general. There is an earnest futility in these efforts, as it is perhaps obvious that these complex systems couldn't be represented that simply.

An obvious note is that much of this effort towards transparency is in hopes of exposing the production and exchange of capital, something that comes from an institution growing into an ever-more capitalist structure, while maintaining a tradition of institutional critique. This critique of capitalism is important, especially for artists, but there is not as much of a tradition of institutional critique from curators. Positioned as managers of the subjective immaterial labor systems that allow contemporary exhibitions to come into being, curators occupy an interesting part of the machine.ⁱ As information and social communication become catalysts for the production of value in contemporary art, the middlemen of these information transfers hold a lot of power and are given opportunity to feather their own nests. Soren Andereasen and Lars Bang Larsen write in their essay *The Middleman: Beginning to Talk About Mediation*, "The figure of the middleman is typically seen as a conformist, parasitical agent responsible for short-circuiting authenticity. The middleman has an aura of mediocrity. The middleman is average, and a suspect character."ⁱⁱ Positioned as such a

suspect figure, it seems only natural that a movement away from capitalism would necessarily start with the curator.

Before discussing a model of curating that may exist outside of a capitalist structure, it seems necessary to define the ways in which current models of curating are complicit with the current capitalist structure. The contemporary curator manages and organizes the ways in which cultural value is created, and engages in a capitalist art structure predominantly by standardizing its production. Much of this production comes from immaterial labor, as exhibitions come into being through the collaboration and communication of a number of subjective “laborers”. It is in fact the direct involvement of the curator that makes this immaterial labor operate in a capitalist manner, as excessive management turns the subject-laborer into a relayer of codification and a transmitter of messagesⁱⁱⁱ.

One of the most basic ways that the production of exhibitions and, in turn, the cultural and informational value of objects is standardized is through the regular scheduling of exhibitions. The contemporary curator, who works for some gallery, exhibiting physical exhibitions, usually has an expectation that a new exhibition will go up every one, two or three months. This is a model that forces the curator into a constant stream of communication-production. They must communicate with artists and talk exhibitions into being at a steady clip, as looming deadlines and the need to produce override all else. Of course there are many alternative models to this, and much of an effort has been made by self-organized spaces towards a less standardized model of exhibitions. It seems to be, however, that any curatorial project that indeed “exhibits” work in any format ultimately standardizes production to some extent. It begs the question of whether or not production itself is necessarily standardized. A curatorial practice that avoided the standardization of production would need to employ some kind of force that took control away from the curator: some aspect of chance- perhaps an unreliable benefactor or an argumentative co-curator.

Perhaps the most integral aspect of the role of curating is the act of being the middleman in a communicative sense. Social networking and the transfer of information through communication do indeed create cultural value for artworks today, but that seems to be dependant on the necessity of artworks to be exhibited. The linear routes of artworks through artist, curator, gallery, collector, or whatever other paths it may take, are predominantly organized according to profitability. To exist outside of a capitalist structure it seems as if a curator would need to remove all potential profitability for themselves or anyone down the line- that is, remove the need for production from their role. Would a curator that operates outside of a capitalist structure seem like somewhat of a deadbeat? A purely social figure? A lazy curator? They would talk, but never talk something into

being, and never expect anything to materialize from their communications. If, however, all curators followed a model of deadbeat curating, there would be no exhibitions and there would be no art market, so it seems as if the deadbeat curator can only exist as an anomaly, or an outcast- this returns to the notion of earnest futility.

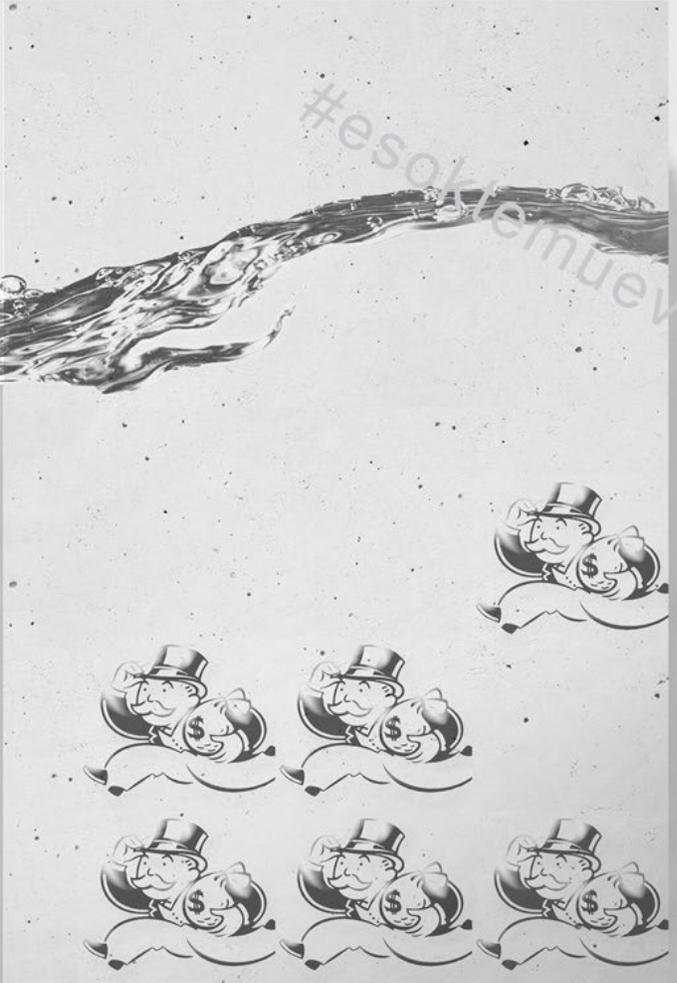
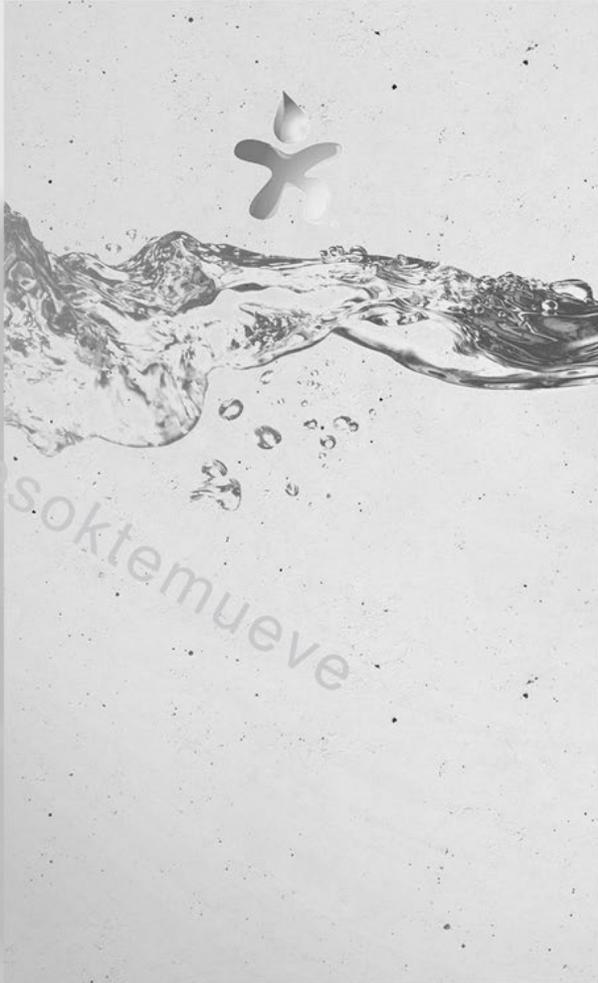
That is not to say, however, that in this case an exercise in futility is not worthwhile. The model of a lazy curator is not necessarily a proposal for change in contemporary art, but rather an analytic tool, or a scope to view the role of the curator through. It shouldn't be overlooked that curators remain managers of production, and in a capitalist society it is important to keep a critical eye on modes of production. The tradition of institutional critique is plagued by an inherent internalization of its own methods, indebted to the very institutions it questions. This problem can be approached from a different direction when discussing the role of the curator, who holds a very different position in regards to the institution when compared to an artist. The curator has the leverage to mold institutions in some way or another, at least more so than the artist does, through less reliance on institutional support and more room for self-organized initiatives. When the critiqued institution becomes capitalism, however, it needs to be assessed whether or not the curator necessarily must rely on these capitalist structures. Private capital accumulation seems difficult to circumvent, unless the production of goods, or goods with any value, was circumvented. Some form of wage labor, however immaterial, seems equally necessary in today's art market. Alternative models of curating undoubtedly are able to circumvent direct capital accumulation (for themselves or anyone down the line), but putting it into practice is another story. Would a critique from curating, then, fall into the same traps as institutional critiques from the 1970's and 80's? A curatorial practice that enacted this critique may be too futile an effort when placed within the overall system of the art market. The curator is positioned as a mediator in the communications that fuel contemporary art production, and we know not to trust the middleman. If the model of a lazy curator is not feasible in practice, it can be an analytic tool through which we view contemporary curators, keeping a critical eye on our contemporary managers of production.

ⁱ Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," from *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2006), 134-147. Lazzarato mentions that "Participative management is a technology of power, a technology for creating and controlling the 'subjective processes.'" The collaborative processes through which exhibitions come into being seems to take on a similar form to what he is discussing. If we take the curator to have a predominantly organizational role, it seems fitting that he or she would act as a manager of this process.

ⁱⁱ Soren Andereasen and Lars Bang Larsen, "The Middleman: Beginning to Talk About Mediation," in *Curating Subjects*, ed. Paul O'Neill (London: Open Editions, 2011).

ⁱⁱⁱ Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor”

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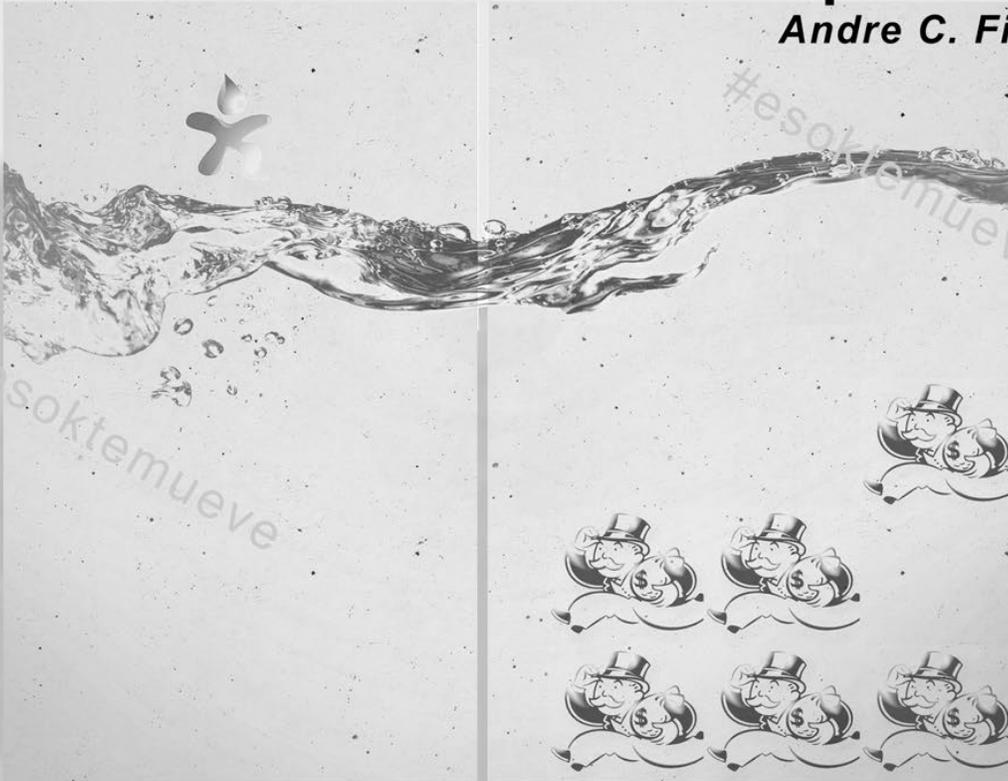
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WET CEILING | USMX

Andre C. Filipek





For the sake of international negotiations, it can be agreed upon that the contemporary global commodity market has all but assimilated its cast of players into an exchange culture predicated on the values of western modernity. We could also say that the economy of geographically specific goods has allowed the market to self-regulate in terms of the hierarchy between national entities active in the global capitalist network.

However, this hierarchy finds itself not only regulated by nationally oriented economic strength and variation of demanded goods, but by power dynamics embedded into national entities on either side of colonial history.

Since the launch of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement in 1991, we can observe the politics of trading entities in North America as decidedly power-oriented, particularly when we look closely at the relationship specific to the United States-Mexico border. The geographical distinction created by the vast desert at the border is the image of the disparity between the neighboring nations as they search for common histories in developmentally distinct origins.





Coca-Cola Company's international water distributor, Ciel, in the last five years, has begun to involve itself in a series of humanitarian initiatives as a means of promoting its products in Mexico. This plan services the establishment of a platform whose purpose is to support the market-share overtake of its primary competitor, French corporation Danone. Danone's subsidiary, Bonafont, controls 39.4% of Mexico's water consumption, while Ciel's market share comes in second to Bonafont's at only 25.4%. Despite the stiff competition, Ciel is poised to overtake the market majority during the next half decade. Here, I will assert that the motivation behind this new marketing model is not principally in service of overtaking the Mexican market share to surpass Danone, though this is desirable in terms of continued global visibility and relevance, but rather to assert a continued stronghold over the Mexican polity. This assertion is made possible through a personalization of the Ciel brand to the Mexico's market; A market whose relationship with water, both in its fundamental and recent history, is strained by a mistrust of domestic municipal systems, and their incapacity to promote access and prevent contamination. By choosing to follow the trend of green marketing, Ciel is able to utilize this

pre-existing platform to emphasize purity, safety, and sustainability in their product – an ethos, which strikes a positive chord with the Mexican public.

Together, Ciel and Bonafont hold over 50% of the market share of branded water in Mexico. By creating strategic marketing plans, which work in conjunction the political landscape in Mexico, both companies are responsible for the creation of an updated and contemporary language for potable water. This is true in particular of Ciel, whose ability to market pure bottled water to their pre existing consumer demographic of Coke drinkers in conjunction with Mexico's national health reform in 2004 has rendered them a formidable opponent to Danone, whose approach of taking the the market with a line of flavored waters proved effective in the short-term, but with dwindling long-term appeal. While both corporations continue to entice consumers with flavored waters and similar products, Ciel's recent marketing overhaul focuses wholly on changing the social outlook surrounding negotiations about improving current municipal water infrastructure. Their approach, which emphasizes purity, and utilizes green marketing as a platform, provides an alternative rather than an update to a system of which the Mexican public is generally untrusting. By building consumer bias through strategic

one-upmanship, Danone and Coca Cola are assembling a critical mass of consumers, whose lifestyles are readily impressionable by popular marketing strategies.

The retooling of marketing goals in the Mexican market led by these two corporations, further, clandestinely utilizes residual national trauma from Latin American Cholera outbreak in 1991, as well as Mexico's 2004 national health reform as platform. The shift in priority in terms of commodities-to-be-sold, as a result, is the linchpin of post-NAFTA corporate imperialism in Mexico; A contemporary conception of a border politic that is de-socialized, and is dragged forth by marketing objectives.

While the Cholera epidemic all but quelled hope of an imminent economic renaissance via the NAFTA agreement, and decreased national morale by socially and geopolitically leperizing Mexico and its continental neighbours, it did serve to re-establish a portion of the trust lost for government-sanctioned infrastructure affected by the epidemic in the first place.

Following a rapid overhaul in capitol allocation meant to rapidly reinvigorate the effected public, the nation invested in facilities, research labs, research, public education, and prevention programs to swiftly mitigate the situation, while simultaneously stimulating its domestic economy. This allowed

Mexico to re-open its frozen trade partnerships, and re-enter the market with an expanded industrial, medical, and technological infrastructure, which made the forthcoming agreement with the United States much more exploitable, as it proved Mexico as the image of industriousness that it had been denied in the global market. However, while proving itself as a formidable contender, Mexico had also, in its resilience, invited the possibility of conventional modernization. What occurred during this period was the actualization of a "hole in the fabric" of a self-sustaining Mexico.

Publically, the savior complex manifest by the United States' involvement in the westernization of the Mexican frontier masquerades as the helping hand necessary to assist the nation in moving away from broken systems that cause blunders like their recent suffering at the mercy of pre-industrial disease such as Cholera. While the outbreak did give Mexico the leg up on its own recovery, as well as did its partnership with the United States, the problematics embedded in this masqueraded symbiosis are those that govern the geopolitical inequalities which allow Western nations more freedoms and mobility in the global economy simply by virtue of their history as nations of conquest and colonialism.



A large stone slab emerged in the compacted soil.

Lightning reflected on its surface as silted water cascaded across its surface filling the symbols, which interrupted its face.

A granite countertop flecked with water; Its natural distribution across the frictionless flat. Small lakes erected. Patterns embedded in the land, reflecting interruptions of each another: quartz, onyx, sandstone, terra cotta.

A great expanse is evident in the landscape; A profound dryness between bodies.

An extinct fountain belies the worn path amidst brick, stone, and ash.

The no-mans land: Migrant neutrality zone.

Silt, stone, silicon...a fecund absence of value on the precipice of its actualization interface.

Water becomes water, whether or not it falls from the sky.

While Mexico has proven its ability to be resilient in adverse situations, the national lack of trust for its municipal water systems leaves a hole in the potential fabric of its own international power. It allows the country to remain in conversation with foreign markets in order to sustain its domestic well being, but risks the sustainability of its economy, should the relationships established take an unexpected turn.

Following the he strategies employed by Coca Cola could be extrapolated to render Mexico as an economic entity under oppression-by-trade. We must look at this situation not only from a business standpoint, but from one that is inseparable from a social and cultural politic that is centered about the reverence of heritage.

When the cultural significance of water is examined in context of the of Mexico's dependence on a Western branded source for potable water, it becomes clear that the water market acts as a primary regulator of inequality amongst the United States and Mexico in the case of Coca Cola's accelerated interest in the water market via Ciel. By demonstrating the manners in which Mexico's entanglement with the United States economy is further complicated by dynamics surrounding public access to water, it is crucial to consider the past two decades as a timeline to follow the border politic potentiated by Mexico's

struggling municipal infrastructure and their agreements with the U.S. in NAFTA.

What can be said of that border politic is that the primary market-players, Coca Cola and Danone, act as ambassadors for the countries from which they originate and are engaged in a power struggle between one another for the title of “principal subjugator” by increasing market shares across the board in a foreign trade relationship. As a result, global visibility and the gap in each nation’s location on a global class hierarchy is increased, thus creating further distinction between the oppressive and oppressed nation. Given leverage from NAFTA, and evidence from consistent annual increase in sales from Ciel, it would be apt to project that the United States will soon overtake Danone in its race for water monopoly in Mexico, and thus increase their ability to regulate border activity.

In what could be described a type of nationalist guilt-tripping, the United States is able to utilize the water market as a primary source of leverage in its 20 year old agreements with Mexico via NAFTA. It shows the United States subscribing to a decidedly nationalist agenda in its carrying out of the NAFTA agreements; One that is outdated in terms of its ability to function in a global economy, and a culture of international business and

networking lexicons without creating an egocentric hierarchy¹.

As country with a strong nationalism all its own, we can see NAFTA’s 20 year mark impacting Mexico with force. After the United States’ mass corporate-export regime unto its neighbors to the south, Mexico’s federal powers are beginning to pursue alternate agreements surrounding the trade of the domestic goods and services they still *do* provide, hopefully as a result being able to raise revenues in order to begin to lower dependence on both United States imports, and export consumption.

Mexico currently attributes 80% of their export market to United States buyers and currently seeks to diversify their global export platform by stimulating pre-existing international trade agreements. While Mexico is currently negotiating a space in the Trans-Pacific Partnership launched by the Obama administration in the US², it is Mexico’s private network that potentiates their global market uprising. This private network, constituting primarily of Latin American and Asian countries, and while already contributing to the economic integrity of the United

¹ It should be noted, however, that the
² a ‘contemporary’ re-imagining of efforts such as NAFTA, which will ultimately lower production costs in lieu of diverse, but Amerocentric outsourcing of production worldwide

States and its products, concurrently develops industries and communities which contribute universal production methods and design perspectives which benefit marginalized populations, particularly, those which are predominantly non-western in cultural practice.

Thus, the question at hand begins to tangibly rupture a global, Western precedent for modernity, in which the historical location of modern culture expands into the economies and industries built within “Third World” polities. It is the result of this type of expansion that syndicates a global resistance to Western and subsequently (and with hope) purely capitalist modes of dialogue between nations complicit in the economy of global trade.

While cast in an idealistic and foreseeing manner, the development of a radical consensus based international-relations reform, here, is what we are looking at, when we take into account the global relevance of a strengthening trade relationships between non-Western economies today. What is apparent in this examination of corporate imperialism in Mexico, is the potential for capital exchange, and shift of power.

What I do see in this potential for exchange around branded water is the ability for it to promote a type of unity. It provides all of the materials with which to create a pseudo capitalist manner of building

consensus, much in the image of an international trade partnership. The difference between a trade partnership, and the type of exchange that I am speaking of particularly is the connotations with which trade comes packaged – a type of power dynamic that is established between the nations involved as a residue of colonialism and a globally dominant Western modernity. This is to say, regardless of whether or not the United States needs Mexico’s exports, in some manner the nation could feasibly bounce back if they suddenly lost that market. On the other hand, Mexico’s current position in the post-NAFTA relationship is one in which the economy would crumble if the United States pulled its exports out of the country. This potential instability can, however, interface a leg up in strategy, given that the nation counter intuitively shifts its focus away from improving municipal infrastructure, and toward updating a transnational model of global trade in which it is the hub for distribution.

While *business* is regulated by international corporate entities, the United Nations, and NAFTA, *exchange* is regulated by economic symbiosis and cultural difference predicated on a platform of heritage rather than structural components.³ The politics of exchange, here, must be negotiated over the course of colonial history *alongside* the politics of business in a Capitalist system. This establishes a power dynamic that is located outside of purely financial or political negotiations, but that is primarily social, and about saving global face.



³Structural differences, or those within the systemic folds of both Western and Non-western markets, are limited to capitalist and non-capitalist systems. For the purposes of this essay, this distinction renders a moot point, and does not support the claim that power is distributed unequally amongst western and non-western nations seemingly unified under capitalism.



*El agua
sería agua*

*Si es o no
cae del cielo...*



Automatic reply: Invitation for Contribution



Inbox x



Joselit, David <david.joselit@yale.edu>
to me ▾

Jan 17 ☆



I am traveling with only occasional access to my e-mail until January 19. I'll be in touch as soon as I can.
David Joselit



Joselit, David <djoselit@gc.cuny.edu>
to me ▾

Mar 23 ☆



I think you've sent this to me in error. I have no idea what this project is.
Best,
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