

Mediations

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Editors' note

This issue of *Mediations* is broadly concerned with the ways Marxism is reflected and refracted in the lives and ideas of activists, philosophers, and citizens as a way of thinking about and acting in the world. Jim Holstun's "Antigone Becomes Jocasta" introduces us to Soha Bechara, a Lebanese political prisoner and activist whose prison memoirs resist the tropes and conventions expected of a Middle Eastern woman engaged in violent revolution: Bechara, Holstun argues, refused to engage in sectarian conflict during the Civil War, resisted being made a female martyr by the Lebanese Communist Party after her attempted assassination of SLA leader Antoine Lahad, and remained committed to revolutionary praxis during her eleven-year imprisonment. Bechara's perspective on Middle Eastern geopolitical conflict offers readers a startling new perspective on what is at stake in the region and, more important perhaps for the Marxist *Literary* Group, what is at stake in literary presentations of the region. When her story is taken up by non-Marxists, all that makes it exceptional disappears; *Incendies*, the play (perhaps) based on her life, turns her from an active communist revolutionary to a passive victim of senseless Middle Eastern violence. As she is transformed from Antigone — a woman whose ethical and political practices might reshape the world — to Jocasta — a victim of the whims of powerful forces over which she has no control — all that is revolutionary about Bechara's life is lost.

The next article also points to the expansive potential of global Marxism, both as it is practiced and as it is represented. In "Jameson Among the Contras," James Christie undertakes a new reading of Fredric Jameson's seminal "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital." By considering biographical details of Jameson's life — his trips to Cuba and Nicaragua, and his relationships with artists and activists in those nations — Christie provides us a new way of thinking about a first-world critic's relationship to the art and politics of the Global South. The article periodizes Jameson's encounter with the Third World at the inception of the Reagan doctrine and, thus, at the beginning of a new phase of US imperialism to go with a new phase of global capitalism. Christie's periodization is an insightful reading of an essay that has never ceased to be a touchstone (and lightning rod) for Marxist and postcolonial critics. Further, like Holstun, Christie understands the work of Marxism — here, Marxist criticism — as life's work, as inseparable from one's writing and politics as it is from one's ethics.

Malcolm Read presents another thread of global Marxism in his essay-review

of Juan Carlos Rodríguez's *De que hablamos cuando hablamos de marxismo*. Detailing Rodríguez's career from the 1970s to the present and offering some explanation for why he remains largely unknown in Anglophone Marxism, Read reveals why Rodríguez's Marxism — inflected both by the political situation in Spain and his commitment to Althusser — should be considered a major contribution to Marxist thought in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The breadth of the article is consonant with the breadth of Rodríguez's work, ranging over Spanish history, encounters with British Marxism and Critical Realism, and literary figures like Góngora, Quevedo, and Brecht. At its heart, Read's contribution articulates the way that national and historical specificity — in this case, the specificity of Spain after fascism — cannot be ignored when we talk about Marxism.

We turn, finally, to Alexander Bove's elaboration of A. Kiarina Kordela's 2008 *\$urplus: Spinoza, Lacan*. Through a careful reading of Kordela's use of the death drive, *jouissance*, the gaze, and the Other, Bove posits a new way of understanding the relationship between contemporary capitalism, geopolitics, and ethics. Bove's piece builds on the work of Kordela, Spinoza, Lacan, Žižek, and Levinas to make a startling claim: the mechanisms of late capitalism have transformed the death drive into a narcissistic drive to consume. But the foreclosure of the death drive has a surprising consequence: it is through its disappearance that the violent culture of terrorism emerges, so that what is at stake in any encounter with the Other turns out to be our lives.

Jen Hedler Phillis, for the *Mediations* editors

Antigone Becomes Jocasta: Soha Bechara, *Résistante*, and *Incendies*

Jim Holstun

For the secret of a human being is not his Oedipus complex or his inferiority complex. It is the very limit of his freedom, his ability to resist torture and death.¹

Torture preoccupied her because she saw in it, or rather in the person who could resist it, the summit of human courage.²

Those who broke down, or became informers, were those who did not understand the reality of occupation and resistance, those who could not grasp the radicality of freedom.... For me, the fact that I was a girl, that I put my family in danger, that I was incarcerated — none of this mattered. To have stopped fighting would have been to turn my back on what it means, for all of us, to be human.³

Introduction: Resisters and Tragedians

In March 1978, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) invaded Lebanon in "Operation Litani," named after the southern Lebanese river coveted by Israelis and pre-state Zionists as far back as Chaim Weizmann in 1919.⁴ They withdrew later that year, leaving behind a proxy militia later called the South Lebanon Army. The SLA established a buffer state in the south. It expanded after the IDF's 1982 invasion, which culminated on September 15, when the Phalange (a Maronite militia), the SLA, and the IDF coordinated a massacre of Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila Camps, West Beirut. The next day, Leftist groups, including the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), founded the Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF), a small but effective force.⁵ The SLA fought Palestinians and their allies in the LNRF at first, then the Shia forces of Amal

and Hezbollah. In 2000, Hezbollah drove the IDF out of Lebanon. Some SLA veterans stayed. Others fled abroad.

In June 1967, Soha Bechara was born in Beirut to an Eastern Orthodox family. She joined the LCP. In 1988, posing as an exercise instructor, she shot SLA leader, General Antoine Lahad. Without charges or trial, the SLA interned her for ten years in Khiam Camp, near the Israeli border, supervised and funded by Israel. Released in September 1998, she moved to Paris, then to Geneva, where she married a Green politician, had two children, taught mathematics, and began work with *Collectif Urgence Palestine-Genève*. In 2000, with Gilles Paris, she published a memoir titled *Résistante*, with translations into Arabic (2000) and English (2003). Three film biographies appeared in 2000.⁶ In 2011, with former Khiam internee Cosette Ibrahim, she published a second memoir, translated as *La fenêtre: camp du Khiam* (2014).⁷

In 2001, the Lebanese-Canadian playwright Wajdi Mouawad learned about Khiam Camp, saw Sabbag's documentary, read Bechara's book, and met her in Paris. In 2003, he mounted productions of *Incendies*: a play that turns Bechara into "Nawal Marwan," a political prisoner raped by her unrecognized, long-lost son. 2009 saw a revised edition and an English translation.⁸ In 2010, Canadian director Denis Villeneuve premiered a film adaptation in Bechara's Geneva. In 2011, it won eight of Canada's Genie Awards and an Oscar nomination. DVD versions included a documentary on the film's making.⁹

This essay contrasts two groups. "The Resisters" include Bechara, her fellow militants, and the interviewers and documentarians focusing on them. Emphasizing Israel's invasion and proxy occupation, they trace the Lebanese Civil War to colonialism, capitalism, and the power and profits they combined to create. In response, from a position of anti-colonial solidarity, they produce a resistance narrative resembling a complex Realist novel grounded in the experience of everyday life and in a prison-based project of experimental, anti-sectarian collectivity. Bechara unifies this narrative as a self-conscious *type* of Lebanese resistance — not a bourgeois nationalist but a specifically communist fighter and writer who struggles to create a socialist alternative to Israeli occupation and Lebanese sectarianism.

"The Tragedians" include Mouawad, Villeneuve, and the reviewers, cultural agencies, and festivals subsidizing and publicizing their work. Minimizing the role of Zionism and capitalism, they present the Civil War as a non-ideological story of incest, rape, and murder, tracing it to the poverty of the atavistic sectarian village. They turn the Resisters' future-oriented resistance narrative into a backward-facing Symbolist drama of Sophoclean recognition. From a position of neocolonial humanism, they offer missionary sympathy, catharsis, and reconciliation as the means to forge a modernized nuclear family and neoliberal state. Their genuine innovation lies in turning not to Islamophobia but to development ideology — the capitalist universalism that promises to cure sectarian violence while quietly continuing to incubate it. Mouawad unifies this project as a histrionic Lebanese-Canadian *auteur*

whose emigrée heroine appropriates Bechara's experience, turning an eloquent, Red Antigone into a catatonic, ill-fated Jocasta.

Though Bechara and Mouawad were both born into Beirut's Christian bourgeoisie, their accounts of the Civil War clash strongly in form and content, illuminating the class struggle defining the culture wars of modern Lebanon, and their representation abroad. I'll begin with Bechara's memoirs, then turn to Mouawad's play and its film adaptation, concluding with responses by Bechara and Mouawad to Israel's 2006 war on Lebanon.

Soha Bechara and Anti-Colonial Realism

Jean Said Makdisi faults *Resistance*, Bechara's first memoir, for its confinement to "the real world of ordinary people with ordinary powers of expression," adding that only "high art or philosophical writing" can address prison and torture adequately. Indeed, the victims themselves "are often the last to be able to adequately articulate their own suffering."¹⁰ But Bechara has not set out to write a confession evoking the horrors of internment, the glories of resistance, and the profound depths of insight that result. Such works risk becoming a vicarious substitute for self-reflection and political action. Rather, she has written an intellectual and political memoir that emphasizes the social contexts for political action, the practical daily techniques for survival while interned, and the step-by-step emergence of a new, multi-sectarian solidarity. By family, genus, and species, *Resistance* is Realist narration, resistance literature, and prison writing. These vertical strata of classification also form Bechara's horizontal emphases, as she moves from a Realist narrative about her family, to resistance literature about the LCP and her political project, to a prison narrative about Khiam Camp and her eventual release.

At first, it might seem that a non-fiction memoir would automatically aspire to Realism, and fiction, drama, and film to Symbolism, but the categories blur, as we can see when we contrast the fiction of Tolstoy and Kafka, the drama of O'Casey and Yeats, the Auschwitz memoirs of Realist Ella Lingens-Reiner and Symbolist Elie Weisel.¹¹ In *Resistance*, Bechara presents herself as particular but also *typical*, an ordinary inhabitant of "the real world of ordinary people," thus leading her readers to inventory and reflect on their own lives. Here, she resembles the "typical" heroine of Realist fiction, as distinguished by Lukács from "the *average*" and "the *eccentric*.... A character is typical, in this technical sense, when his innermost being is determined by objective forces at work in society."¹² The Realist novel remains unsurpassed as a tool for examining the analogies and interactions between private or family life and public or political life. Similarly, *Resistance* shows us Bechara entering political life not *outside* her family but *through* it. Unlike the static, oppressive family of Arab-hating fantasy, Bechara's complex and dynamic family becomes the very medium through which she gains political consciousness. Born in June 1967, she lived a classic Lebanese girlhood in an extended family split between the city and the country, living in the

southeastern Beirut suburb of al-Shiyyah but spending her summers in the southern village of Deir Mimas, home to her parents and their Greek Orthodox relatives. It had a reputation for Left-wing politics, but with Phalangist residents, it also knew political conflicts. This divide ran through Bechara's family. Her mother's nephews joined the SLA.¹³ Her father's father, Hanna, a stern and violent patriarch, paid fealty to the French and the local landowner, Ahmed El-Assaad. But Hanna's wife, Salima, ridiculed the landowner publicly, called Soha her "comrade," taught her about the sufferings of the Palestinians, and pointed out their stolen Galilean lands just over the border.¹⁴

Salima's sons Dawud and Nayef followed her example, as did their wives Jamila and Nawal: "In the middle of the chaos of war, Nayef the activist and Nawal the feminist helped me discover political debate, ideals, and the concept of commitment."¹⁵ Bechara christened her attack on Lahad "Operation Loula Abboud," after her cousin.¹⁶ In April 1985, 19-year-old Abboud led an attack on Israeli soldiers in her hometown, then blew herself up, killing four of them, rather than being captured.¹⁷ But Bechara found her most important political model in her father, Fawaz, a printer: "He was a Communist and trade unionist, and had been so probably since his teens. I say 'probably' because he didn't drum his beliefs into our ears — quite the contrary. He was a silent man, though always ready to struggle for the cause."¹⁸ Sabbag's documentary violates an Orientalist taboo by showing an affectionate relation of solidarity between an Arab father and daughter: Fawaz shyly embraces Soha, just released from prison, while unpocketing and waving a red flag, spoiling the official nationalist photo op for Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.

Bechara inventories the "skewed and perverted logic" of the Lebanese Civil War, with all its multiform violence: Christian Lebanese against Palestinian Muslims, Christians against Christians, Lebanese Christians against Palestinians and Shia and Leftist Christian Lebanese, and "the kidnappings on all sides, the checkpoints springing up everywhere, the city split in two as we looked on, stupefied."¹⁹ The new Islamist movements begin kidnapping and killing Left intellectuals.²⁰ An acid attack by Islamists missed Bechara but slightly burned her mother.²¹ As a university student in Beirut, Bechara's communism and even her avid chess playing brought her into the public eye, attracting death threats from Amal. Nonetheless, with typical presence of mind, she didn't rule out joining Amal to pursue the work of resistance. One anecdote encapsulates the ingrown turmoil: Bechara thought Palestinians executed her relative Afif at a checkpoint, despite his mother's entreaties, simply because he was Christian. Then she learned he was actually murdered by a Lebanese Shia avenging his brother, supposedly murdered by Phalangists. Even later, she learned that this brother survived, joined the Phalangists, and commenced "doing dirty work on their behalf." But this is a tragic complexity, not an absurdist morass. She proceeds to describe a different sort of sectarian and national encounter at the funeral of her cousin Khalid, who died alongside Palestinians while fighting against the Israeli

invasion: “I was transfixed by the spectacle in front of me — the young Palestinians marching in rhythm bearing the photos of their martyrs, throwing flowers across streets bedecked with the four colors of Palestine: black, white, red and green.” Emulating her cousin, she “discovered a flag, a cause, a people.”²²

Divisions are asymmetrical: Beirut’s “Green Line” separates not two dueling sectarian mirror images, but sectarian East and anti-sectarian West:

When the civil war broke out between East Beirut and West Beirut, I had the choice, even though I was Christian, of joining one of the two parties of the city. In the West, you had seventeen communities. In the East, only Christians. I chose the party of West Beirut — and it was also the choice of my father. Why? I asked myself the question: who’s really the enemy? Is it the person in the East who thinks Muslims aren’t quite human? Is it the person in the West who struggles to serve the common interest?²³

Rather than despairing at the convoluted sectarian landscape, she surveys it and acts by joining the LCP and the Lebanese Resistance: the LCP “touched me deeply, waking parts of me long numbed by fratricidal slogans and rallying cries.”²⁴ This nationalist group struggled to end sectarianism from within, as opposed to foreign interventionists who lament from without the sectarian madness of squabbling sects and tribes while supplying arms and launching an invasion, an occupation, or a sortie of Vaclav Havel’s humanitarian bombing.²⁵

So far as the Civil War created two sides, says Fawwaz Traboulsi, each took shape in relation to Israel: “On the eve of 1983, Lebanon was as a country divided into two parts: one resisted the Israeli occupation with arms, and another negotiated a peace accord with Israel.”²⁶ Bechara agrees: “As the 1980s began, after five years of fighting, something had become clear to me. Lebanon had only one real enemy, one occupying power: the state of Israel. To my mind, the civil war was just a consequence of this situation.”²⁷ Complicating the structure without discarding the strategic analysis, she adds that Syria moved among various sides and that new parties like Amal and Hezbollah emerged. Only a carefully nurtured exterior view can see the Lebanese Civil War as the mad sectarian binary of Christians and Muslims, or the equally mad conflict of atomized parties. From within, it looks like a structured dynamic conflict that requires an ability to inventory, analyze, and act. As she organizes all her experience and all her praxis in a revolutionary struggle against occupation, Bechara’s narrative has the variegated coherence of the Sartrean *project*. On a theoretical level, Sartre calls this “totalization”; on a more individual, ethical, and practical level, “commitment.” The literary mode of totalization and commitment is resistance literature.

Under Israeli rule, South Lebanon took on that ulcerous combination of colonial occupation and neocolonial exploitation that still defines Palestine.²⁸ Israel’s economic policy combined antiterrorist rhetoric, duty-free Israeli agricultural imports, and a

free-wheeling Lebanese drug trade, with a full-fledged colonial occupation that went as far as hauling off truckloads of Lebanese topsoil, “a new interpretation of the land-for-peace principle.”²⁹ Substantial segments of occupied South Lebanon submitted and adapted, and the effects spread to all of Lebanon. From 1985-1990, Lebanon broke into sectarian statelets engaged in customs-farming, extortion, weapons sales, even coastal piracy: not as an atavistic reversion, but realizing “the supreme capitalist phantasm — the generation of revenues and profits without capital investment — through the militias’ parasitical politico-military levy on practically all economic activities.”³⁰ Bechara emphasizes the economic rather than the immediately military transformation: “Traditions and whole ways of life had been turned upside down,” and “money, even more than the presence of Israeli troops, helped to destabilize social relations.” Lebanese flowed through the porous border seeking work in Israel, while drugs and stolen cars flowed in, and “bottles of *arak* were replaced by bottles of Johnny Walker,” as money became “the lifeblood of the occupied zone.”³¹ She found most of her fellow Southerners not particularly friendly to Israel, but determined to profit as much as possible and incapable of imagining resistance: “Each looked after his own interests, not worrying about how much compromise or collaboration with the occupying powers this really meant.”³²

Effective resistance, then, would be anti-capitalist as well as anti-Zionist and anti-sectarian.³³ She joined the LCP because of “the idea of nationhood. The Party had never sought to slice Lebanese society up by religion.”³⁴ During the Civil War, LCP leader Karim Mroué warned against the “fragmentation of our country into hostile communal cantons,” including South Lebanon, a new Maronistan, and a Shiite Islamic Republic.³⁵ LCP General Secretary George Hawi feared Lebanon would thus imitate and aid Israel’s own sectarian ethnocracy.³⁶ Learning from the experience of her cousin Loula, who allowed a romantic breakup to push her into resistance, Bechara shunned actual romantic entanglements, while inventing an imaginary relationship to a lab technician in the South to justify her frequent visits there. She stayed with an aunt and a cousin, all the while reporting to her Beirut contacts on southern troop movements.³⁷ The LCP leadership suggested she bomb an Israeli office in East Beirut, but the prospect of a breakaway state of South Lebanon had been broached, and “targeting its supposed leader seemed like the best way to ruin Israel’s plans.”³⁸ Taking on the identity of an apolitical young woman, she distanced herself from her militant family. She even befriended the security forces in Hasbaya, who tried to recruit her as an agent.³⁹ Her cousin Issam helped her get a job in a sports center in Marjayoun. When Lahad’s wife Minerva came looking for an aerobics instructor, Bechara saw her chance. She began instruction in the Lahad home in Marjayoun.

To her LCP higher-ups, she had to prove her ability to carry out a violent mission alone, while resisting the scripted romantic role of the female martyr. She wrote a farewell message declaring her solidarity with the Intifada, “which seemed to me to be a beautiful example of resistance and an ideal of revolution.” But she burned

some photos of herself she feared would be used for martyr posters and spurned the *nom de guerre* chosen for her: “Flower of the South.”⁴⁰ Inverting the usual humanist perspective of trauma studies, she found herself struggling not against violence, but for it, as her pacifist sensibility caused her to miss a good opportunity to shoot Lahad: “I realized that I was still just as resistant to brutality and force, still just as disturbed by violence, even the fictional violence shown on television. The car bombings, the wounded whom I had treated, the memories of the dead, none of it had hardened me.”⁴¹ She couldn’t work up any personal dislike for Lahad, an indulgent husband who helped pay for his wife’s aerobics lessons, and she strongly resisted the idea of booby-trapping his bed: “The end doesn’t justify the means.... This was a message aimed at the Israelis. If the bomb also got his wife, his children, it would be meaningless.”⁴² Bechara shot Lahad out of a concrete analysis of what might wake Lebanon from its neocolonial torpor, not out of bloodlust and a desire for revenge: “for all I care, he can die of a heart attack. There’s no sense of personal revenge between me and Antoine Lahad.... There was an invader, and we fought against this invader.”⁴³ The assassination, then, would be a multiple negation. She would overcome her own pacifist sensibility. As a Christian militant shooting a Christian SLA collaborator, she would negate and not just reverse Amal and Hezbollah’s recent sectarian attacks on the LCP. She would allay the patriarchal doubts of the LCP, explode her collaborationist persona, and politicize her passive blood relation to her radical family. Most important, by wounding the colonial statelet of South Lebanon, she would expand the borders of the thinkable for her near-sighted countrymen. But she would also negate herself: “While preparing the operation, I knew that there would be no way out, that I would be captured and killed. I had no vision of a future.”⁴⁴

George Hawi, Secretary of the LCP, gave her his pistol, a gift from Castro. On November 17, she stopped by Lahad’s house to drop off copies of Jane Fonda’s workout tapes, the perfect icon of eighties narcissism and Zionist solidarity.⁴⁵ Asked if being a young woman made her task more difficult, Bechara responded:

That helped me. I was able to infiltrate the IDF and the SLA more easily. To win them over and get what I wanted, I partied a lot, I danced, and I drank. When the guard frisked me at the entrance to General Lahad’s house, he was touching the body of a woman, not frisking a militant, even though I had a pistol hidden on my belly.⁴⁶

She found Lahad viewing a television report on the Intifada — a final, unanticipated inspiration. She shot him twice.⁴⁷ The shots were symbolic as well as instrumental: “The first bullet was a message for the Lebanese people to save their bullets in the Civil War and to use them against Israel’s occupation, not against each other. The second was a salute to the children of the Intifada.”⁴⁸ The SLA immediately took Lahad and Bechara to Israel: he for extended medical treatment, she for a beating, interrogation,

and rape threats. The LCP immediately released photographs of Bechara and her statement.⁴⁹ At first, Lahad announced he would head Bechara's tribunal.⁵⁰ Instead, he disappeared her into Khiam, with no charges, no trial, and no public access.

How should we view Bechara's time in prison? Suggesting a Modernist narrative of metaphysical abjection, Harker presents Jayce Salloum's bare-bones documentary about Bechara's imprisonment as a meditative encounter with a "living martyr" characterized by "non-representational excess," both "more-than-human" and, like Agamben's Auschwitz internees in *Homo Sacer*, a "sub-human" clinging to bare life.⁵¹ But Bechara never presents herself in this sort of florid higher register, which would produce a Symbolist effusion to be tremulously consumed, then forgotten. For all its horrors, Khiam offered her a site of counter-praxis as well as suffering: "It was not a one-sided struggle — the prison walls had their faults and weaknesses."⁵² Her Realist memoir incites reading, understanding, and commitment. Formally, it presents us with a prison narrative, a subgenre of Realist resistance literature. In *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach sees the serious representation of everyday life as the defining trait of literary Realism.⁵³ Reviewing a new edition of *Mimesis*, Terry Eagleton says:

Perhaps it is impossible for us now to re-create the alarming or exhilarating effect of a few pages of Daniel Defoe on an 18th-century reader reared on a literary diet of epic, pastoral and elegy. The idea that everyday life is dramatically enthralling, that it is fascinating simply in its boundless humdrum detail, is one of the great revolutionary conceptions in human history.⁵⁴

If Modernism aims at estrangement, defamiliarization, and making it new, then Realism, its traditional Other, also forms its first instance.⁵⁵ Eagleton mentions Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, but prison narratives connect better with *Robinson Crusoe*, which has drawn centuries of readers not just because of the loathsome castaway slave-trader's colonial project, but also because of his enthralling presentation of everyday activities such as making flour, drying grapes, tanning hides, keeping a diary, and teaching English as a second language. Three examples of the extraordinary-quotidian among the imprisoned Resisters: In 1995, they received reading materials, including copies of the Bible and the Qur'an, but also three Barbara Cartland novels, which she grudgingly read aloud for her illiterate co-detainees: "I thought that was awful — another form of torture!"⁵⁶ Second, in Sabbag's film, Bechara displays with bemused pride a perfectly-fashioned sanitary napkin, which she kept as a memento of prison handicrafts.⁵⁷ Third, while in Khiam, Bechara sang to drown out the screams of the tortured and became known as "the woman who sings."⁵⁸ After they met in Paris, Mouawad asked Bechara what she sang in prison: "Everything that came into my head... ABBA, for example."⁵⁹ So rather than *Levantine Homo Sacer*, perhaps *Cartland, Khiam-Kotex, and "Dancing Queen."*

Prison narratives fascinate precisely because they give us a version of everyday life under stress, focusing on bodily experience, communication, and experimental collectivity.⁶⁰ First, the body. South Lebanon offered a Guantanamo-like neither/nor status perfect for detentions: “Israel” with regard to control, “not-Israel” with regard to accountability. “Prisoners in Khiam were negated, buried, conveniently wiped from the world of the living.”⁶¹ From 1985 to 1994, at least nine Khiam inmates died in custody or shortly after release, some from torture and medical neglect. The SLA interrogated sixty persons close to Bechara, torturing many of them. They interrogated her in the presence of her mother, who urged her to speak. To end her first session of electric torture, she implicated her cousin Issam, only to retract her statement an hour later.⁶² Bechara developed techniques for handling violence and pain, such as counting the blows from a whip. Punished with solitary confinement for her non-cooperation, she adopted a restrained and disciplined method of consuming her one daily meal and a rigorous physical regimen, including miles of daily walking, in 2½ step increments.⁶³

Sexual degradation and threats of rape pervade Bechara’s account, but not explicit discussions of political rape. Nor do they appear in the Amnesty International pamphlets on Khiam. In Sabbag’s documentary, Bechara and Afifi laugh at the male torturers who demurely looked away from women detainees instructed to attach electrodes to their own nipples. But Bechara does say that “women were often subject to the most intimate kinds of pressure.”⁶⁴ Jean-Michel Leprince says camp commander Jean Homsy (“Abu Nabil,” in Bechara’s narrative) raped many women detainees in Khiam, while Serge Thibodeau, who tried to visit Khiam, says guards raped almost all.⁶⁵ In a book dedicated to Bechara, Lambert, and others, Thibodeau interviews a Lebanese-Canadian who had been imprisoned in Khiam and raped repeatedly, and speculates that others who shared her experience kept quiet, fearing the social stigma.⁶⁶ Cosette Ibrahim, one of four women detained in Khiam in 2000, after Bechara’s release, says guards repeatedly raped one or more women inmates.⁶⁷ One need not invoke any uniquely Arab conservatism to understand why a rape victim might decide to keep quiet, given the trans-cultural tendency to blame victims and to aggravate their trauma by fixating on rape’s sensational rather than its political aspects.⁶⁸

Second, communication. For Bechara, Khiam offered a site of counter-praxis as well as suffering. She passed notes to new prisoners and audible messages through the pipes connecting sinks, tried to “sow seeds of doubts among the women who had become collaborators,” and corrupted a guard alienated from her job and coworkers, sharing confidences and information with her.⁶⁹ In an interview, Bechara notes:

We communicated through windows, by songs, by coughing (they later prohibited coughing at length), and there were also the little messages left in the toilets.... We also had a scarf that, carried by the wind, connected

one cell with another.... Writing was prohibited, but eventually, you learned to hide things, you learned the habits of the guards.... And you taught them to the new detainees.⁷⁰

She frequently matched wits with camp commander Jean Homsi, refused to call the camp a prison, since the SLA never formally charged her with a crime, and declined to help Israel negotiate for the release of captured Israeli pilot Ron Arad.⁷¹

The transformation of the everyday into art occurs not just between *Resistance* and its readers, but within the camp itself. In an interview, Bechara says, “How can man work on himself to evolve within four walls? On the second day I said ‘Anything that comes into this cell must be put to use.’”⁷² Bechara devotes a chapter of *Resistance* to the detainees’ efforts to fashion art out of the detritus of everyday life in detention, which made them “thieves of everything and nothing, because even the tiniest piece of stolen paper was a treasure.” They smoothed olive pits, then carved, painted, and strung them into rosaries. For hers, Bechara carved the initials of the Lebanese National Resistance Front into each pit — a perfectly pious mnemonic aid for the lucky secular survivor of a communist martyrdom operation.⁷³ They unraveled clothing and blankets and reknit them into fabric sculptures, sweaters, baskets, small tapestries, and headscarves for Muslim comrades. They exchanged craft works with each other, sometimes as tokens of romantically-tinged solidarity when the internees could convince a sympathetic guard to smuggle them back and forth between the women’s and the men’s sides. They gave them as presents to representatives from international human rights organizations, who began visiting in 1995.

These artifacts have the extraordinary aesthetic presence of objects represented in Realist narrative, which Sartre associates not with transparent mimesis, but with praxis and *being handled*: “The more often the characters handle it, take it up, and put it down, in short, go beyond it towards their own ends, the more real will it appear.”⁷⁴ Bechara remarks,

I have many families, equal to the number of detainees who entered the detention centers. Each family, mother, father, brother, and sister, works to bring anything with them, the smallest items, they’re bringing them to the detainees, even if it’s a package of kleenex, they will bring it to the detainees. This package of kleenex will pass through the hands of all the detainees and I amongst them.⁷⁵

Where internment creates Modernist fractured time and subjective isolation, the Resisters’ artworks reveal a Realist preference for linear time and community. Where prison life aims to destroy “any clear sense of time,” making and displaying these artworks became a means of “marking time... in a context precisely designed to eradicate it.... Thus they become a means of keeping community alive. They also

embody the ideal of a future.”⁷⁶ Bechara also turned her attention to “the abstraction of poetry,” which “became a fundamental part of [her] life in Khiam,” as she composed and memorized over fifty poems.⁷⁷ A screaming neighbor internee inspired her first poem, a poetic denunciation of Israel, while her martyred cousin Loula inspired another. She left her written poems behind in Khiam, but she later received them as the stuffing in a small cushion sent to her in Paris by a former detainee — a striking materialized memory with which she opens her narrative.⁷⁸

Third, the strenuous intimacy of camp life gave Bechara the opportunity for experiments in fabricating anti-sectarian collectivity, replacing the vertical relationship of sovereign captor and abject isolated captive with unauthorized horizontal relationships of solidarity among diverse captives, corrupted guards, and the outside world.⁷⁹ Working to create an experimental version of the cross-sectarian and international unity she desired for Lebanon, she befriended Hanan Moussa, a Shia woman detained in 1996. Despite their differences in background and sensibility, “we shared the same vision: a resistance movement in which each could find his or her own place fighting against an occupying army.” As they became comrades, Hanan taught Soha some Hezbollah songs, while Soha taught her those of Marcel Khalifé.⁸⁰ In creating this friendship, Bechara acted out on a micro-level the political strategy of the LCP as a whole in the eighties and nineties, as it sought to reach out to and solidify relations with the religious resistance.⁸¹ Chapter 13 turns to another prisoner, Kifah Afifi, a Palestinian born in Shatila Camp, who lost two brothers to the 1982 massacre and another to the War of the Camps. In October 1988, at age 17, she led a squad of five Palestinians and two Lebanese hoping to cross the border and capture Israelis for a hostage exchange.⁸² Afifi and Bechara shared a cell, and after being separated, they established a passionate epistolary friendship, using the shower sponge as a letterbox. Making a plus of her claustrophobically narrow cell, Bechara shimmied up its high walls until she could see out a window and look into the courtyard below: “Under the right circumstances, I could even catch a glimpse of Kifah, and we would grin at each other.... Every time I looked out, I felt like I was playing tricks on Abu Nabil, ruining his strategy of trying to make me cooperate with him.”⁸³ In 2001, Bechara exclaimed, “Kifah deserves to have books and books written about her. All by herself, she represents the Palestinian cause. She has lived all the suffering of the Palestinian people: the war, the prohibition of return.”⁸⁴ After her release, Afifi married a fellow-detainee, Mohammed Ramadan, and named her first daughter Soha. Visiting Afifi in Lebanon, Bechara told her, “Until ‘82 I was very distant from the Palestinians. I thought all of Palestine was you. Now I’m flirting with you!”⁸⁵

In Sabbag’s film, Bechara also visits Khiam Camp and meets other Khiam veterans, including men whom she had known about but never met: a Druze communist survivor of a failed rescue attempt, male and female Hezbollah ex-detainees, and a communist named Soleiman Ramadan, physically and mentally injured during his fifteen years of captivity. Repeatedly asked to retell her story in print, on film, and

on video, Bechara conveys neither boredom nor exultation in the attention. Rather, she responds with dutiful clarity — presenting herself as an individual but also as a type: an embodiment of historical tendencies and contradictions. In a 2000 interview, she explains these disciplined performances as part of her mission, reverses the gaze directed towards her, analyzes the fascination of her audiences and interviewers, and asserts the complex unity of her project of resistance and publicity:

The French today have heard how their grandparents lived through an occupation during World War Two, but that seems far in the past, over fifty years ago. They cannot touch or feel this experience now. Likewise for most Americans and the West in general, they have not lived through similar situations. For them it is as though seeing something, meeting someone who has lived this... reminds them of stories they have heard or that their grandparents lived through, but they themselves had no way of feeling... no way of engaging with a witness to such events. This is why first-hand accounts, testimonies are important.... For me as long as there is someone raising questions, that automatically implies that he does not know. And as long as I have the capability to answer, it is my duty to answer. Because one has to acknowledge and share the conditions that one is living. Resistance for me is a mission and part of this mission is the talking about it.⁸⁶

The fascination with Bechara's narrative shows the failure of periodization — of the effort by *fin-de-siècle* proponents of postcolonial hybridity to present it as the regnant successor to sixties/seventies resistance literature. Reflecting on her time in Khiam, Bechara asks, "Where can one discover the true nature of man, where can man find the deep truth about himself? I never believed it could be the detention center."⁸⁷ The concluding paragraph of Bechara's memoir links the traumatic memories of camp life to a militant hope for the future:

Sometimes in the camp, a laugh, a little improvised scene was enough to overcome the horror. Today, some innocuous thing can take me back for a moment to my solitary cell with its floor of beaten earth. But only for a moment. It is not this memory which fills me now, but that of a whole people and its future — the spirit of resistance. Because what I did, I did for tomorrow's children, for that fragile time when they will play in the shade of trees, and the air will echo with their shouts of joy.⁸⁸

Like the factory, the army camp, the colonial school, and the slave or merchant ship, the neocolonial detention camp became a compact dialectical space with unintended consequences: designed to concentrate, individuate, and control, it also creates

conditions for breeding up tomorrow's children and a new resistant collective, across ethnic and sectarian divides.

Wajdi Mouawad and Neocolonial Symbolism

Wajdi Mouawad was born in 1968 to a Maronite family living in Deir el-Qamar, the ancestral home of historian George Antonius and of the Chamoun family, twenty-seven miles due north of Deir Mimas, in the mountainous Chouf area of south-central Lebanon.⁸⁹ His family moved to Paris in 1976 and to Montreal in 1983. Mouawad has become one of Canada's leading playwrights, with *Incendies* frequently called his greatest achievement.⁹⁰

Incendies interweaves events of two times: the life of Nawal Marwan, a woman living first in an unnamed country resembling Lebanon, from the 1950s to the 1980s, and then in Canada for the next twenty years, and the investigation of her life by her twin children, Janine and Simon, in 2002 or so. It begins with the third paragraph below ("Lebel reads") and interweaves the times of the mother and the twins. Here, I'll present a sequential version of events. Nawal Marwan, a fourteen-year-old girl living in a northern village, falls in love with Wahab, a refugee camp boy. He gives her a clown nose stolen from a traveling circus. After Nawal gets pregnant, the camp people send Wahab away, while Nawal's mother tells her she must either leave her family forever or give up her baby. She puts the clown nose into his baby clothes to mark his identity, bids him farewell, and vows to find him one day. Her midwife takes him south to an orphanage in Nabatiyé, which transfers him to another orphanage. During a civil war, the militia of a Southern resistance movement allied with the refugees and led by Chamseddine empties out this orphanage and gives Nawal's son to a couple named Harmanni, who name him Nihad. He begins working as a sniper for Chamseddine's militia, then leaves to look for his mother. An invading foreign army captures him and converts him to their side.

Meanwhile, Nawal's grandmother Nazira tells her to leave her impoverished and illiterate village, go to the city, and learn to think, read, and write. She does so. At age 19, she returns and engraves Nazira's name on her unmarked headstone. As she leaves, Sawda, a girl from Wahab's camp, joins her. Nawal teaches her to think, read, and write. Together, they look for Nawal's son, visiting two orphanages. A doctor tells them that refugees dispersed the orphans. Nawal and Sawda separate, and Nawal takes a bus belonging to a nearby refugee camp. A militia attacks the bus and Nawal alone survives. The play rejoins Nawal and Sawda, age forty. After working at a newspaper wrecked in the course of the civil war, they head out on the road together. When a militiaman threatens them, Sawda kills him. She tells Nawal of the militias' attack on her camp, their slaughter of sleeping civilians, and her own plan to retaliate against their families. Nawal proposes instead that she kill the militia leader named Chad. The two separate. Nawal shoots and kills Chad. The militia takes her to their prison in Kfar Rayat, where her son Nihad Harmanni, now known as Abou Tarek, has become

a guard and torturer, though neither knows of their relation. He rapes her, and at age forty-five, Nawal bears twins. Another guard turns them over to a peasant, who raises them as “Jaannaan” and “Sarwane” and returns them to Nawal when she is freed. The three emigrate to Montreal, where Nawal becomes a secretary to Alphonse Lebel, a notary. At age sixty, she tells a war crimes tribunal about her years in prison. Abou Tarek, also in Montreal, testifies about his time as a prison guard and mentions the clown nose. When Nawal sees and hears him, she recognizes him as her son and her rapist, and falls silent for the final five years of her life. After she has a stroke, a sympathetic nurse records her nightly silences. Nawal dies, leaving behind her twenty-two-year-old twins: Janine, a graduate student in mathematics, and Simon, a boxer.

Lebel reads them her cryptic will, which directs that she be buried face down without a headstone. He gives Janine a sealed letter for the father whom the twins thought had died, Simon one for the brother they never knew they had. Simon rebels and curses his mother, while Janine meets Nawal’s nurse, retrieves the silent tapes, then travels to Nawal’s home country to search for her father. In Nawal’s village, Janine learns of Nawal’s departure and trip to Kfar Rayat. At the prison museum there, a guide tells her of Nawal and of a guard who worked at the prison. This guard tells her that Nawal killed Chad, that she was raped and gave birth to twins in prison, and that he turned her children over to a peasant. The peasant tells Janine he raised the twins and returned them to Nawal on her release. With Lebel, Simon travels to his mother’s home country, where they meet Chamseddine. He tells Simon that his brother Nihad is also his father, Abou Tarek, who has found asylum in Canada. Simon reveals what he has learned to Janine. They return to Canada and deliver their letters to Abou Tarek. They read a final letter from Nawal. Nawal, the twins, Lebel, and the audience all recognize Nihad as the twins’ brother-father in scene thirty-five; Nihad recognizes the relation in scenes thirty-six and thirty-seven. In the first edition of the play only, a final scene presents Nawal’s voice on tape reading a love letter to Wahab.

Neither Mouawad’s preface to the play, the film, nor the documentary about it mentions Bechara or her memoir. Speaking of *Résistance* in an afterword to the 2009 French edition of *Incendies*, Charlotte Farcet says:

Wajdi Mouawad has not read this book, almost as a precaution, to let his imagination float free, to let himself be guided by intuition and not overwhelmed by the biographical. Reading the book is all the more unsettling, then, for there are astonishing coincidences between *Incendies* and the life of Soha Bechara.⁹¹

Our astonishment may fade when we remember that, while writing the play, Mouawad saw Sabbag’s documentary and, according to Bechara, read her memoir.⁹² But the formal differences predominate over the substantive echoes. And the Tragedians’

distance from the Resisters matters, whether it derives from an intentional rewriting or from the orientalist neoliberalism that springs forth when the imagination tries to float free of history.

I will not argue that the Tragedians should have followed the work of the Resisters more faithfully. Rather, I will juxtapose the two groups with the goal of reciprocal illumination of *Résistance* and *Incendies* and their genres (anti-sectarian resistance narrative, neoliberal-neoclassical tragedy). In shaping his play's plot and its reception, Mouawad employs three interconnected techniques. Where Bechara presents herself as a collective type, he oscillates between asserting the abstract imaginative universalism of his vision and insisting on his authentic depiction of Lebanese reality, incarnated by Mouawad himself. Where Bechara focuses on conflicting political ideologies and material interests, his plot reduces these conflicts to a psychic sectarianism born of misrecognition. And where Bechara focuses on the political construction of solidarity, he centers his plot on the familial recognition of mother rape and blood relation. These techniques define the formal and political project of the Tragedians.

The Tragedians repeatedly stress *Incendies's* lack of engagement with or even specific reference to one side or another in the Lebanese Civil War, an elision so profound that it comes to stand for the aesthetic as such. Mouawad comments, "Strictly speaking, *Incendies* isn't a piece about the war. It's about the promises one doesn't keep, about desperate attempts at consolation, about how to stay human in an inhuman context."⁹³ Campbell says that an English production of the play "does not attempt to provide answers and tie the human experience up in a happy, neat, little package, but instead, raises the questions that surpass specific races, cultures, and experiences."⁹⁴ To process fully the inadequacy of such statements, we need to remember just how universal the particular can be, how particular the universal. First, aesthetic practice and theory have long held that particular narratives representing historical or realistically-rendered persons can lay claim to universality.⁹⁵ A Symbolist author avoids the particular not to gain the universal as such, but to gain a certain sort of universal — one that explains historical particulars from above or without. Second, *Incendies* reminds us just how emaciated the universal can become: by excluding the political analysis of motives, it leaves us with no more than some banalities about the quest for identity, the self-destructive horror of revenge, and the human ache for consolation and togetherness. These commonplaces define Mouawad's atrophied stagecraft. If Symbolist drama in turn-of-the-century Paris, Moscow, and Dublin exercised some critical force against decayed Classicism and bourgeois Realism, then the Late Symbolist drama of twenty-first century Montreal and Paris offers little more than authorized and formulaic surprise, and an implicit ratification of capitalist development ideology.⁹⁶

At the same time, the Tragedians constantly remind us that Mouawad's Lebanese origin allows him to bear intimate witness to the war, invoking particularity not

as aesthetic and political reflection, but as *authenticity*.⁹⁷ Though it never mentions Lebanon, *Incendies* alludes to Bechara's attempt to assassinate Lahad, to the 'Ain el-Rammaneh Bus Massacre of 1975, to the Beirut massacres, to particular places, including "Nabatiyé" and "Kisserwan," and even to persons: Mouawad turns the Ayatollah Muhammad Mahdi Shamseddine, the South Lebanese Shia scholar associated with Amal, into "Chamseddine," a cross between a militia leader and Sophocles' Tiresias.⁹⁸ In writing, staging, and marketing *Incendies*, Mouawad repeatedly speaks as an emigré native informant worthy of interviews, reflective essays, scrupulously recorded junkets to Lebanon. True, he's an ill-informed informant, one who had not even heard about Khiam Camp until 2002. But this ignorance becomes a further mark of his questing tragic authenticity: his parents and his culture denied the Civil War, as Sawda's parents denied the Nakba, as the universe denied Nawal and Nihad knowledge of their relation. Mouawad's ignorance prepares a Sophoclean moment of tragic recognition: "strangers had to tell me my own story."⁹⁹

Stories by and about Mouawad and *Incendies* tend to improve with each retelling. Someone seems to have convinced Denis Villeneuve that Mouawad and Bechara were childhood friends in Beirut before the war separated them.¹⁰⁰ First in fiction, then as a factual claim, Mouawad placed a childhood version of himself at the very origin of the Civil War. In his 2002 novel, *Visage Retrouvé*, his seven-year-old protagonist, Wahab, witnesses an attack based on the 'Ain el-Rammaneh bus massacre of 13 April 1975 — the conventional marker for the war's outbreak.¹⁰¹ Mouawad later claimed that he himself witnessed the massacre in the street below his family's Beirut apartment, as "Christian militiamen" avenged "the assassination of their chief by Palestinian militiamen."¹⁰² Members of the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP), not Palestinians, attacked a wedding party at the Maronite Church in 'Ain el-Rammaneh but did not kill Pierre Gemayel, head of the Phalange, who was present. Mouawad may be creatively melding Pierre with his son Bashir, assassinated in 1982. Mouawad also asks us to imagine his mother letting little Wajdi play on the balcony after two shooting incidents and five killings in the street below, earlier that morning.¹⁰³ Similarly, in *Visage Retrouvé*, little Wahab survives a bombing that destroys the family garden in the mountains, leaving him to collapse in his father's arms. In a 2008 essay, Mouawad says a bomb destroyed his family's edenic garden home in the Chouf, causing little Wajdi to suffer "the inconsolable grief of my life," as he collapsed into his father's arms, before beginning to hero-worship local Phalangists and handle their weapons. But the military history of the Chouf falls short of Mouawad's elegiac need for a paradise lost. Druze militias did attack some Christian towns there after Kamal Jumblatt's March 1977 assassination, but they didn't have an air force, and Mouawad's family was in Paris by then.

Regardless of their literal truth, these stories share a dramatic consistency in rendering Mouawad both victimizer and victim, blending male and female trauma identities.¹⁰⁴ Riding the North America Islamophobic lecture circuit, women like

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Nonie Darwish, Souad, and the flabbergasting Kola Boof (womanist poet, soft-porn actress, and self-proclaimed mistress of Osama bin Laden) appear as the innocent victims of Arab or Islamic patriarchy, rescued by Jesus, the West, or capitalism, while men like Walid Shoebat, Kamal Saleem, and Zachariah Anani, appear as blood-stained ex-terrorists, publicly repentant but still seared by their own actions. Mouawad plugs into this material, but removes the sectarian polemic that might limit his work's appeal to a single Islamophobic faction. This leaves him free to wallow in the most rancid clichés about Levantine tribal violence, for he has inoculated himself by claiming to have verged on participating in it. In the novel, he's a little boy fantasizing about obliterating enemy planets with his laser canon, just before he witnesses the bus massacre. In the interview, he imagines himself the little boy on the balcony but also the Phalangist spraying the bus with gunfire. In the play he becomes Sawda the massacre survivor and plotter of revenge slayings, Nawal the rape victim and assassin, and Abou Tarek the foster child and sniper-rapist. Our focus of sympathy turns inexorably from the bus passengers to Wajdi and his avatars; like a histrionic postcolonial theorist, he is confessionally *complicit* in the violence he dramatizes.¹⁰⁵ Mouawad's intimate witness authenticates his later writing. The playwright-director breaks down the fourth wall from without and finds himself onstage. Like Oscar Wilde's Oscar, Wajdi Mouawad's Wajdi is his greatest creation.

The Tragedians' interviews, press kits, and programs oscillate between Mouawad's authentically-rendered horrors of the Civil War, and the tremulous freedom of his universal imagination, pleading authenticity to questions about the universality, universality to questions about the authenticity.¹⁰⁶ Thus they *set the binary*, claiming to cover everything while silently blocking a host of alternative binary contexts: the Lebanese Civil War and the Israeli Occupation, class domination and imperialism, Lebanese émigrés and indigenes. The Tragedians reveal no serious interest in the enormous body of Lebanese writing on the Civil War, casting Lebanon as a wordless ache awaiting an occidental raid on the inarticulate. In a web essay for an Avignon theater festival, Mouawad chronicles his May 2008 visit to Lebanon, where the Civil War appeared primarily as the force shaping him as an émigré author, and the Lebanese as lost "twins" revealing the Wajdis who might have been.¹⁰⁷ Asked if he has read Arab authors in translation, he responds, "No. I am more a reader of the soul than a reader of the social.... I feel more like a citizen of Hubert Aquin's universe than of Elias Khoury's."¹⁰⁸ Why is Quebec soulful, Lebanon merely social? Mouawad doesn't say. But sometimes writers read their predecessors on a certain topic to avoid the pratfalls of appropriation and false immediacy. For instance, if Mouawad should ever read *Gate of the Sun*, Khoury's 1998 epic of the Nakba and the Palestinian experience in Lebanon, he might encounter a more embarrassing touristic twin: a fictional Frenchman visiting 1990s Beirut to authenticate his planned stage adaptation of Jean G  net's *Four Hours in Shatila* — that "stunningly beautiful text" about the massacre, as he calls it.¹⁰⁹

Where do tribalism and ethno-sectarian cleansing come from? Metropolitan capitalists emphasize pre-colonial and indigenous roots, with capitalist development as the cure. But sect and tribe always play a crucial role in the divide-and-conquer schemes of colonial capitalism — witness Britain in Ireland and Kenya and Malaya, France in Rwanda and Burundi, the US in Iraq and Afghanistan. And as yesterday's Euro-American civilizing mission created or aggravated indigenous conflicts of sect and tribe, so today's Euro-American humanitarian interventions aggravate those conflicts rather than quelling them. For neocolonial investors, invaders, and arms traders, a "failed state" constitutes a resounding success and an opportunity for the West to assume, in Žižek's words, "the role of the neutral judge elevated above local tribal conflicts."¹¹⁰ The resulting "neoliberalism" does offer an innovative and redoubled phase of development and exploitation after an ostensible interruption — the welfare state in the West, the Civil War in Lebanon — but in both areas, the capitalist continuities are most striking. Marie-Joëlle Zahar notes the role of liberal intervention in maintaining Lebanese sectarian conflict after the Taif Agreement.¹¹¹ The Lebanese national bourgeoisie have also revealed the structural affinity of capitalism and sectarianism. Traboulsi says, "Sects... are a perfect example of the way pre-capitalist formations are recycled to play new roles in a peripheral capitalist economy" — notably, by providing "clientist networks" inside the state, and as instruments for enlisting the interference of outside military powers.¹¹² Responding to neoliberal prescriptions of rational developmental economics as the solution to power-driven partisan politics, Najib Hourani shows the intimate integration of finance capital with the Kata'ib (Phalangist) Party, and the continuing role of economic-political blocs in Lebanese politics. In another essay, he shows that Lebanese film and historical writing focus on the sectarian militiaman as the atavistic opponent of humane, liberal modernization, while discreetly overlooking the "beys" of Lebanon, "the ruling classes that have historically perpetuated and benefited from a system of institutionalized vertical cleavages."¹¹³

Like Bechara, Mouawad criticizes Lebanese sectarianism, and he avoids crude Islamophobic commonplaces — but only because he extends them to Christians. The resulting Arabophobic vision detaches sectarianism from present-day social interests and traces it to an ancient psychological aberration. For Mouawad, the immemorial extended family of the Arab village forms the heart of Lebanon's sectarian darkness, whose salvation lies in capitalist development, emigration, and a reformed oedipal but nuclear family. Mouawad traces sectarian violence to the village by reiterating "Kfar," a Syriac word for "house" frequently found in Levantine village names: we encounter the orphanage and prison in Kfar Ryat, village violence in Kfar Samira, and the massacres of Kfar Riad and Kfar Matra, which stand in for Beirut's eminently urban Sabra and Shatila.¹¹⁴ When the village horde chastises Nawal, her grandmother Nazira says "Poverty is to blame for all of this, Nawal. There's no beauty in our lives."¹¹⁵

Poverty is to blame, but no one is to blame for poverty: it derives from the human condition, or from sheer Arab backwardness. Poverty remains the origin of violence, but never an instance of it; it is the passive absence of development, never the active creation of underdevelopment through exploitation. On her deathbed, with the mythic wisdom of one about to cross over, Nazira tells Nawal to leave the village: “learn to read, learn to write, learn to count, learn to speak. Learn. It’s your only hope if you don’t want to turn out like us.... Learn to think, Nawal. Learn.” Nawal promises to return and engrave a name on her headstone, after she learns to read.¹¹⁶ The Symbolist portentousness coexists with urbane developmental bigotry: stupid people in villages must seek wisdom elsewhere. The way out of sectarian poverty lies not in solidarity and struggle but in a banal bourgeois ethic of education and self-improvement, sealed by histrionic, neo-feudal face-to-face promises: of Nawal to Nazira and her children, of Janine and Simon to her. At age nineteen, Nawal keeps her promise, and the hateful village jeers at her literacy.¹¹⁷

As she leaves, she adopts Sawda from Wahab’s camp, and begins teaching her the alphabet. They proceed to spend twenty years together working at a press in Daresh.¹¹⁸ By changing the affectionate solidarity of Lebanese Christian Bechara and Palestinian Muslim Afifi into missionary condescension, Mouawad practices a traditional bourgeois Lebanese form of orientalism: like Syrians, Palestinians are further *east*, more Arab, ignorant, and impulsive. Nawal and Sawda travel to an orphanage in Nabatiyé, rumored destination of Nawal’s son, then to a second orphanage in Kfar Rayat. A doctor tells them the refugees emptied out the orphanage:

Two days ago, the militia hanged three young refugees who strayed outside the camps. Why did the militia hang the three teenagers? Because two refugees from the camp had raped and killed a girl from the village of Kfar Samira. Why did they rape the girl?... [T]he story can go on forever, one thing leading to another, from anger to anger, from sadness to grief, from rape to murder, back to the beginning of time.¹¹⁹

All sects are equally depraved and backward; all moments of political action are equally caught in a web of reciprocal violence. Mouawad says *Incendies* aims “to explore the question of origins,” which rise above merely historical *beginnings*, while mythopoeic phrases like “back to the beginning of time” screen out mere *days* like May 15, 1948; April 13, 1975; and September 16-18, 1982.¹²⁰

This pedagogical relationship of Nawal and Sawda continues through the play’s awkward twenty-year jump, which allows Nawal’s baby to grow into a rapist. In Scene Twenty-Four, a guide at the Kfar Rayat prison tells Janine of the massacre “in the refugee camps of Kfar Riad and Kfar Matra,” during which soldiers surrounded the camps and “sent in the militia.” They killed many civilians, including Sawda’s family, because “their leader had been assassinated.”¹²¹ Mouawad alludes to the September

1982 Sabra and Shatila Massacre. When a Maronite Lebanese SSNP militant blew up Maronite Phalange leader and Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel, Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon immediately and publicly blamed the PLO, then released Phalangists and probably also SLA units into the camps, where they massacred thousands of Palestinian civilians.¹²² In his version of the massacre, Mouawad pinches some pathos from *Sophie's Choice* by having Sawda describe a mother forced to choose which one of her sons would live. In response, Sawda proposes "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" by killing civilian relatives of the militia, but Nawal says they must stop trying "to take revenge, burn down houses, make people feel what you feel so they'll understand." Nawal too would have become a sectarian terrorist, but she promised Nazira that she "would learn to read, to write and to speak, so I could escape poverty and hatred."¹²³

The ongoing pressure of Lebanese events means that the Tragedians must continue working to replace political explanations with psychological ones, as we can see in a study guide drawn up for a 2006 production of the play in Toronto:

A disturbing characteristic of reprisals to perceived insults or injuries is that they always escalate. This summer when Israel struck back at Hezbollah forces in Lebanon for kidnapping two of its soldiers, the extent of retaliation was much greater than the original injury.... Since this phenomenon is universal, it is not tied to any religion or culture; it is part of human nature generally.¹²⁴

Neoliberal humanism indicts everyone and therefore no one, but Israel is particularly blameless, for, as always, it *retaliates* and *strikes back*. Similarly, Mouawad's many references to Israel in his rehearsal book disappear from the script:

Now not wanting to speak in a direct way, or not being able to do so, and most of all, not being interested in doing so, I later got the notion to approach the question in a sensory way. The political fact of the Israeli invasion will not be apparent. It is more than subterranean, it's inside me, like an abyss turning into a cry.... The countries will not be named.¹²⁵

Political bad faith spawns a narcissistic prose poem. Like neoliberal intervention, neoliberal theater blurs cause and effect, turning human suffering into a chewable fetish.

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In January 2001, Mouawad invited Canadian photographer and militant Josée Lambert to visit his Montreal theater company. She showed them her photographs of Khiam detainees and their families, including Bechara and her mother, and staged *Diane and*

Jean: her play about a Khiam detainee who, to prevent the torture of her grandmother, submitted to the sexual assaults of a guard named “Jean,” who later emigrated to Canada. Farcet tells us that, while Mouawad sat in the wings of the theater listening to the play, “one phrase struck him like lightning: ‘How can you do this? I could be your mother.’... [T]he story appeared to him of a woman tortured and raped by her own son.”¹²⁶ Unsurprisingly, there’s no such phrase in Lambert’s play as printed, where Jean is about sixty and Diane much younger.¹²⁷ Mouawad wrote Lebanese director Randa Chahal Sabbag about his plan for a play on Khiam’s women prisoners. Sabbag sent him her documentary on Bechara, and when he visited Paris, introduced him to her. Mouawad says he “was struck by her appearance, which revealed nothing of what she had lived through: her face appeared without pain, without scar, or shadow, or half-closed eyes: a stupefying simplicity [stupéfiante simplicité].” When he described his play about mother-rape, Bechara turned to Sabbag with something that sounds less like simplicity than gentle mockery: “That’s a nice story he’s got there!”¹²⁸

For Bechara, family life becomes one item among others to be totalized in a project of revolutionary liberation; for Mouawad, it forms the hidden truth of all existence. Mother-rape doesn’t figure prominently in the litany of horrors comprising the Lebanese Civil War, but in a 2008 interview, he presents it as a “very shameful war, where fathers killed sons... where sons raped their mothers.” Like Nawal Marwan, Mouawad’s parents never spoke of the war to their children, leaving him to learn of it from historians.¹²⁹ Like the Marwan family, the Mouawads repress the fact of incestuous rape. And Mouawad’s decision to have Nawal kill Chad clashes with her rejection of revenge in the rest of the play, suggesting that Mouawad is struggling to get Nawal into jail so she can be raped by her son. Mouawad’s oedipal plot begins sounding less like a bolt from the blue than an *idée fixe*. We share in Nawal’s ignorant ache. In a theatrical dossier for children attending the Nantes performance, Pascal Vey observes, “The story of Nawal is particular and eternally true at the same time. It’s the story of a woman who finds herself plunged into a war without knowing why.”¹³⁰ Bechara and her fellow Resisters found Khiam Camp to be a grim experimental site for resistance, solidarity, and self-reflection; Nawal Marwan and the Tragedians find Kfar Rayat prison to be a site of pure individual abjection. Whatever the realities of sexual violence in Khiam, Mouawad’s focus on unwitting incest mythically distances us from the lived experience of the Civil War and the Israeli occupation. Rape-torture drives out electrode-torture, incest drives out both, and the fact of political torture at Khiam dissolves into an oedipal fog.

Mouawad’s incest plot also distracts us from Israel’s distinctly exogamous border-crossings during Operation Litani (1978), Operation Peace for Galilee (1982), its twenty-two years of large-scale colonial occupation, and its continuing occupation of Lebanon’s Ghajar and Shebaa Farms. For Mouawad, it’s not just that literature isn’t or shouldn’t be political. Politics isn’t political either — it’s a sectarian bloodbath, a tribal struggle, a family saga, and ultimately, an agon of the self. In Mouawad’s

family allegory, two symmetrical antagonists locked in a self-misrecognizing struggle eventually discover a final reduction to unity. Mouawad's Nawal begins this deconstruction when she lectures Sawda on the "hundred years war":

Seen from above, it must be very instructive to see us struggling to name what is barbarous and what isn't. Yes. Very "interesting." A generation raised on shame. Really. At the crossroads. We think, this war will only end with the end of time. People don't realize, if we don't find a solution to these massacres immediately, we never will.... The war pitting brother against brother, sister against sister. The war of angry civilians.¹³¹

As young Oedipus the wanderer kills King Laius, his unrecognized father, at the crossroads, so young Nihad the sniper kills a version of his father Wahab: one nameless victim pleads "Don't kill me! I could be your father! I'm the same age as your mother," echoing the mysterious phrase that Mouawad claimed to hear in Lambert's play.¹³² Nihad resembles Lévi-Strauss's intemperate Oedipus, with his "underrating of blood relations" in slaying Laius and his "overrating of blood relations" in marrying Jocasta.¹³³

Referring to both play and film, Erin Hurley observes,

But this walking in circles also bodies forth a latent sense in the play that echoes Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, which Mouawad avows served as one point of inspiration for *Incendies*. That is, the sense of returning to a self and an origin which are always somehow already known yet when encountered still unbearably unexpected. In other words, we've seen this play before.... These doubles are all "twos" that are also "ones"; each character instantiates the binary calculus of this family and this region — where one plus one may look like two (two people, two sides) but actually equals one. These doubles-that-are-not telegraph too a truth about war: that it is always internecine.¹³⁴

Hurley's monist deconstruction of binary opposites nicely explicates Mouawad's classically bourgeois humanist play, since both positions struggle to avoid feminist, communist, or anti-colonial analysis, which can never quite do without the *two* necessary to describe exploitation, or the *three* that suggests mediation and movement — for instance, the mediating position enacted by an anti-sectarian Christian communist and anti-Zionist militant.

Mouawad traces sectarian violence to incest, and incest to aggressive misrecognition, followed by a healing moment of recognition. In an interview, he explains his habitual turn to Sophocles for this moment: "Electra recognizes Orestes, Oedipus recognizes his mother, Ajax recognizes his madness: each confronts his

blindness, which shows him who he is. For me, this experience of instantaneous revelation is the most profound experience there can be."¹³⁵ Mouawad prepares us for this deconstructive moment with the play's riddling equation, intoned by Simon as he tells Janine about their father: $1+1=1$.¹³⁶ This formula recalls the Sphinx's riddle: what creature walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three at night? Just as Oedipus knows that Man crawls on four legs when an infant, two when mature, and three when old, walking with a cane; so Janine and Simon learn that one father plus one brother can equal a single person. The undeniable dramatic power of the play's revelation — as simple and satisfying as an ABBA chorus — rests on a formally pleasing literary corollary: one *Oedipus Rex* plot plus one Nawal/Nihad plot becomes one *Incendies* plot, and the self-congratulatory audience recognizes the allusion to Sophocles just as Nawal, Janine, Simon, and Nihad recognize the incest.

This moment of neoclassical allusion cloaks the colonial or neocolonial "third" that nurtures the struggles of a sectarian or tribal "two." When his play premiered in Paris and Montreal, Mouawad's French audience could mourn Lebanon's ethno-sectarian madness while forgetting that France partitioned Christian-majority Lebanon from Muslim-majority Syria. His Canadian audience could forget that Canada, working with the U.N. Special Committee on Palestine, separated Jewish-majority Israel from Muslim-majority Palestine. And both could forget that, in 1947, France and Canada voted to partition Palestine, sending one hundred thousand refugees north to the camps of Lebanon.¹³⁷ This forgetting is not incidental: *Incendies* generates so much emotion not despite its hypocrisy, but precisely because of it, for its classic tragic scapegoating allows its audiences to deny their role in fomenting sectarianism, blame it on Levantine madmen or the universe, and top everything off with vicarious mourning for those they helped kill. This theatrically displaced guilt resonates with US war films from *The Deer Hunter* to *The Hurt Locker*; with the Liberal Zionist aesthetic of *yorim ve'bochim* ("shooting and crying") in *Beaufort* (2007), *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), and *Lebanon* (2009); and with the amnesiac ethic of neoliberal humanitarian intervention itself. Dramatic art plays its part in the neocolonial repetition compulsion: the goal isn't mourning and peace, but a pleasing melancholic hunger for perpetual "consolation," which will generate the next intervention, the next bombardment, and the next denial.

Still, Mouawad set out to write not a Realist historical novel, but a Symbolist neoclassical tragedy. We can understand the relation between the two better with the aid of Lukács's *Historical Novel*, which harkens back to Hegel's contrast between Greek epic and Attic tragedy. Like epic, the historical novel aspires to a "totality of objects," for "an artistic image of human society which produces and reproduces itself in the same way as the daily process of life" — not objects as a world in themselves, but humanized objects, mediating and mediated by human relations. Tragedy, on the other hand, though it necessarily simplifies and generalizes, aspires to a "totality of movement," giving an impression of a social whole through a "dramatic collision.

It is an artistic image of the system, so to speak, of those human aspirations which, in their mutual conflict, participate in this central collision.” In *Antigone*, Sophocles needs exactly two sisters, Antigone and Ismene, to embody the conflict between two historically distinct visions of authority. Without Ismene, there “would not be an artistic image of the social-historical totality,” but “a third sister would be dramatically a tautology.”¹³⁸

So while it’s a genre error to fault *Incendies* for failing as a Realist novel, we may note that its dramatic “totality of movement” derives ultimately from neocolonial development ideology. The impetus comes from Nawal’s grandmother Nazira, who rejects the barbarous culture of her impoverished village. She tells Nawal to “break the thread,” becoming an inverted version of the Fate Atropos, one whose broken thread preserves life rather than ending it. Nawal, a natural-born emigrée, flees the village for Daresh, then for the humane metropole of Montreal, presided over by the Canadian Truth and Justice Commission and the avuncular notary Lebel. There she contemplates eastern horrors while preaching a developmental sermon: learn to read, to write, to think. She sends her twins on a circular civilizing mission that reverses then repeats her own. When they return, her posthumous voice echoes Nazira by telling them to “break the thread.”¹³⁹ Where the dialectical crucible of Khiam Camp transformed Bechara’s old family relations and created new ones, Mouawad’s Kfar Rayat Prison restores the oedipal nuclear family in a perverse but profoundly conservative reunion of father-brother, sister-daughter, brother-son, and grandmother-mother-partner-corpse. The oedipal emigrée mother overwhelms but also binds together her family, and all become one, in the words of the play’s refrain: “Now that we’re together, everything feels better.”¹⁴⁰ Mouawad produces a fragmentary false totality of movement by rewriting the neocolonial capitalism that generates Lebanon’s sectarian conflict as a family romance. The oedipal denouement requires no effort, no new cognition, no lurch of strenuous complexity — only a smug pseudo-shock of recognition of and acquiescence in all-too-familiar Greek myth. Sophocles turned Antigone’s future-oriented act of resistance *sumud* and solidarity into Jocasta’s past-oriented recognition and acceptance. Mouawad turns Bechara the vocal Resister into Nawal the mute, autistic Tragedian.

But we can imagine other dramatic “totalities of movement” that would not have silenced the Antigone of Deir Mimas in her struggle with the Creons of Israel and the SLA. In 1977, Etel Adnan published *Sitt Marie Rose*. This experimental novella in the form of a Sophoclean play shows a Lebanese Christian death squad interrogating then martyring the Christian protagonist for her solidarity with the Palestinians of Sabra and Shatila. Adnan modeled her protagonist on Palestinian partisan Marie Rose Boulos, a Syrian Christian and Director of St. Luke’s School for Retarded Children in Beirut, abducted in 1976 and never seen again.¹⁴¹ Adnan’s Marie Rose uncannily resembles Soha Bechara, only nine years old when Boulos died. Though Lebanese culture continues to suffer from neocolonial sectarianism, it also offers a glorious

history of anti-sectarian popular struggle, carried on at mortal risk.

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Mouawad gave Quebec director Denis Villeneuve a free hand to adapt and direct the film version of *Incendies*. Villeneuve shortened the play, coarsened it, and straightened out some ineffective plot kinks, while remaining true to its neoliberal political and aesthetic vision.¹⁴² Villeneuve cast Belgian-Moroccan actress Lubna Azabal as Nawal and used a Palestinian refugee camp in Amman to represent a refugee camp in “Daresh.” He hired displaced Iraqis to play the film’s refugees, “because those people were available, they need money.... And they did help me a lot about finding the kind of authenticity I was looking for.”¹⁴³ Villeneuve made a pluralist neocolonial plus of the resulting *mélange* of spoken Arabics, which show “there is no such thing as ‘Arab culture’ but many cultures in the Arab world and many individuals.”¹⁴⁴ The film opens by zooming out from a bleak, iconic Middle Eastern landscape (actually, Israel-occupied Syria, seen from Jordan), panning to a shot of Chamseddine’s militia giving buzz-cuts to a group of orphan boys, Nihad Harmanni among them. Villeneuve moves from Mouawad’s stylization to something like film Realism, mitigated by certain Symbolist motifs: a chorus of droning cicadas, wide-angle shots of primeval desert and smoldering cityscapes, and recurrent set-pieces of multiple characters glaring off into space along non-parallel, non-intersecting axes. They combine to sketch out a human world alternating between the primal horde and the pathological monad.

Villeneuve says, “The play was politically neutral and I want the film to be politically neutral also, because it’s a movie about peace, about ending the cycle of violence, so I don’t want to be part of this conflict.”¹⁴⁵ But this kind of neutrality toward the squabbling natives requires a colonial asymmetry of places. Joseph Conrad’s London nabobs sit in the yawl *Nellie*, on the River Thames, imagining an inchoate, vaguely African heart of darkness; Denis Villeneuve’s Quebecers sit in a notary’s office on Montreal’s Rue Jean-Mance, imagining an anonymous, vaguely Levantine civil warscape — a place authentically “out there” (“là-bas”) which remains nevertheless an Oriental realm of pre-masticated mystery, a mythological site for an oedipal reunion, and a placeless metaphor for the mind alone.¹⁴⁶ Commenting on his film’s generality in an interview, Villeneuve alludes to the name of the film’s Beirut-like city:

Beirut or Daresh? This question haunted me throughout the process of adapting the script to the screen. I decided to follow the play’s lead and set my film in an imaginary space like Costa-Gavras’s *Z* so as to free it from any political bias. The film is about politics but is also apolitical. The play’s purpose was to delve into the subject of anger and not to fuel such anger. And the setting of *Incendies* is a historical minefield.¹⁴⁷

Villeneuve removes Nawal’s return to her village and the subplot of her silent tapes.

He folds the narrated camp massacres into a live action bus massacre, which becomes his visual touchstone for sectarian violence. Where Mouawad's Symbolist stagecraft brings young Nawal and Janine together onstage, Villeneuve's cuts create moments of vertigo as we struggle briefly to determine whether the jeans-clad young woman we see is Nawal or Janine. Mouawad's Nawal recognizes Abou Tarek as her son at the Canadian war crimes tribunal when he mentions his clown's nose. Villeneuve has Nawal's midwife tattoo a three-dot ID right on Baby Nihad's oedipal heel: $1+1=1$. His Nawal finds her long-lost son when she swims up to the side of a Montreal pool and sees the tattoo on a man's heel. She moves to the pool's conspicuously labeled "partie profonde" ("deep end"), climbs the ladder, and recognizes her son as Abou Tarek — who does not recognize her.

Like Mouawad, Villeneuve spurns crude Islamophobia and embraces crude Arabophobia. True, he turns Mouawad's religiously indeterminate "Nationalists" and "Refugees/Resistance" into "Christians" and "Muslims." But when the former take the bloody initiative, the latter respond with reciprocal violence: "Chamseddine and his men killed all the Christians to avenge the refugees."¹⁴⁸ By having Christian Nawal's brothers shoot Wahab and almost shoot her, Villeneuve rejects the obsessive contemporary identification of honor killings with Islam alone, in an endless stream of accounts — truthful, fictional, and fraudulent.¹⁴⁹ But for Villeneuve, the Arab tribal savagery remains: "I understood in the Arabic world such a thing will be condemned by death."¹⁵⁰ Thus his audiences can abhor barbarous "honor killings" by extended Eastern families of brothers, fathers, and uncles, while blocking any troubling comparisons to civilized "crimes of passion" by lonesome Western patriarchs — like Mouawad's friend and collaborator, musician Bertrand Cantat, who beat Marie Trintignant to death.¹⁵¹

Villeneuve flattens Mouawad's Symbolist prose poetry but retains his capitalist development narrative. What the film "sets out so powerfully is the biblical nature of sectarian violence."¹⁵² Nawal's grandmother tells her to go to the city: "There's nothing here for you now.... You'll go to school there. You'll learn to read, to think. To escape this poverty ["*misère*"].... Promise me that you'll go to school." Mouawad's Nawal returns to her village to inscribe her grandmother's blank headstone, drawing the villagers' jeers; Villeneuve's Janine seeks information in her mother's village, where she meets the same hostility from a female horde, one of them named "Souha." The Levantine heart of darkness festers inside the sectarian village, while cosmopolitan Montreal nurtures humane development and consolation, miraculously whitening Janine and Simon (Mélissa Désormeaux-Poulin and Maxim Gaudette), the offspring of dusky Wahab, Nawal, and Nihad (Hamed Najem, Lubna Azabal, and Abdelghafour Elaaziz).¹⁵³

In his greatest change, Villeneuve expunges vaguely Palestinian Sawda and smudges Mouawad's oblique references to Israel, turning his "army that invaded the south" into "an enemy invasion."¹⁵⁴ Thus he removes the perplexing contradiction in

Mouawad's Nawal, who piously reproaches Sawda for wanting "to take revenge, burn down houses, make people feel what you feel so they'll understand," then executes Chad.¹⁵⁵ Villeneuve's Nawal becomes her own traumatized Sawda, forming her vengeful decision to kill Chad after witnessing the bus massacre and the aftermath of his massacres in "Deressa." She tells one of Chamseddine's group "I have only hatred for the Nationalists.... [I want t]o teach the enemy what life has taught me." While Mouawad places vengeful camp girl Sawda under Nawal's tutelage so she can learn to think, speak, and write, Villeneuve turns vengeance-crazed young Nawal into older-but-wiser Nawal, who leaves politics behind for life as a Montreal clerical worker and yearns to bring her children together. Thus Villeneuve motivates Mouawad's stylized Symbolist plot, pushing it in a Realist direction. But resistance remains nothing more than atavistic reciprocal violence.

And by eliminating Sawda and Palestine, Villeneuve solves a pressing problem for any ambitious young filmmaker pondering the awards scene. As Elia Suleiman, Hany Abu-Assad, Emad Burnat, Guy Davidi, and Dror Moreh can testify, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences tends not to smile on films critical of Israeli colonialism.¹⁵⁶ Villeneuve spares his reviewers any awkwardness: no need to mention Israel and Palestine at all, except to underscore their irrelevance to the film's deeper human meaning. Thus even the *Jerusalem Post* published a favorable review, abhorring the madness of a country "in which seemingly ordinary people become torturers and murderers," lamenting the madness of "the Arab Winter" which preceded the "so-called Arab Spring."¹⁵⁷ Another review shows audiences they can feel all the insanity, all the pathos of the Middle East, while remaining agnostic on its actual conflicts:

Even the work's insistence not to specify actual countries serves the greater purpose of a broader theme: the utter senselessness and tragedy of the unending violence, suffering, atrocities and deaths that self-righteous warring religious and political factions impose upon the region (or anywhere, for that matter). Whether to blame Jews, Muslims, Arabs, Palestinians or power/money-hungry tyrants is beside the point. But *Incendies* is so much more than a "message" film; it is outstanding, high-quality entertainment that should ring up impressive art-house numbers.¹⁵⁸

The rapt contemplation of sectarian madness among generalized ethnic others requires no overt, market-narrowing blame of anyone in particular, while conjuring up a traditional developmental racism.

In her documentary on the film, Barbeau-Lavalette says Villeneuve "sets his story in an invented country representing all countries at war," opening her film by cutting from its central image of sectarian madness, the bus massacre, to a shot of two young Jordanian rams butting heads.¹⁵⁹ But alongside this stylized racism, the documentary

offers, wittingly or unwittingly, a peripheral Realist drama of lived experience. Around the film shoots, local people ride horses, crack jokes, harvest their crops, and compare the action of the film to their own experience of civil war. A Beirut passerby shows off his civil war wounds, but his curiosity about the film annoys a crew member. A refugee patriarch asserts that exiled Palestinians will never forget the Nakba, as he holds his infant daughter Gaza, born during Israel's 2008-9 assault, while another girl beside him mugs for the camera. When a refugee boy cast as a victim of Nihad's sniping asks that somebody else take his place, Villeneuve obviously reassures him that he won't really be shot. Another boy grimaces at the bad memories stirred up. Parents worry about their war-scarred children who play at "Soldier and Terrorist." As Villeneuve's Nawal heads south against a tide of refugees fleeing north, two by two, through a checkpoint, he addresses the Jordanian, Palestinian, and Iraqi extras, "When they cross, they must not smile. They are just happy to go on to their side, but they must not smile." One woman extra says:

I lived through this scene in Iraq. The same thing exactly. It was in the South. The soldiers came into the houses, and they deported us on a bus just to the frontier. I was with my parents. We were all separated, my mother, my brother, my sister and me. I made a half-turn, but I don't know if my house was bombarded. It was in 2006, and it isn't over.

An assistant director interrupts her and repeats the directions: "Listen up, don't look at the camera! We have to get going here. Every action on time! No smiling at all! Nobody laughs!" In this film universe, laughter would verge indecorously on resistance, suggesting intact survival, reflective consciousness, and an escape from the sheer abjection defining *Incendies*, play and film.

Conclusion: Bechara, Mouawad, and the Second Lebanon War

Affi launched her cross-border mission seeking Israelis to exchange for Lebanese and Palestinian hostages. In June and July 2006, Hamas and Hezbollah followed suit, ultimately leading Israel to exchange 1027 Palestinians for one living Israeli, and over two hundred dead and five living Lebanese for two dead Israelis.¹⁶⁰ But these tactical successes provided an excuse for massive Israeli attacks that took thousands of lives and did billions of dollars in damage. During the attack on Lebanon, the media called on both Bechara and Mouawad for expert commentary. In the autumn of 2006, she traveled to Lebanon with a Télévision Suisse Romande film crew, providing the bona fides that made possible the documentary, *Soha, Retour au Pays du Hezbollah*.¹⁶¹

In documentaries and interviews, Bechara has maintained an independent Left position critical of the two dominant Lebanese blocs, Hariri/March 14 and Hezbollah/March 8.¹⁶² In an April 2009 talk to the Union of Democratic Youth, she laments the group's failure to fight for Palestinian civil rights and acknowledge the role of secular

fighters, including communists, in Lebanon's liberation: "You may wonder why the others didn't recognize us as a part of the resistance.... We don't need them to. Ask the soil in the South, and it will tell you."¹⁶³ In December 2009 interview, she praises Hezbollah's resistance effort but opposes its sectarian impulses and support for the neoliberal policies of the Lebanese government. She criticizes the Democratic Left Movement for forgetting its Leftist principles when it split from the LCP to join the March 14 bloc, thus short-circuiting the LCP's discussion of Syria's role. And she offers a comradely critique of the LCP's failure to work concretely for the rights of women and Palestinians.¹⁶⁴

After Israel's retreat in 2000, Hezbollah turned Khiam Camp into a museum of the resistance. On 25 July, 2006, Israel bombed it: "the Israelis themselves confirmed the importance of telling the terrible story of this torture center meant to break a society, when they bombed Khiam almost flat."¹⁶⁵ Bechara has commented, "But you can't erase the memory of a place.... It goes beyond Lebanon. It's the history of humanity."¹⁶⁶ This attack persuaded former internee Cosette Ibrahim to collaborate with Bechara on a more lyrical memoir titled, in its French translation, *La fenêtre: Camp de Khiam*. Disinterested in traditional prison memoirs, Ibrahim helped Bechara write, "not to boast about certain heroic moments or to renounce days of ordinary cowardice," but "to accompany Soha's words, her scattered memories, to leave traces like Post-it Notes... so as not to forget, to engrave certain lived details of Khiam Camp: details that we cannot engrave on the walls, as prisoners habitually do... the remnants of walls that no longer exist." With Ibrahim's help, Bechara records her lived experience of internment in short chapters: the complaint of her mother, temporarily interned, that Soha launched the operation during olive-harvesting season; the names of her fellow internees, and the dates of their arrival, departure, and death; menstruation, bruising, eczema, and body odor; emotional dialogues with Kifah about Sabra and Chatila; her poems "as mediocre as they were passionate"; and detailed recollection of resistance through crafting olive pit rosaries, knitting, and embroidery, including a chapter titled "In the Beginning Was the Needle."¹⁶⁷ In this memoir, even more than the first, we see a camp saturated not with the abject silence of the play and film, but with constant, cunning efforts at communication, commemoration, verbal and artifact-based solidarity.

In the middle of Israel's 2006 invasion of Lebanon, Montreal's *Le Devoir* published Mouawad's prose poem, "A Cry for Lebanon — The Ache" ("Un cri"), a masterpiece of disengaged empathy, with strong tonal similarities to *Incendies*.¹⁶⁸ Like his play's ideal audience, Mouawad assumes a position of overwhelmed, contemplative paralysis: "Bridges destroyed, arms pulled out, childhoods lost and roads broken, apartment buildings flattened, airplanes in the air and screams. Whistling and explosions and desperate prayers, hard breathing, hearts beating, great frights, incinerated sleep, irony and hatred and humiliation."¹⁶⁹ As his circumspect participles lay out a postmodernist buffet of uncaused effects, Mouawad remains narcissistically non-

partisan:

I don't have a position, I don't have a party — I'm simply overwhelmed, because I belong completely to this violence. I look at the land of my father and mother and I see myself — myself. I can kill and I can be on both sides, or on six sides, or on twenty. I can be an invader and I can be a terrorist. . . . This war is me; I am this war.¹⁷⁰

And he fears that sectarian Lebanon will snatch defeat from the jaws of victory: “The army which invaded my country will withdraw, one day or another, and that day will be a holiday,” but “other wars will come to take the place of those that concern us now: other attacks, other massacres, other disgraces, other sufferings, restoring everything we're struggling to forget today.”¹⁷¹

If we have any ache left, we should save some for Mouawad's timing. His article appeared the very day that Israel destroyed Khiam Camp and, two hundred yards to the south, a U.N. post. After hours of bombing and frantic protest from the U.N., Israel dropped a half-ton smart bomb that killed four U.N. peacekeepers, including Canadian Major Paeta Derek Hess-von Kruedener.¹⁷² The next day, seventeen miles to the southwest, Hezbollah ambushed Israelis invading Bint Jbeil, forcing their retreat — perhaps the turning point of the war, which ended twenty days later.¹⁷³ Like Bechara's attack, like her liberation and that of Khiam Camp, Hezbollah's victory produced a temporary unity in Lebanon and in the Arab world as a whole, despite neocolonial efforts to widen rifts among Sunni, Shia, Christian, and atheist Arabs, and the various Arab states. This unity — flawed, partial, and temporary — survives as a model for Lebanon's post-sectarian future.

The conflict between resistance culture and liberal humanism thus helps define the contemporary historical moment in Lebanon, and in its Western representations. Both sides may feel a little retro, for different reasons: confronting the fact of continued colonial occupation, the Resisters still find useful the formal strategies of resistance literature; desperate to deny that occupation and its sectarian consequences, the Tragedians revert to a humanist tautology: “Man Is Man, after all!” For Mouawad, militant resistance and imprisonment corrode the individual, producing either psychopathic violence or abject passivity. Still, he wants to capture and condescend to some of the authenticity radiating from Bechara. Basking in the success of Villeneuve's film, he says, “*Incendies* the film was inspired by *Incendies* the play, which was inspired by a woman, Soha Bechara, who was imprisoned for six years [sic] in Khiam, in southern Lebanon.... For me, the success of this play and the film is a way to give back some life to a woman whose life was taken away from her.”¹⁷⁴ Never was a shipment of development aid more ostentatious or more superfluous. Unblinking with regard to child soldiers and mother-rape, Mouawad finds the truly unnamable horror in militant eloquence and cross-sectarian solidarity against Israel and its

mercenaries. *Incendies* deserves an unauthorized guerrilla production featuring the arrival onstage of an articulate communist engineering student with an anti-occupation project founded in political analysis, not traumatized bloodlust. It would play like *Godot Shows Up*.

Notes

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Republic of Silence," *We Have Only This Life to Live: The Selected Essays of Jean-Paul Sartre, 1939-1975*, ed. Ronald Aronson and Adrian Van den Hoven, (New York: New York Review of Books, 2014) 83. Thanks for comments to Joanna Tinker, Bashir Abu-Manneh, Tony Bradley, Najib Hourani, Chris Kendrick, Laleh Khalili, Jen Phillis, Obada Shamaa, and an anonymous reader for *Mediations*. This is for my comrade Sami Hanna, who took time off to comment while living through a civil war.
2. Etel Adnan, *Sitt Marie Rose* (Sausalito: Post Apollo P, 1982) 102.
3. Souha Béchara [with Gilles Paris], *Résistante* (N.P.: J. C. Lattès, 2000); trans. as Soha Bechara, *Resistance: My Life for Lebanon* (Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull P, 2003) 141. I will generally refer to "Soha Bechara." Other transliterations of her names include "Suha," "Souha," "Beshara," "Béchara," "Bishara," and "Bisharah."
4. Hussein A. Amery, "The Litani River of Lebanon," *The Geographical Review* 83.3 (July 1993): 233.
5. Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto P, 2007) 221-22.
6. Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, dir., *Khiam* (About Productions, 2000); Randa Chahal Sabbag, dir., *Souha, survivre à l'enfer* (Cinétévé, 2000), English subtitled version, *Souha: Surviving Hell* (First Run/Icarus Films, 2001); Jayce Salloum, dir., *Untitled Part I: Everything and Nothing* (France/Canada, 2001) <http://vimeo.com/71401594>.
7. Souha Béchara and Cosette Ibrahim, *Ahlumu bi-zinzānah min karaz* ["I dream of a prison made of cherries"] (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2011), trans. *La fenêtre: camp du Khiam* (Tunis: Editions Elyzad, 2014).
8. Wajdi Mouawad, *Incendies*, nouvelle édition, *Le Sang des promesses 2* (Arles: Actes Sud-Papier, 2011).
9. Denis Villeneuve, dir., *Incendies* (micro_scope 2010); French language DVD (Les films Christal: 2011); English subtitled DVD and Blu-Ray (Sony: 2011).
10. Jean Said Makdisi, "Review of Soha Bechara, *Resistance: My Life for Lebanon*," *H-Gender-MidEast, H-Net Reviews* (March, 2005) 5, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=10358>.
11. Ella Lingens-Reiner, *Prisoners of Fear* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1948).
12. Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London: Merlin P, 1963) 122.
13. Jean-Pierre Perrin, "Soha Bechara, 31 ans, vient d'achever dix années de prison pour avoir voulu tuer un général passé à l'ennemi israélien. La prisonnière du Liban," *Libération* (September 24, 1998) http://www.liberation.fr/portrait/1998/09/24/soha-bechara-31-ans-vient-d-achever-dix-annees-de-prison-pour-avoir-voulu-tuer-un-general-passe-a-l-_246621.
14. Bechara, *Resistance* 4-5, 7, and Bechara and Ibrahim, *La fenêtre* 105-6.
15. *Resistance* 14.
16. *Resistance* 48.
17. *Resistance* 108. Aboud's father Elias co-founded *As-Safir*, the Leftist Lebanese daily. Her mother, born Antoinette Bechara, mentions other tortured or martyred relatives: her niece Soha, her brother's son, her cousin's son Marwan Bechara, her nephew Khalid. See Joyce M. Davis, *Martyrs: Innocence, Vengeance*,

and Despair in the Middle East (New York: Palgrave, 2003) 67-84.

18. *Resistance* 11.
19. *Resistance* 29.
20. In 1984, Islamists captured, forcibly converted, and killed fifty-two Communists and, in 1987, assassinated LCP leader Hassan Hamdan amid a general assault on the Left. See Vijay Prashad, "The Arab Gramsci," *Frontline* (March 5, 2014), <http://www.frontline.in/world-affairs/the-arab-gramsci/article5739956>.
ece?css=print.
21. Perrin, "Soha Bechara."
22. *Resistance* 30-31.
23. Valérie Heuchamps, "Interview de Souha Béchara, symbole de la résistance libanaise," *Solidaire* (April 17, 2001).
24. *Resistance* 34.
25. "In NATO's Kosovo intervention, I think there's an element that no one can doubt: the raids, the bombs, aren't provoked by a material interest. Their character is exclusively humanitarian. What's at stake here are principles, the rights of man that take precedence even over state sovereignty. This is what makes it legitimate to attack the Yugoslav Federation, even without a United Nations Mandate." Vaclav Havel, "Moi aussi je me sens albanais," *Le Monde* (April 29, 1999).
26. Traboulsi, *History* 221.
27. *Resistance* 34.
28. David Hirst compares corruption in Arafat's post-Oslo Gaza to that in Lahad's South Lebanon in "South Lebanon: The War That Never Ends?" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28.3 (Spring, 1999): 5-18, see especially 15.
29. Israel Shahak, "The Real Israeli Interest in Lebanon," *Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs* (July 1996) (reprinted in *Bint Jbeil* [June 28, 2013]) <http://www.bintjbeil.com/E/occupation/shahak2.html>, and "The Great Terrain Robbery," *The Economist* (November 12, 1998) <http://www.economist.com/node/175951>.
30. *History of Modern Lebanon* 232.
31. *Resistance* 53.
32. *Resistance* 54.
33. For Bechara's chronically overlooked communism, see her 2001 interview with the Workers Party of Belgium (Heuchamps, "Interview de Souha Béchara").
34. *Resistance* 34.
35. Karim Mroué [Mroueh], "The Lessons of the Lebanese Patriotic Resistance," *World Marxist Review* 29 (February 1986) 91.
36. George Hawi, "The Lebanese Knot: Seeking a National Democratic Solution," *World Marxist Review* 30 (June 1987) 23-4.
37. *Resistance* 51-57.
38. *Resistance* 55.
39. *Resistance* 66.
40. *Resistance* 65-6.
41. *Resistance* 64.
42. *Resistance*, 60; Sabbag, *Souha, survivre à l'enfer*.
43. Bilal Khrais, dir., *Lebanon's Women Warriors: Lebanese Women from All Sides Talk about Participating*

- in *Their Country's Civil War*, *Al Jazeera* (April 21, 2010) <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/general/2010/04/2010413115916795784.html>.
44. Gabriel Tejedor, "Soha Bechara militante libanaise et martyre vivante," *Le Courrier* (April 21, 2006) http://www.lecourrier.ch/soha_bechara_militante_libanaise_et_martyre_vivante.
 45. Perrin, "Soha Bechara," and David Rudge, "Lahad Releases Would-Be Assassin. Soha Bishara Served 10 Years for Shooting SLA Commander," *The Jerusalem Post* (Sept. 4, 1998). In 1982, Fonda and her husband Tom Hayden visited Lebanon to cheer up IDF troops shelling apartment buildings in West Beirut. See James M. Markham, "Israelis Keep Reminding Beirut that Siege Is on," *New York Times* (July 5, 1982) <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/07/05/world/israelis-keep-reminding-beirut-that-siege-is-on.html>.
 46. Perrin, "Soha Bechara," and Tejedor, "Soha Bechara."
 47. *Resistance* 69.
 48. Khrais, *Lebanon's Women Warriors*.
 49. David Rudge and Ya'acov Friedler, "Lebanese communists claim responsibility for Lahad murder bid," *Jerusalem Post* (Nov. 9, 1988).
 50. BBC, "Lebanon ASL commander discharged from hospital," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* (January 24, 1989).
 51. Christopher Harker, "'A Close and Unbridgeable Distance': Witnessing *Everything and Nothing*," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 6.1 (2001) 66, 67, <http://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/765/625>.
 52. *Resistance* 121. The strength of Salloum's video derives more from his rapport with Bechara, despite their linguistic awkwardness: he asks in shaky French, supplemented with English, while she answers in Arabic, which he does not understand. See Ilona Hongisto, "Moments of Affection: Jayce Salloum's *Everything and Nothing* and the Thresholds of Testimonial Video," *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a 'New Materialism' Through the Arts*, ed. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: IB Tauris, 2013) 105-12.
 53. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953).
 54. Terry Eagleton, "Pork Chops and Pineapples. Rev. of Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*," *London Review of Books* 25.20 (Oct. 23, 2003) http://www.lrb.co.uk/v25/n20/print/eaglo1_.html.
 55. Death notices for Realism are premature. Western literary critics have tended to suggest that global or "postcolonial" fiction must be Symbolist, modernist, post-modernist, or magical realist, but some have begun to acknowledge the claims of global Realism. See Neil Lazarus, "The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism," *The European Legacy* 7.6 (2002): 771-82, and Joe Cleary, Jed Esty, and Colleen Lye, eds., "Peripheral Realisms," a special issue of *Modern Language Quarterly* 73.3 (Sept. 2012).
 56. *Souha, survivre à l'enfer*.
 57. *Souha, survivre à l'enfer*. See also *La fenêtre* 131, 117.
 58. Olivia Snaije, "Seeing yourself re-made as fiction," *The Daily Star* (Feb. 2, 2011) <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Film/Feb/02/Seeing-yourself-re-made-as-fiction.ashx#axzz1PJ051RPc>.
 59. Charlotte Farcet, "Postface," *Incendies* 150.
 60. See Harlow's "Prison memoirs of political detainees," *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987) 117-154, and "Prison Writing," *Banipal* 50 (2014).
 61. *Resistance* 80. On Khiam, see Neve Gordon, "Outsourcing violations: the Israeli case," *Journal of Human*

Rights 1.3 (September 2002): 321-37, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Film/Feb/02/Seeing-yourself-re-made-as-fiction.ashx#axzz1PJ051RPC>; Yehezkel Lein, *Israeli Violations of the Human Rights of Lebanese Civilians* (Jerusalem: B'Tselem 2000) http://www.btselem.org/download/200001_lebanon_eng.rtf; Human Rights Watch, "Torture in Kham Prison: Responsibility and Accountability" (Oct. 27, 1999) <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/1999/10/27/torture-khiam-prison-responsibility-and-accountability?print>; Amnesty International, *Israel/South Lebanon: The Kham Detainees: Torture and Ill Treatment* (Amnesty International: 1992) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/008/1992/en/>; "A Prison without a State," *Haaretz* (September 30, 1999) <http://outofkhiam.tripod.com/prison.htm>; Robert Fisk, "Relatives let into Israelis' jail of death," *The Independent* (Feb. 2, 1995) <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/relatives-let-into-israelis-jail-of-death-1571094.html>; Laleh Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgency* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2012), 101-38.

62. *Resistance* 75.

63. *Resistance* 93

64. *Resistance* 83.

65. Jean-Michel Leprince, "La prison de Kham," *Zone Libre*, *Radio Canada* (December 21, 2001) <http://ici.radio-canada.ca/actualite/zonelibre/01-12/khiam.html>, and Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Immortalizing South Lebanon's anguish," *Daily Star* (Lebanon) (December 17, 2004) <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Arts/Dec/17/Immortalizing-South-Lebanons-anguish.ashx#axzz2OPIO44pH>.

66. Serge Patrice Thibodeau, *La Disgrâce de l'humanité: Essai sur la torture* (Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 1999) 83-5.

67. Larry Kaplow, "Released, but Wounds from Notorious Prison Are Hard to Heal," *Bint Jbeil* (May 30, 2000) http://www.bintjbeil.com/E/liberation/000530_wcox.html, and Ranwa Yehia, "Memorial to Atrocity," *Al-Ahram Weekly* 484 (June 1-7, 2000).

68. In 2004, Amal leader Hajj Mustafa al-Dirani sued Israel, saying he had been raped and tortured in Israeli custody. See Mariam Karouny, "Tortured Lebanese National Sues Israel," *Al Jazeera* (Feb. 27, 2004) <http://www.arabnews.com/node/244930>.

69. *Resistance* 92, 123, 121.

70. "Interview de Souha Béchara."

71. Bechara, *Resistance* 89, 90-91, 94, 95-96. On the identity of Abu Nabil and Jean Homsî, see Fisk, "Betrayed"; and Leprince, "La prison de Kham." On Homsî, a former Army officer from Qleiaa, near Marjayoun, see Charles M. Sennott, *The Body and the Blood: The Holy Land's Christians At the Turn of a New Millennium: A Reporter's Journey* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 313-14. Shortly before Kham's liberation, Homsî fled to Israel, then to Montreal, where he became a Canadian citizen. See Caroline Montpetit, "Souvenirs du Liban-Sud," *Le Devoir* (May 8, 2004) <http://www.ledevoir.com/culture/livres/54047/souvenirs-du-liban-sud>. In 2002, Amnesty International Canada demanded an investigation of SLA veterans in Canada, including Kham torturers and "at least one former director." See *Real Security: A Human Rights Agenda for Canada* (Ottawa: Amnesty International, 2002) 11. Bechara says journalist Roger Auque interviewed her and falsely reported she begged to be exchanged for Arad (*La fenêtre* 89-91). Auque's posthumously-published memoir reveals he was an agent for Israel's Mossad at the time. See Blandine Le Cain, "Les confidences posthumes de l'ex-otage au Liban Roger Auque," *Le Figaro* (February 6, 2015) <http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/2015/02/06/01002-20150206ARTFIG00124-les-confidences-posthumes-de-l-ex-otage-au-liban-roger-auque.php>.

72. Hadjithomas and Joreige, *Khiam*.
73. *Resistance* 103-9.
74. Jean-Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature?* (London: Routledge, 2001) 45. See also Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983) 93.
75. Salloum, *Untitled Part I: Everything and Nothing*.
76. Annie E. Coombes, "The Art of Memory," *Third Text* 14.52 (Summer 2000): 50-51, <http://www.galerienikkidianamarquardt.com/new/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Third-Text-Critical-perspectives-on-contemporary-art-culture-Autumn-2000.pdf>. Coombes's essay includes images of Bechara's embroidery and other detainee artworks. For more on crafts in Khiam, see also *Khiam*; Victoria Brittain, "From Khiam to Guantánamo and back: ex-prisoners and the transformation of perception," *Race & Class* 52.3 (2011): 54-60; Bechara's and Ibrahim's *La fenêtre*, which includes some photos — with many more in the original Arabic edition. Modernism is frequently attacked for its lack of historical sense; more to the point, as Sartre says of Faulkner, is its missing future: "On *The Sound and the Fury*: Temporality in Faulkner," *We Have Only This Life to Live* 17-25.
77. *Resistance* 108.
78. *Resistance* 2.
79. See also *La fenêtre* 120. Compare Nawal el Saadawi's prison experience with women members of the Muslim Brotherhood in *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1986), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's with Kenyans of different classes, faiths, and tribes in *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (London: Heinemann, 1981).
80. *Resistance* 125, 126.
81. Tarek Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *The Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon* (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1998), 133-4.
82. *Resistance* 97-102. On Afifi's capture, see AP, "Israeli Jets Hit Guerrilla Base: Raiding Party Halted in Southern Lebanon," *Los Angeles Times* (Oct. 25, 1988) http://articles.latimes.com/1988-10-25/news/mn-307_1_southern-lebanon.
83. *Resistance* 98-9, 99-100.
84. "Interview de Souha Béchara." Jean Khalil Chamoun focuses on Afifi in her documentary, *Ard al-nissa'a/Women Beyond Borders* (Arab Film Distribution, 2003).
85. *Souha, survivre à l'enfer*.
86. *Everything and Nothing*.
87. *Khiam*.
88. *Resistance* 142.
89. Camille Chamoun/Kamil Sham'un founded the National Liberal Party and its militia, the NLP Tigers (*History* 128-37).
90. F. Elizabeth Dahab, *Voices of Exile in Contemporary Francophone Literature* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009), 135-72. I'll refer to the play as "*Incendies*," but will quote from Linda Gaboriau's English translation, *Scorched* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada P, 2009). The translation renames Hermile Lebel as "Alphonse" and Jeanne Marwan as "Janine."
91. "Postface," *Incendies* 145.
92. Snaije, "Seeing yourself."

93. Les Trouvères, *Les Trouvères présentent Incendies, Une pièce de Wajdi Mouawad* (Montreal, 2013) 15 http://www.lestrouveres.be/Incendies_programme_rev.pdf.
94. Amanda Campbell, "Scorched Paints Poetry on the Ceiling of the Tarragon," *The Way I See It...* (September 19, 2008) <http://mt-champion.livejournal.com/4981.html>.
95. See, for instance, Auerbach on "figura" in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1984), 11-78, and Georg Lukács on "typicality" in *Contemporary Realism* 122.
96. Compare the toothless "Late Modernism" analyzed by Fredric Jameson in *A Singular Modernity* (London: Verso, 2002), 161-79.
97. For a fine study of Villeneuve's politically circumspect quest for authenticity that also illuminates Mouawad's play, see Stéphanie Croteau, "Incendies: Quand la Douleur Perd ses Repères," *Horschamp* (May 2, 2011) <http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/spip.php?article446>.
98. Mouawad, *Scorched* 51, 94, 90, 119-20. In early 1983, as Deputy Leader of the Shia Higher Council, Shamseddine issued a fatwa "declaring total civil resistance against Israel." See Chibli Mallat, "Aspects Of Shi'i Thought From The South Of Lebanon: Al-'Irfan; Muhammad Jawad Mughniyya; Muhammad Mahdi Shamseddin; Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah," *Papers on Lebanon* 7 (Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1988) http://www.bintjbeil.com/E/shii_mallat.html.
99. Martin Morrow, "Hot Topic: Wajdi Mouawad discusses *Scorched*, his searing play about the Lebanese war," *CBC News* (22 Sept. 2008) <http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/hot-topic-1.701170>. See also Wajdi Mouawad, Hortense Archambault, and Vincent Baudriller, *Voyage pour le Festival d'Avignon 2009* (N.p.: POL Festival d'Avignon, 2009) 18-19, http://www.festival-avignon.com/lib_php/download.php?fileID=78&type=File&round=198452645.
100. Edward Douglas, "Exclusive: *Incendies*' Denis Villeneuve," *Comingsoon.net* (April 19, 2011) <http://www.comingsoon.net/movies/features/76455-exclusive-incendies-denis-villeneuve>.
101. Wajdi Mouawad, *Visage Retrouvé: roman* (Montreal: Leméac Éditeur, 2002) 21-3. On the bus massacre, see Antoine J. Abraham, *The Lebanon War* (Greenwood, CT: Praeger, 1996) 1-2; Edgar O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon, 1975-92* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998) 1-2; Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon* (New York: Thunder Mouth P/Nation Books, 2002) 78; Dilip Hiro, *Lebanon, Fire and Embers. A History of the Lebanese Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1993) 19; *History of Modern Lebanon* 183. Most agree there were one or two shootings earlier in the day at the site outside the Church of Notre Dame de la Délivrance in East Beirut, and that Phalangists killed over twenty Palestinians on a bus that later happened by.
102. Jean-François Côté, *Architecture d'un marcheur: Entretiens avec Wajdi Mouawad* (Ottawa: Leméac, 2005) 78-80.
103. Mouawad, *Visage Retrouvé* 26-7; Mouawad, "Je t'embrasse pour finir," *L'Oiseau Tigre, Les Cahiers du théâtre français* 8.1 (Sept. 2008) 125; Hiro, *Lebanon* 101.
104. On the relation between Lebanese cultural representations of female-gendered pure victims of sectarian violence and ultra-masculine militiamen who are "feminized" by public repentance, see Sune Haugbolle, "The (Little) Militia Man: Memory and Militarized Masculinity in Lebanon," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 8.1 (2012): 115-39.
105. Reflecting on *Incendies*, Mouawad lists Wahab, Nawal, Sarwan, and Sawda as having "W's like Wajdi": *Le sang des promesses: Puzzle, racines, et rhizomes* (Montreal: Leméac Éditeur, 2009) 10. On postcolonialist "complicity," see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

- UP, 1999) xii-xiii and throughout.
106. Compare *Zero Dark Thirty*, which celebrates the murder of Osama bin Laden. Asserting its authenticity, director Kathryn Bigelow calls it “almost a journalistic approach to film.” Defending its spurious suggestion that waterboarding led the US to bin Laden, screenwriter Mark Boal says, “It’s a movie, not a documentary.” See Dexter Filkins, “Bin Laden: The Movie,” *The New Yorker* (December 17, 2012) http://www.newyorker.com/talk/2012/12/17/121217ta_talk_filkins.
 107. Mouawad, Archambault, and Baudriller, *Voyage* 51, 64-7.
 108. Côté, *Architecture* 73.
 109. Elias Khoury, *Gate of the Sun* (Brooklyn: Archipelago Books, 2005) 251.
 110. Speaking of U.N. actions in Bosnia, Žižek comments “these diversions were intended to create the perception of the Bosnian conflict as a kind of ‘tribal warfare,’ a civil war of everybody against everybody else in which ‘all sides are equally to blame.’ Instead of a clear condemnation of the Serb aggression, this perception was destined to prepare the terrain for an international effort of ‘pacification’ which would ‘reconcile the warring factions.’” See *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 2015) 22.
 111. Marie-Joëlle Zahar, “Liberal Interventions, Illiberal Outcomes: The U.N., Western Powers, and Lebanon,” *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*, eds. Edward Newman, Oliver Richmond, and Roland Paris (Tokyo: United Nations UP, 2009) 292-315. Zahar remains agnostic as to whether Western interventionists intended this superficially chaotic outcome, but her point in another essay about Lebanese militias, extended to liberal interventionists, is suggestive: “There can be little prospect for conflict resolution as long as economic benefits flow to combatants.” See “Is all the News Bad News for Peace? Economic Agendas in the Lebanese Civil War,” *International Journal* 56.1 (2000) 117.
 112. *History of Modern Lebanon* viii.
 113. Najib Hourani, “Transnational Pathways and Politico-Economic Power: Globalisation and the Lebanese Civil War,” *Geopolitics* 15.2 (2010): 290-311, and “The Militiaman Icon: Cinema, Memory, and the Lebanese Civil Wars.” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 8.2 (2008): 287-307.
 114. *Scorched* 54, 56, 81. Thanks to Sami Hanna for this point.
 115. *Scorched* 29.
 116. *Scorched* 32, 33.
 117. *Scorched* 44. Speaking to her children from beyond the grave, Nawal recalls “the promise I kept for a woman who once made me understand the importance of rising above poverty” (102).
 118. *Scorched* 44-6, 51.
 119. *Scorched* 55-56.
 120. *Scorched* 51, 54, 55-6, iii.
 121. *Scorched* 81.
 122. On Sharon’s incitement, see Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 488-89, and AP, “Bomb Kills President Elect,” *The Toledo Blade* (September 15, 1982) <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1350&dat=19820915&id=Mz9PAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=rgIEAAAIAIBAJ&pg=5962,4566538&hl=en>. On SLA participation, see Leila Shahid, “The Sabra and Shatila Massacres: Eye-Witness Reports,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 32.1 (Autumn, 2002) 39.
 123. *Scorched* 83-4, 82, 85, 87.
 124. Jim McNabb, “*Scorched* by Wajdi Mouawad... Study Guide” (National Arts Centre: 2007) 10, <http://www>.

artsalive.ca/pdf/eth/activities/scorched_guide.pdf.

125. "Postface," *Incendies* 151.
126. "Postface," *Incendies* 143.
127. Josée Lambert, *They Called Them Terrorists: During the South Lebanon Occupation* (Montréal: Les Éditions Sémaphore, 2004) 100. Lambert's superb trilingual book on Khiam and the occupation of South Lebanon includes her play, her photographs, and other materials. Her "Jean," based on Jean Homsî (Montpetit, "Souvenirs") resembles Bechara's Abu Nabil (*Resistance* 90-91) and a photograph of Homsî (Leprince, "La prison de Khiam").
128. "Elle est jolie cette histoire" ("Postface," *Incendies* 149-50).
129. Morrow, "Hot Topic."
130. Pascal Vey, "A propos de *Incendies*," *Incendies, Du lundi 5 au jeudi 15 octobre 2009, Au TU—Nantes. Dossier Jeune Public* 11 http://archives.legrandt.fr/saisons/archives/2009-10/Dossier_Incendies_light.pdf.
131. *Scorched* 74.
132. *Scorched* 112.
133. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *The Journal of American Folklore* 68.270 (Oct.-Dec., 1955) 433.
134. Erin Hurley, "What Consolation? *Incendies* on Stage and Screen," *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage* 8.3 (March 2011) 25, 27.
135. *Voyage* 40.
136. *Scorched* 123-5. For Mouawad's use of the Collatz Conjecture in this formula, see Adam Mazmanian, "New generation caught in rekindled 'Incendies,'" *Washington Times* (May 19, 2011) <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/may/19/movie-review-incendies/>.
137. Similarly, Mouawad's righteous Canada brings Nihad Harmanni to the dock for war crimes; actual Canada granted asylum to SLA torturers. See Lambert, *They Called Them* 38; Levon Sevunts, "Canada haven for ex-SLA members? Some are war criminals: rights groups," *The Gazette* [Montreal] (June 7, 2000); Leprince, "La prison de Khiam"; Nicholas Blanford, "SLA interrogator living quietly in Canada—Issam Jarawan suspected of war crimes," *Daily Star* (Oct. 29, 2001) <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2001/Oct-29/33579-sla-interrogator-living-quietly-in-canada.ashx>.
138. Lukács, *The Historical Novel* 92-5.
139. *Scorched* 33, 134.
140. *Scorched* 15; reiterated on 25, 28 (5 times), 37, and 57-8 (3 times).
141. On Boulos, see Noel Alexandre, "Hundreds Take Part in Motorcade to Draw Attention to Kidnapping of Syrian Social Worker, Marie Rose Boulos," *Reuters* (April 29, 1976) <http://www.itnsource.com/shotlist/RTV/1976/04/30/BGY510030443/?s=motorcade>, and the 1976 poster, "Because She Was with Palestine" *The Palestine Poster Project Archives* (Lebanon: Committee of Friends of Marie Rose Boulos) <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/because-she-was-with-palestine>.
142. On Villeneuve's adaptation of Mouawad, see Bruno Dequen, "Entretien: Denis Villeneuve," *24 Images* 149 (Oct-Nov. 2010): 54-9, <http://www.erudit.org/culture/images1058019/images1510320/62892ac.pdf>.
143. Director's commentary, Villeneuve, *Incendies*. Casting Director Lara Attala, who appears in the film as "Angry Woman #1," also cast Iraqi refugees for *The Hurt Locker*. See Amanda Palmer, "The Fabulous Picture Show: *Incendies*," *Al Jazeera* (June 10, 2011) <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/>

fps/2011/06/20116872147841379.html.

144. Diane Lefer, "Incendies: A Perspective on War We Rarely See On-Screen," *Hollywood Progressive* (March 30, 2011) <http://dianelefer.weebly.com/2/post/2011/03/incendies-a-perspective-on-war-we-rarely-see-on-screen.html>.
145. Douglas, "Exclusive."
146. "I tried to represent the culture out there as faithfully as possible... how people out there move and talk and act" (Dequen, "Entretien" 57). See Croteau, "Incendies," on Villeneuve's "là-bas."
147. SONY Pictures, "A SONY Pictures Classic Release: *Incendies*, A Film by Denis Villeneuve" (July 5, 2011) <http://www.sonyclassics.com/incendies/presskit.pdf>. Compare the legal boilerplate of Villeneuve's credits with Costa-Gavras's opening provocation: "Any resemblance to real events, to persons living or dead, is not accidental. It is INTENTIONAL." Costa-Gavras, dir., *Z*. (France, 1969).
148. Bechara faults Villeneuve's film: "The war wasn't between Christians and Muslims. You can't just simplify things. Christians killed Christians and Muslims killed Muslims" ("Seeing yourself").
149. For Western credulity toward florid tales of oriental honor killing, see Norma Khouri's best-selling *Forbidden Love* (London: Doubleday, 2004), which centers on the author's ostensible Jordanian friend Dahlia, slain by her Muslim family when she fell in love with a Christian. Anna Broinowski reconstructs Khouri's impressive history as a Chicago con artist in her hilarious documentary, *Forbidden Lies* (Odin's Eye Entertainment, 2007) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VlxTRTJ-s4>.
150. Villeneuve, Director's Commentary, included on both DVDs for *Incendies*.
151. Mouawad called Cantat's murder of Trintignant a "crime of passion," hired him to write music for a production of Sophocles, and hoped to add him to the chorus to amplify the themes of justice and revenge. Canada denied Cantat a work permit. See Kate Taylor, "NAC show to go on without French killer," *The Toronto Globe and Mail* (April 18, 2011) <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/theatre-and-performance/nac-show-to-go-on-without-french-killer/article576881/>.
152. Joe Morgenstern, "Incendies Burns With Mystery, Truth," *Wall Street Journal, Asia* (April 29, 2011) <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703983704576276653857492370.html>.
153. Development ideology also wanders into racism in the 2010 Dutch production of the play, whose sole black actor played a diabolical, dreadlocked, African-accented Nihad. For a clip, see "Branden (*Incendies/Scorched*) Wajdi Mouawad, Alize Zandwijk," Vimeo (2010) <http://vimeo.com/9571509>.
154. *Scorched* 116.
155. *Scorched* 85.
156. In 2012, Villeneuve was briefly associated, as director and co-writer, with a film project to adapt Joe Sacco's radical text-and-graphic documentary *Footnotes in Gaza*, but it seems to have been deferred or abandoned as he has moved on to more big studio productions. Melanie Goodfellow, "Denis Villeneuve to direct adaptation of Joe Sacco's Footnotes in Gaza," *Screendaily* (Feb. 1 2012) <http://www.screendaily.com/news/production/denis-villeneuve-to-direct-adaptation-of-joe-saccos-footnotes-in-gaza/5037226.article>.
157. Hannah Brown, "A Real Scorcher," *The Jerusalem Post* (May 27, 2011) <http://www.jpost.com/ArtsAndCulture/Entertainment/Article.aspx?id=222380>.
158. Doris Toumarkine, "Incendies," *Film Journal International* 114.4 (April 2011) 132-3, <http://www.filmjournal.com/node/5380>.

159. Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette, dir. *Se souvenir des cendres — regardes sur Incendies* (micro_scope, 2010). Included in both DVDs for Villeneuve, *Incendies*.
160. On Israel's Creon-like practice of posthumous vengeance, see Yehezkel Lein, *Captive Corpses* (Jerusalem: B'tselem, 1999) http://www.btselem.org/download/199903_captive_corpses_eng.pdf.
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162. "Liban: Nouveau bras de fer. Entrevue avec Soha Bechara," *Alternatives International* (Jan. 18, 2007) <http://www.alterinter.org/article546.html>, and Ihsan Alkhatib, "Suha Bishara: on Palestine and Sunni-Shia Tensions," *Law, Politics, Arab- American Issues, Arab Politics, Islam* (July 16, 2008) <http://ihsanalkhatib.blogspot.com/2008/07/suha-bishara-on-palestine-and-sunni.html>.
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166. "Seeing yourself."
167. *La fenêtre* 18, 31, 37, 58-61. The Arabic original intersperses the text with many more photographs of prison writings, crafts, and the prison itself.
168. Wajdi Mouawad. "Un cri pour le Liban—La courbature," *Le Devoir* (July 25, 2006) <http://www.ledevoir.com/international/actualites-internationales/114388/un-cri-pour-le-liban-la-courbature>; also in *r: une revue* (June 28, 2013) <http://remue.net/spip.php?article1728>. I will quote from *Voyage* 68-72.
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170. *Voyage* 70.
171. *Voyage* 71-72.
172. Inka Kovanen, "Israeli forces shelled Khiam practically incessantly," *Helsingin Sanomat, International Edition-Foreign* (Nov. 1, 2006); Ian Austen, "Canadian Inquiry Blames Israelis for Deaths in 2006," *New York Times* (Feb. 2, 2008) <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/02/world/americas/02canada.html?sq=Hess-von-Kruedener&st=nyt&adxnnl=1&scp=1&adxnnlx=1312073753-DdjEH18qaTkXXyZKdayotQ>; National Defense Board of Inquiry, "Death of Major Hess-Von Kruedener" (Ottawa, Nov. 1, 2006) <http://www.scribd.com/doc/118093375/Inquiry-Report-on-the-Death-of-Major-Paeta-Hess-Von-Kruedener>.
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Jameson Among the Contras: Third-World Culture, Neoliberal Globalization, and the Latin American Connection

James Christie

In the years since it emerged as a major theme of his work in the mid-1980s, Fredric Jameson's theoretical engagement with third-world cultural production has clearly been subject to a substantial and singularly convoluted critical reception. It is a long time since Aijaz Ahmad's postcolonialist critique of "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," based on the now well-known accusations of over-generalization, reductionism, and a generally complacent orientalism, began to look out-dated, and the period dominated by the distrust and strategic disapproval towards Jameson which it initiated to wane.¹ The exhaustion of this period was then confirmed by the emergence of a subsequent wave of criticism, marked by a number of fine essays mostly published in a flurry of revisionist readings in the early to mid-2000s which offered a dynamic reframing of Jameson's position. Interventions by critics including Imre Szeman, Neil Lazarus, Ian Buchanan, Julie McGonegal, and Marjorie Levinson collectively modernized the reading of Jameson's conception of third-world culture, moving beyond the Ahmad paradigm and thereby opening up a new range of interpretive dimensions and opportunities within it.²

A central theme introduced in these re-readings was the historicity of the receptive narrative produced around Jameson's essay. It is consistently asserted that earlier controversies can in retrospect be defined as an extended metacommentary, revealing as much about the situation of postcolonial criticism in that particular point in time as about the objective content of Jameson's thinking.³ Szeman and Buchanan in particular then extend this to its logical conclusion, claiming in a highly self-reflexive move that the contemporary requirement to resuscitate Jameson's argument similarly constitutes a statement upon their own historical moment. What they highlight is a particular appropriateness within the argument Jameson made in the mid-1980s to the later period dominated by the predominance of what Szeman calls "neoliberal globalization."⁴ What is identified is the extent to which Jameson's particular

construction of a universal and yet internally differential approach to non-Western writing prefigures a situation that (as Betty Joseph has recently argued) would only be completely fulfilled in the twenty-first century context of a high-neoliberal capitalism characterized by transnational patterns of corporate privatization, displacement, and economic integration.⁵

The contention made in this essay is that there is a feature of Jameson's engagement with the third world the significance of which is suggested by these assertions of its contemporaneity, but which has yet to receive wide or sufficiently substantial consideration. This is the extent to which Jameson's theses about third-world culture were themselves historically determined at the point of their origin, and his theoretical statements developed out of a particular historical and material context. Specifically this will focus on the claim that Jameson's theory is rooted within a crucial period in the historical development of American overseas power and imperial domination — what he himself refers to as “a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world.”⁶

What this view emphasizes, therefore, is the fact that the years when Jameson was formulating a conceptual model that sought to redefine the aesthetic status of the third world and its epistemological relations to the first were also the years when American foreign policy was being rearticulated on the basis of the “Reagan Doctrine,” which positioned the third world at the heart of political discourse in the US and abroad. They were the years of dirty wars and the attempted American “rollback” of Soviet-backed communism across Latin America, Africa, and Central Asia; actions which formalized the pattern of the suppression of Leftist governance in the third world that had been initiated during the 1970s (most notably through CIA interventions in Chile and Argentina). They were the years in which the US invaded post-revolutionary Grenada in order to curtail Cuban and Soviet influence, and backed Islamic guerrillas in Afghanistan. The historically determinate status of “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” can thus be illuminated by reconstructing the specific structure-of-feeling that was generated by this wider context and by viewing substantial elements of Jameson's position as part of a complex reaction forged within it.

The importance of this historicization is that it is able to shed significant light upon that affinity which Jameson's thought is held to possess with the forms that took shape under the framework broadly defined as neoliberal capitalism (regardless of how dated the terminology of first and third world might seem today). For according to those historians of neoliberalism who have sought to overturn the ideological and utopian narratives of its development, its arrival as a seamlessly globalized hegemon has origins in precisely this period of US power and the developments in the overseas domination in the third world which took place within it. David Harvey, for example, asserts this genealogy, claiming that the universalization of neoliberal economics originates in the suppression of alternative ideologies in the

third world during the 1970s and 1980s: “much of the non-communist world was opened up to US domination by tactics of this sort... The need to coerce oppositional or social democratic movements (such as Allende’s in Chile) associated the US with a long history of largely covert violence against popular movements throughout much of the developing world.”⁷ Naomi Klein assigns a similar significance to US intervention in the third world: “Reaganomics certainly held sway in Washington. But... it would be a Latin American country [Bolivia] that would be the testing ground for Friedman’s crisis theory.”⁸ Greg Grandin, in *Empire’s Workshop*, also provides a related account of the role played by Latin America in the re-establishment of US global power and the subsequent development of the “new” economic and military imperialism into the twenty-first century: “just as Latin America played a critical role in the reconstitution of the ideological, military, and political foundations of the American empire following the crisis of the 1970s, the region provided the main venue for the economic transformation that today underwrites that imperialism.”⁹

It should also be noted that a mandate for this way of approaching Jameson’s work is already established in regard to his theorization of the first-world cultural logic of postmodernism. It is a relatively familiar proposition that the portrait of an immanently depthless postmodern aesthetic, characterized by the disorientating spatialization of culture and the effacement of class history, can be defined in terms of its self-conscious location within the free-market fervor of Reaganite American life.¹⁰ The proposal argued here is that this reading be extended to the counterpart of Jameson’s model of first world postmodernism, and the existence established of a parallel relationship between his conception of the third world and contemporary US foreign policy. In this sense the antipodal yet mutually interconnected relationship between domestic politics and overseas domination which marked both the development of US global power in the 1970s and ‘80s and the subsequent formation of global neoliberalism can be mapped onto Jameson’s development of a theoretical model which asserts its single and universal character and yet also foregrounds this absolute internal fissure between the situations of first and third worlds.¹¹

This argument will address three areas of Jameson’s conception of third-world cultural production. The first is the explicitly political vocation that he ascribes to third-world culture. The second is the expression of that political vocation in terms of the nation-state, and the third is his construction of the highly self-conscious subject position from which he chooses to project his theoretical model. These points will be prefaced, though, by a claim for the priority of one particular geographical region of the third world in Jameson’s thinking during this crucial mid-1980s period of his writing.

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“Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” clearly presents a theoretical model that self-consciously operates at a high level of abstraction and

generality, producing a mode of analysis universal in its scope and ambition. It therefore, equally clearly, cannot be simply reduced to one narrow regional, geographical, or national manifestation of third-world existence. After all, the tri-part structure through which it develops its argument claims to apply to cultural landscapes across East Asia, West Africa, and Latin America, precluding the straightforward reduction to any one of these contexts. It is important to note, however, that Jameson's writings about the third world beyond the high theoretical framework of this most famous of his essays on the subject (and, indeed, at certain moments within it) are often marked by a very different sensibility; one which is highly concretized, theoretically modest, and closely attached to the particularities of immediate, biographical experience. From the perspective offered by supplementary publications in which this is documented, I would suggest that there is in fact something to be gained by viewing Jameson's theoretical machinations as originating, in however mediated a way, in the direct personal experience of specific geographical contexts.

There are several areas that suggest themselves as possible starting-points. Jameson's extensive contact with China is well-documented, and in "Periodizing the 60s" he reveals a close interest in the decolonization process as it unfolded across Africa.¹² However, in terms of the relation between Jameson's theory of third-world culture and contemporary US foreign policy, it is the unique position of Central America which must be foregrounded. It is clear from his numerous publications on the region's culture that Latin America in general has long been an important object of interest in Jameson's work, and has exercised a powerful influence in the formation of the Jamesonian imaginary.¹³ However the significance of his interaction with the Central American region can be most clearly established by referring to his own immediate experience there in the years preceding the publication of "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." This biographical involvement is primarily manifested in the trips Jameson made to two countries, each of which then produced a corresponding set of publications.

The first and most obviously influential of these experiences concerns Jameson's engagement with Cuba, and in particular with the cultural landscape which developed there following the 1959 revolution. Jameson's experience of Cuba is articulated in the brief foreword to *Caliban and Other Essays* by the Cuban intellectual Roberto Fernández Retamar.¹⁴ It also provides material which explicitly feeds into the theoretical model developed in "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," as well as playing a central role in "On Magic Realism in Film" and "Periodizing the 60s." The second is less explicitly present in his writing but if anything plays an even more suggestive function within it. It is the trip that Jameson took to Nicaragua in the mid-1980s, in which he conducted an interview with Tomás Borge, the leader of the Marxist Sandinista government. The text of this interview was published in the *New Left Review* in 1987 alongside an introductory piece penned by Jameson.¹⁵

It is clear from these writings that the revolutionary character of the third-world

nation as it was articulated in this Central American context had a singular and significant impact on Jameson's thinking. His attraction to Cuba and Nicaragua, both under revolutionary Marxist governance and experiencing identifiably socialistic forms of economic and social organization, is palpable. Cuba's status as the world's foremost revolutionary state in particular seems to perform a crucial structural role in Jameson's thinking, functioning as the key material realization of a genuine alternative to the otherwise universal logic of global capitalism. As he states in an interview, "the Cuban Revolution then proved to me that Marxism was alive and well as a collective movement and a culturally productive force."¹⁶ Cuba consequently comes to be employed in a paradigmatic manner throughout "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," where a specifically Cuban relationship between revolutionary political organization and its corresponding cultural sphere often seems to serve as the driving force behind Jameson's general construction of third-world national culture as such. One example among several is this reference to the contemporary Cuban situation:

[W]e must recover a sense of what "cultural revolution" means, in its strongest form, in the Marxist tradition.... The term, we are told, was Lenin's own, and in that form explicitly designated the literary campaign and the new problems of universal scholarship and education: something of which Cuba, again, remains the most stunning and successful example in recent history.¹⁷

In order to grasp the full significance of this formative involvement with Castro's Cuba and the Nicaragua of the Sandinistas, however, it must be seen within the context of Central America's pivotal geopolitical status during the period. US foreign relations in the Reagan era were defined in large part by the policy framework retrospectively termed the "Reagan Doctrine." Emerging from the late stages of the Cold War, the doctrine was based on the covert military and economic intervention in the governmental sovereignty of third-world nations. As Greg Grandin points out, this process was crucial not only in transforming the third world into the proxy battleground for the global struggle between American capitalism and Soviet communism, but also in providing a laboratory in which America's imperial identity as a military and economic power could be reformulated. The appreciation which Jameson displays in "Third-World Literature" for a politically engaged brand of third-world cultural nationalism thus constitutes a deliberately oppositional gesture toward the dominant narrative emerging from the political establishment at the time, and a reaction to the aggressive re-establishment of US hegemony according to which "a revitalized America could still make the world bend to its desires."¹⁸

Specifically it was the countries of Central America which became the central rhetorical and strategic focus of the anti-Marxist drive formulated under the Reagan

Doctrine. As Mayer and McManus state of the rhetoric around Reagan's second electoral victory in 1984:

[I]t was intentionally symbolic, in that first week after the inauguration, that Reagan spent much of his time working visibly on foreign initiatives.... It was also symbolic that Reagan's first public speech after the inauguration focused on a region that ranked high on his list of priorities: Central America.¹⁹

The admiring character of Jameson's response to Cuba and Nicaragua therefore signals the investment of his thinking in a wider and more complex reaction to a North American ideology based on the subversion of the indigenous Leftist impulses of Central American nations. To engage with the reality of Cuban and Nicaraguan life in the mid-1980s in the intimate and appreciative manner that Jameson did inevitably meant implicating oneself at the same time in a wider critique of America's overseas activity. It is in fact precisely this subversion which Jameson highlights when introducing the American reader to the situation in Nicaragua, the country subjected to the most sustained destruction and focused public denigration by the Reagan administration's Central American activities: "Contragate had not yet been disclosed; but clearly Nicaragua was living under the anxiety of invasion, and suffering daily from desperate economic conditions."²⁰

Indeed, this dual emphasis placed on Cuba and Nicaragua in Jameson's background is particularly significant in the sense that America's aggressive disruption of the Sandinista government marked the final stage in the thirty year project of re-establishing its domination of the area after the hugely symbolic and strategic blow it had received from the Cuban revolution and subsequent failure to reverse it. The violence delivered on the wider Central American region, and Nicaragua above all, was thus closely connected to the desire to reverse the spread of Cuban influence and the feared process of a wider "Cubanization." The two countries are therefore closely linked by the fact that together they signal the effective opening and reclosing of a discreet stage within the history of US power, the end of which marked the successful reassertion of America's global hegemony following several years of perceived weakness.²¹ In doing so of course it also made a crucial contribution to the establishment of the foundations for the later universalization of a US-dominated free-market capitalism.

In terms of the theoretical construction of "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," this context is most clearly manifested in the political imperative which forms the centerpiece of Jameson's conception of the third-world cultural sphere. What distinguishes the third world according to Jameson is the complete politicization of daily life — the production of an existence in which the life of the social collectivity, the social whole, is always immanently present in that

of the individuals assembled within it. The particular vocation of third-world culture then becomes the formal manifestation of this life-world in which the boundaries that preserve the depoliticized character of private or individually psychologized experience have been dissolved (boundaries which are still prominent in the first world, where they curtail the possibility of such collective or unified artistic expression). Hence “psychology, or more specifically, libidinal investment, is to be read in primarily political and social terms.... Here already then, in an ancient past, western antinomies — and most particularly that between the subjective and the public or political — are refused in advance.”²²

From the perspective of Jameson’s Marxist aesthetics, the idea of this opaque and unmediated relationship between cultural works and the whole material, economic, and political development of the society in which they exist contains a clear utopian strain. However, any temptation to present this cultural logic simply as a realized ideal is curtailed by the fact that the politicization of the third world is also portrayed as being inextricably bound up with the invasive penetration of external force. The formation of this singularly politicized culture thus also takes place under the pressure of a particular form of imperialism, forged by “the *embattled* situation of the public third-world culture and society,” that develops from the ravages of “the experience of colonialism and imperialism.”²³

In this sense the political vocation of the third world is defined by a violent disjuncture between two distinct forms of the political. While the first is a broadly home-grown and utopian collectivist impulse, the second is the subversion of that impulse by external power which occurs through the location of the third-world nation in a world-order inherently hostile to such social, political, economic, and cultural formations. As Jameson states in reference to Sembène’s *Xala*, “the space of a past and future utopia — a social world of collective cooperation — is dramatically inserted into the corrupt and westernized money economy.”²⁴ Something of this disjuncture, incidentally, is also discussed in Santiago Colás’s essay on Jameson of 1992.²⁵ In this second sense the political becomes an imposition upon the life of the third-world nation, which is given no choice but to be defined politically if it is to preserve its existence at all: a “third-world culture, which must be situational and materialist despite itself.”²⁶

The identification of allegory as the key mode of expression within this context indicates precisely this clash between these two meanings, and the consequent sense of the political as a disruptive, even destructive, presence which forcibly inserts itself into the continuum of third-world existence and denies the establishment of a more organic or unified political aesthetic. Thus Jameson argues that “the allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogenous representation of the symbol.”²⁷ The turn to allegory is explicitly motivated by allegory’s ability to preserve the violent splits between such distinct and oppositional orders of meaning: “the capacity of

allegory to generate a range of distinct meanings or messages, simultaneously.”²⁸

Consequently, although Jameson produces a concept of third-world politicization which is suitable for generalized applicability, it can also fruitfully be seen as possessing substantial roots in the specific geographical and temporal context provided by his contact with Central America. For it was precisely this clash between an indigenous Leftist politics and a globalizing imperialist force that was embodied contemporaneously in Nicaragua and Cuba. It was embodied in both the Sandinista and Castro governments, which had explicitly come to power under the banner of socialism and had then endured years of violent subversion by the US government: through the CIA-sponsored Contra wars in the case of Nicaragua, and an economic embargo and sustained terrorist attacks in the case of Cuba. Whatever its interest in the classical origins of third-world cultural resistance in, for example, ancient China, in “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” that interest can be seen as animated by its self-conscious engagement with the particular geopolitical status of the third world during its own contemporary historical moment.

One area where this is demonstrated particularly clearly is Jameson’s development of this cultural logic in relation to the figure of the third-world intellectual. The vocation of the intellectual in the third world is defined explicitly in terms of this total and immanent politicization: “in the third-world situation the intellectual is always in one way or another a political intellectual.”²⁹ This is then identified in a historical sense with a figure like Lu Xun — a novelist and poet but also simultaneously a political activist and communist whose writing was directly bound up with the anti-imperialist opposition to “foreign devils who had nothing but modern science, gunboats, armies, technology, and power to their credit.”³⁰ This classical figuration is also given a specifically Latin American inflection by Jameson’s references to José Martí, the legendary Cuban figure who under Castro’s rhetoric became the central representation of the fusion between culture and political struggle.

But it is once again in his references to the present-day situation in Central America that the contemporaneity behind this construction of the third-world intellectual is revealed. Again this is partly expressed in relation to Jameson’s experience in Cuba:

[N]owhere has the strangeness of this vacant position been brought home to me more strongly than on a recent trip to Cuba, when I had occasion to visit a remarkable college-preparatory school on the outskirts of Havana... the semester’s work I found most challenging was one explicitly devoted to the study of the role of the intellectual as such.³¹

However if one looks for a particular individual who fulfills this paradigm of the immanently politicized third-world intellectual in the contemporary Central American context and Jameson’s own experience, then this is provided most closely and evocatively by Tomás Borge in Nicaragua.

For Borge was a practicing poet of considerable note at the time Jameson interviewed him (some of his most important poetry, incidentally, being written while he was imprisoned under the US-backed Somaza dictatorship). Yet what emerges from the interview is the sense that for Borge the entirety of his intellectual life, including those cultural and aesthetic aspects, had come to be inescapably defined in terms of the sphere of public politics; something attested to by his vocation as political leader which had come to subsume that of poet. As Borge states in reference to the Sandinistas' domestic nation building project, "if you are making a table and someone is hitting you on the head from behind, naturally you are more preoccupied with the blows than with the table."³² Borge in this way emerges from Jameson's personal contact with him as a clear exemplar of the dissolution of any private or depoliticized cultural space which explicitly occurs under the violently disruptive realities of US intervention. It is his presence which can be framed as an animating force behind Jameson's construction of "the cultural intellectual who is also a political militant, the intellectual who produces both poetry and praxis."³³

Indeed, wider reference to the contemporary status of Nicaragua illustrates the extent to which Borge and the Nicaraguan context he articulated can be seen as an energizing presence in Jameson's theorization of third-world culture. The period when Jameson was developing that theoretical model, and when he interviewed Borge, was also the period in which Nicaragua was being positioned right at the heart of political discourse in the US. From Reagan's inauguration in 1981 onwards, the Sandinistas had increasingly been constructed as the world's foremost communist menace, bent on spreading a tyrannical Soviet influence beyond their own borders. By the time of the 1985 State of the Union address Nicaragua was being presented to the world virtually as the poster child for the policy of American intervention in the Central American third world:

the Sandinista dictatorship of Nicaragua, with full Cuban-Soviet bloc support, not only persecutes its people, the church, and denies a free press, but arms and provides bases for Communist terrorists attacking neighboring states. Support for freedom fighters is self-defense and totally consistent with the OAS and U.N. Charters. It is essential that the Congress continue all facets of our assistance to Central America.³⁴

It is Jameson's interaction with Borge which therefore signals the impulse of his thinking to situate itself in relation to that current foreign-policy climate. This can be seen in the precise inversion of this Reaganite rhetoric that Jameson puts forward; asserting both the progressive nature of the Sandinistas and the destructive reality of the contra rebellion and thus projecting a concerted opposition to the dominant position on Nicaragua which was exemplified in Reagan's speech. This is clear from his brief introduction to the interview which highlights the fact that "today the

Nicaraguans have an open prison system, of which they are justly proud, and like many other Latin American countries do not have the death penalty. This has never been mentioned in the US media.”³⁵

Jameson’s designation in the “Third-World Literature” essay of a culture that has become immanently politicized by the weight of US imperialism thus emerges as a reflection of this oppositional reaction towards the prevailing zeitgeist. That Nicaragua in particular was marked out by this intense and disruptive politicization of the fabric of daily life is confirmed, for instance, by historian Peter Kornbluh, who describes the activities of the US backed contras in terms of

vicious attacks on small villages, state-owned agricultural cooperatives, rural health clinics, economic infrastructure, and, finally, civilian noncombatants. Indeed, CIA training manuals explicitly advised the contras on how to “neutralize carefully selected and planned targets” — an intelligence euphemism for assassinating court judges, magistrates, police, and state security officials.³⁶

Or as Borge himself puts it in the course of the interview, “if we were to divide now imperialism would fall upon us with the same ease and ferocity as in Grenada... if we were divided the North Americans would immediately fall upon us and tear us to pieces.”³⁷

Jameson’s focus on a total politicization therefore also has a wider significance in the sense that it expresses particularly clearly the connection between his thinking and the forms adopted by a then still emergent logic of US global domination. For the key point about the Reagan Doctrine was that it formalized the ongoing transition of US policy away from the deployment of a clearly delineated external military force, such as the American army or navy. It thus signaled a crucial moment affirming the departure from those older forms of overt colonial intervention in the third world, which in a North American context had effectively been rendered politically unworkable since the end of the Vietnam War in the early 1970s. The Reagan era thus saw America’s position of economic and military dominance ultimately re-asserted through the replacement of such undisguised militarism with the covert infiltration of largely indigenous local groups such as the contras, using more surreptitious bodies such as the CIA and NSA.

In the earlier situation of the “foreign devils” of Lu Xun’s era, with their “gunboats, armies, technology and power,” the imperial aggressor could at least be clearly identified as such, and some scope for preserving a limited, if only oppositional, autonomy be maintained.³⁸ But it was the collapse of just this distinction which marked the displacement of this older paradigm. The opaque character of the later forms of US influence meant that it was able to manifest its presence vicariously throughout the internal fabric and culture of the third-world state itself. Any clear

distinction, for instance, between domestic and foreign opposition to the national government was suppressed by actions such as North America's entrance into silent partnership with the contras. The scope for national or institutional autonomy to be preserved with any independence was severely eroded when the demarcations were blurred in this way, and the US became able to ventriloquize right at the heart of another nation's internal processes; orchestrating coups (as it had succeeded in doing in Chile in 1973 and was attempting to do with the contras) or dictating the results of elections (as it tried in Nicaragua in 1984 and eventually accomplished in 1990). In this regard Jameson's construction of such an intensely politicized third-world cultural sphere can be seen in terms of the historical movement from the imperialistic logic of monopoly capitalism to some new form of multinational imperialism — echoing his broader designation of postmodernism as the shift from monopoly to multinational capitalism as such.³⁹

“Periodizing the 60s” confirms that this historical transition was in Jameson's thoughts at this time. For here he explicitly associates the demise of the utopian phase of the 1960s with this movement from a classical imperialism to an altogether more pervasive and omnipresent form of US-led global supremacy (“to rethink the failure in Vietnam in terms of a new global strategy for American and first world interests”).⁴⁰ Hence “neocolonialism is characterized by the radically new technology... with which capitalism transforms its relationship to its colonies from an old-fashioned imperialist control to market penetration, destroying the older village communities and creating a whole new wage-labor pool and lumpen proletariat.”⁴¹ He then asserts the existence of a continuous stage originating from this collapse in the early 1970s, stretching to his own present in the mid-1980s and onwards into the future: “it seems appropriate to mark the definitive end of the ‘60s’ in the general area of 1972-1974.... For 1973-1974 is the moment of the onset of a worldwide economic crisis, whose dynamic is still with us today.”⁴²

Viewed in this context, Jameson's comprehensively politicized third-world cultural sphere can be seen as a reflection of this transition. In particular his argument is self-consciously situated in the crucial formative stage it was going through in the first half of the 1980s, when the collapse of the Soviet alternative to US capitalism was immanent, the Cold War's late stages were being fought out in the third world, and the embedding of free-market orthodoxy across the globe consequently being established. This is clear from the description he provides of the characteristics of this stage:

[T]he emergence of a widely accepted new popular concept and term at this time, the notion of the “multinational corporation” is also another symptom, signifying... the moment in which private business finds itself obliged to emerge in public as a visible “subject of history” and a visible actor on the world stage — think of the role of ITT in Chile.⁴³

A statement like this substantially pre-empts something like David Harvey's retrospective assessment of neoliberalism made thirty years later:

[T]he result was the rise of distinctively neo-liberal forms of imperialism. Accumulation by dispossession re-emerged from the shadowy position it had held prior to 1970... The global economy of capitalism underwent radical reconfiguration in response to the overaccumulation crisis of 1973-5. Financial flows became the primary means of articulating the capitalist logic of power.⁴⁴

The implication of Jameson's theorization of third-world literature in the emergence of this historical stage is further evidenced by the fact that his description of the struggle to preserve an autonomous political identity is so closely focused upon the issue of nationhood. It is the contentious figure of the nation and of nationalism to which Jameson appeals, however provisionally and strategically, as the medium through which the immanently political vocation of third-world culture primarily expresses itself. It is the adherence to "a certain nationalism" and "an obsessive return of the national situation" which manifests the sense of a political imperative forged against the external pressure of a globalizing capitalist power.⁴⁵ At this point the aesthetic of national allegory emerges as a framework which is inherently defensive and oppositional in nature, developing from a material situation in which

none of these cultures can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, rather, they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-or-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism — a cultural struggle that is itself a reflection of the economic situation of such areas.⁴⁶

Whatever the pros and cons of this assertion of the nation as the primary medium of anti-imperialist struggle, it was certainly produced as a historical reality within the contemporary forms of US intervention in the third world.⁴⁷ For America's attempts to promote compliant Right-wing regimes and support the disruption and overthrow of independent Left-wing governments can broadly be correlated with the overarching desire to subsume the national borders and identities of the nations in question. In part this was done with the aim of disrupting the formation of the revolutionary relationship between national liberation struggle, class consciousness, and anti-imperialism which had proved in recent decades to be so powerful and so damaging to US interests — particularly in Latin America and most notably of course in the Cuban revolution of 1959 which "attempted to marry the instincts of Cuban nationalism with a commitment to building a Cuban socialism."⁴⁸ Jameson's emphasis on nationalism as the horizon of third-world allegory, where the nation becomes the mediating concept between individual and collective identities, thus functions in a very similar way to

the revolutionary motivation of cultural nationalism which characterized the political and economic basis of Cuba's revolution.

Hence Jameson again turns to Cuba in order to exemplify this position. Indeed what he highlights in the following passage of the "Third-World Literature" essay is the paradigmatic role of a specifically nationalist tradition of cultural resistance:

to receive independence is not the same as to take it, since it is in the revolutionary struggle itself that new social relationships and a new consciousness is developed. Here again the history of Cuba is instructive.... We now know the incalculable role played in the Cuban Revolution of 1959 by the protracted guerrilla struggles of the late 19th century (of which the figure of José Martí is the emblem); contemporary Cuba would not be the same without that laborious and subterranean, one wants to say Thompsonian, experience of the mole of History burrowing through a lengthy past and creating its specific traditions in the process.⁴⁹

As this suggests, the revolutionary significance of this tradition of cultural nationalism can only be understood with reference to a wider economic context, one largely defined in terms of nationalization. For the Cuban revolution had laid down a paradigm based upon the nationalization of all foreign-owned private interests, which largely meant re-appropriating industries and natural resources held by US multinational corporations: "the collectivization process was rapidly extended. Involved were all foreign-owned oil refineries, US-owned sugar mills, banks, telephone and electricity corporations, and all remaining US properties."⁵⁰ This was a disentanglement of the nation from US dependency which then similarly involved the cancellation of all of Cuba's national debt to the US. The struggle to preserve a sense of national cultural identity was thus a projection of its economic parallel in the imperative to preserve nationalized resources and the national economy against ingestion by US capital.

The direct consequence of this was that ever since the 1960s the country had been subject to a US trade embargo which drastically restricted the supply of crucial humanitarian items such as food and medicine, and a campaign of illegal terrorist attacks which were covertly backed by the CIA. Jameson himself in the foreword to Fernández Retamar's essay collection outlines this situation whereby "our other identity as the bankers, arbiters, exploiters, arms suppliers, and military policemen of Latin America then slowly again came to take precedence."⁵¹ Or as Philip Brenner stated in a 1988 article, "the United States's Cuba policy has failed to achieve any of its objectives. Not only has the Cuban regime weathered the US attacks on it, it may even have been strengthened by them, as the government has rallied the Cuban people around it under the banner of nationalism."⁵² The Cuban situation therefore gains greater significance in that it provided the model for all the later struggles between the de-nationalizing force of US capitalism and military resources and resistant Marxist

nationalism in the third world, a paradigm which would go on to define the nature of US intervention in the Central American region throughout subsequent decades.

A related aim of this attempt to dissolve autonomy at a national level, one that would go on to have increasing significance, was to permit the wealth of third-world nations to be extracted through the privatization of nationally held resources, and the opening up of their domestic economies to a US-dominated global market. This was the case, for instance, with many of Chile's major nationalized industries, such as the steel industry and the large sugar refining and electricity companies, which completed their sale to the private sector at artificially low prices during the mid-1980s. In the case of Nicaragua the same US hostility to socialist economic policy centered on the Sandinistas' nationalizations of banking and land ownership. Jameson's reference to the significance of the commodity which has continued to play the defining role in such US-led raids on the resources of third-world national economies up to the present day is particularly prophetic in this regard: "I am tempted to suggest, anachronistically, that this work, published in 1965, prophetically dramatizes the greatest misfortune that can happen to a third-world country in our time, namely the discovery of vast amounts of oil resources."⁵³

In addition to these more militaristic appropriations, this must also be seen as the era of the structural adjustment programs which plunged virtually all of Latin America into a debt crisis and economic depression. These programs were imposed upon individual nations by a transnational force in the form of the International Monetary Fund, although the policy was largely driven by American power and an emergent neoliberal ideology specifically American in origins. As Peter Kingstone notes,

by the mid-1980s, the shift to neoliberalism began to sweep through the region.... Over the 1980s, these 'austerity measures', coupled with poor rates of growth, declining real wages, and severe struggles with inflation and debt, led to the label "the lost decade" in Latin America.⁵⁴

Or as Harvey states more bluntly, "in some instances, for example in Latin America in the 1980s, whole economies were raided and their assets recovered by US finance capital."⁵⁵

The opposition between an imperialistic force seeking to establish its global hegemony by dissolving national borders and the attempt to preserve residual forms of national independence therefore possesses a clear historical grounding which can again be traced back to the forms of nationalist resistance displayed in Central America. Jameson in this sense reflects something close to what Noam Chomsky described several years later as "radical nationalism."⁵⁶ Writing in the context of the apotheosis of US global financial and military power at the turn of the century, Chomsky paraphrases this term from the language of the US State Department, where

it serves to reframe as an act of hostility any attempt by a particular third-world nation to resist the universal aspirations of American economic imperatives, or assert its own national interests against those of the US establishment: “unwillingness to submit to the will of the powerful.” According to Chomsky’s assessment, therefore, the high point of neoliberalism which coincides with that of America’s power is identified precisely with this form of struggle around the identity of the third-world nation-state.

This grounding of Jameson’s theory is then repeated on the inverse side of this imperialist dynamic, and his consistent assertion that the countervailing force to third-world nationalism can no longer simply be defined (as with older forms of imperialism) as the interests of another nation or set of nations distinguished merely by the fact that they are more powerful than the one being colonized. Rather Jameson frames the newly emergent imperial power in far more ubiquitous terms than this, seeing it as being at once tied to a North American origin but at the same time as having successfully extended itself beyond the limits of nationhood altogether. This is the seemingly paradoxical designation of “some global American postmodernist culture,” and “this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture.”⁵⁷ When Jameson turns his attention to this dynamic again in the period around the year 2000, he explicitly identifies this relationship as the source behind the historical development of globalization: “in speaking of the weakening of the nation-state, are we not actually describing the subordination of the other nation-states to American power, either through consent and collaboration, or by the use of brute force and economic threat?”⁵⁸

It is this sense of an international dominance which has transcended national restrictions while simultaneously retaining a US identity that has such strong antecedents in the foreign policy of the Reagan era. This is something which is again confirmed by reference to Nicaragua. Even more than previous US presidents, the fashioning of Reagan’s public image was distinguished by the appeal to a narrowly American form of cultural nationalism. By the mid-1980s Reagan’s persona and his public rhetoric could have been listed with apple pie or the stars and stripes in terms of metonymic representations of a homespun wholesomeness closely bound up with a particular tradition of American self-identification. As Reagan’s most substantial biographer Lou Cannon states: “as *Newsweek* put it, Reagan embodied ‘America as it imagined itself to be — the bearer of the traditional Main Street values of family and neighborhood, of thrift, industry and charity.’”⁵⁹ The systematic militaristic intervention in third-world nation-states thus became mutually inter-dependent with the appeal to this particular rhetoric of American patriotism linked to the dissemination of the apparently universal values of American-style freedom and democracy.⁶⁰

At precisely the same moment, however, that this nationalistic image was being cultivated at home, the Reagan administration’s activities overseas were achieving the

systematic transcendence of the restrictions and limitations of nationhood. This was the key point which gradually emerged in the years leading up to 1986, before being fully revealed in the form of the Iran-Contra scandal. And this extended beyond just the ability to dissolve the boundaries of third-world nationhood. For the nature of the administration's activities meant that presidential policy was able to be enacted almost entirely outside of the limits of American governmental structures; beyond the restrictions imposed by national institutions such as Congress and the Constitution. This was the significance of the use of the CIA and even more covertly the NSA, as these were able to operate in far greater secrecy and financial independence than the overtly military bodies deployed in Vietnam.

The collision course with America's domestic governance was openly reflected in the fact that Congress had passed a series of increasingly strict amendments in the first half of the 1980s which were explicitly designed to halt military support for the contras. The consequence of this refusal to sanction the violation of Nicaragua's officially recognized national sovereignty, however, was not the cessation of support but rather the increasing contortion of that support into ever more convoluted forms. It was this divergence between the legal constraints imposed by Congress and the White House's departure from those constraints which then produced much of the scandal when the continued support finally was made public in late 1986 (within weeks, incidentally, of the publication of "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism").

This pattern was clearly expressed in 1984 when the situation, and the coverage it received, was intensified by the CIA's bombing of three Nicaraguan harbors: "on April 6, *The Wall Street Journal* revealed that the CIA and not the contras had been responsible for the action, which had resulted in damage to several ships, including a Soviet oil tanker.... The reaction in Congress was wrathful."⁶¹ Following that incident the Sandinista government won a case against America over the bombings in the International Court of Justice, with the court confirming that "the mining of the harbors was an example of 'force against another state'... and US support of the contras 'amounts to an intervention of one state in the internal affairs of another.'"⁶² America immediately discounted the court's authority and used its veto on the council to avoid payment of any of the compensation awarded. In doing so it demonstrated its ongoing capacity to operate outside the restrictions of bodies such as the International Court of Justice designed to regulate politics at the level of the nation. In this sense, therefore, through its cultivation in the Nicaraguan context the Reagan Doctrine represented the emergence of precisely the contradictory scenario which Jameson identifies: that of a capitalist power which functions by being at once rhetorically allied with an American identity and yet also capable of dissolving virtually all forms of nationally mandated restriction at will.

The third area where this context can be seen at work is in the way that Jameson chooses to construct his global mapping project from such a highly self-conscious

subject position. Jameson repeatedly foregrounds the fact that the standpoint which frames “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” is not only first world in character, but is also specifically North American. The driving force behind the essay thus emerges as a subjectivity which exists explicitly mired within an experience belonging exclusively to “we Americans, we masters of the world.”⁶³ This is the kind of interpretive self-consciousness which Julie McGonegal, for instance, has described as Jameson’s metacritique or the “point of entry into rigorously self-aware analysis.”⁶⁴

It is this level of emphasis upon such an acutely Americanized point of view which also suggests a personal or biographical element behind Jameson’s account of the first-world intellectual’s confrontation with the third, with “the way people actually live in other parts of the world — a way of life that still has little in common with daily life in the American suburb.”⁶⁵ The Wallersteinian theorization of the penetration of peripheral spheres by a dominant capitalist core, “this primal displacement of the older forms of collective life from a land now seized and privatized,” is in this sense grounded in the uncomfortable experience of an American subjectivity being brought into abrupt proximity with the historical realities of America’s own imperialist interventions within the third world.⁶⁶ It is in this sense that it again invites historical identification with the Reagan-era project of cementing US power by suppressing the development of anti-capitalist social formations overseas.

This experiential encounter between the American subject and the violence through which America’s global hegemony was being imposed is then constituted in a more rigorously theoretical form through the way that Jameson chooses to construct his account around a representational system which is self-consciously flawed in nature, and then goes on to emphasize so insistently those epistemological limitations. Repeatedly there emerges a profound desire to expose the reductiveness which constitutes an inseparable element of the American intellectual’s contact with third-world reality. The focus is consistently placed upon the kind of theoretical hesitancy with which Jameson

moves into the terrain of the metacritical and inquires into how these differences are maintained and reproduced by a First World literary criticism that remains blithely unaware, for the most part, of the ways its own historical and social conditions impart various givens to the interpretive situation.⁶⁷

This is also incidentally the highly nuanced element of hesitancy which Ahmad’s critique almost entirely fails to account for.

Hence “I take the point of criticisms of this expression [third world], particularly those which stress the way in which it obliterates profound differences between a whole range of non-western countries and situations,” and “it is clear to me that *any*

articulation of radical difference... is susceptible to appropriation by that strategy of otherness which Edward Said, in the context of the Middle East, called 'orientalism.'⁶⁸ As Marjorie Levinson points out, the "provisional" and "speculative" emphasis, in which "it would be *presumptuous* to offer some general theory of what is often called third-world literature" indicates something akin to a self-conscious feeling of embarrassment towards the inadequacy of the operative forms of systematic representation: "Jameson not only pre-empts Ahmad's attack on the schematism and reductiveness of the move, he trumps it."⁶⁹

The conditional character of Jameson's stance can consequently be seen as being motivated by a certain feeling of shame in regard to the situation of the American intellectual: a shame which emerges directly out of the material encounter with the site of America's particular incarnation of imperialism. This is the mood which he himself indicates when he states in reference to his experience in Cuba that "it is a matter of some shame for an American to witness the cultural curriculum in a socialist setting which also very much identifies itself with the third world."⁷⁰ The consequence of Jameson's recourse to this logic of metacritique is therefore that the aim of the theory becomes not to transcend that situation's epistemological and representational limitations but rather to incorporate those limitations into the foundation of the theoretical endeavor itself. At this point allegory — the deliberate truncation of the symbolic connection between signifier and object — becomes less an inherent quality of the third-world literary text itself and more an ethical imperative of the first world's interpretive scrutiny of it. It is in this way that it is incorporated as a mode of representation into the wider project of cognitive mapping ("mapping of the totality") which Jameson reveals to be the underpinning presence connecting both the third world and the postmodern in the final footnote of the third-world literature essay.⁷¹

This construction of the first-world subject, based in the turn to a self-reflexive form of allegory that is motivated by a historically determined sense of shame, consequently necessitates some reference to the significance of Walter Benjamin as a paradigm behind Jameson's conceptual model. Highlighting the Benjaminian presence is particularly important because it makes clear how Jameson's argument is able to motivate such ethicist and subjectivist moments within the cognitive mapping framework that ultimately sees them dialectically transcended into formations that are Marxist and objectivist in nature. This applies most notably to Benjamin's great thesis on the philosophy of history, according to which "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."⁷² Indeed Benjamin's dictum that "they are called cultural treasures, and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For without exception the cultural treasures he surveys have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror" is essentially quoted by Jameson in his description of the relationship between American postmodern culture and US imperialism (as well, of course, as providing the epigraph for the concluding chapter of *The Political Unconscious*): "this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture

is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and horror.”⁷³

By employing this Benjaminian sensibility Jameson thus asserts a decidedly unstable character on the part of postmodern culture which emerges directly from its historical relationship with the third world. The preservation of the seemingly ahistorical, classless superficiality of postmodernism in the first world is seen as being structurally dependent upon the imposition of its opposite — the brutal realities of realpolitik, exploitation, and class warfare — in the third. From the perspective of the first-world intellectual this renders the third world precisely “an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror.” This is, of course, what Jameson articulates in his deployment of the dialectic of the master and the slave, in which “only the slave can attain some true materialistic consciousness of his situation, since it is precisely to that that he is condemned. The Master, however, is condemned to idealism — to the luxury of a placeless freedom.”⁷⁴

Indeed, it is clear that forcing the transcendence of this structural divide, and confronting the first world subject with precisely this consciousness-raising form of discomfort at its own material origins, is a major concern, seeking as Jameson does to articulate “some deeper fear of the affluent about the way people actually live in other parts of the world — a way of life that still has little in common with daily life in the American suburb... an existence and a situation unfamiliar and therefore frightening — one that we do not know and prefer *not* to know.”⁷⁵ While ethical and subjective forms of experience thus are employed here they are not, as would be the case in the kind of liberalism from which Jameson must of course be carefully distinguished, the ultimate horizon of the allegorical schema. Rather the representative degeneration which occurs at the ethical level is used to outline the necessity of a transcendent move beyond it towards the ultimate horizon of global political transformation.

The significance of this apparently Benjaminian adaptation of a singular world-system constituted by two sides which are interdependent and mutually definitional, but at the same time oppositional and separated by an acute network of ideological prophylactics and hierarchies, though, does not just lie in its reflection of the then-contemporary discourse of postmodernism. It is again significant for the way its logic substantially parallels the emergent discourse of neoliberalism. For it is exactly this kind of structural relationship between violent conflict overseas and the instigation of seamless hegemony at home which has been consistently used to describe the historical embedding of the neoliberal agenda — its transition from marginal academic theory to dominant material reality — during the 1980s.

This is the narrative which is presented, in slightly different forms, by Naomi Klein in *The Shock Doctrine* and Greg Grandin in *Empire’s Workshop*. The central thesis of Klein’s book is precisely that the establishment of neoliberal capitalism as the predominant global reality originated not in any consensus achieved in the democratic

European and North American nations where it was first conceived intellectually, but rather in a form of violent imposition which could only be achieved through the deployment by the US of a largely covert imperialist foreign-policy:

The coups, wars and slaughters to install and maintain pro-corporate regimes have never been treated as capitalist crimes but have instead been written off as the excesses of overzealous dictators, as hot fronts of the Cold War, and now of the War on Terror. If the most committed opponents of the corporatist economic model are systematically eliminated, whether in Argentina in the seventies or in Iraq today, that suppression is explained as part of the dirty fight against Communism or terrorism — almost never as the fight *for* the advancement of pure capitalism.⁷⁶

According to Klein's narrative it was the disorienting experience of collective catastrophe, (hence the terminology of "shock") which was systematically employed as the midwife of neoliberal globalization. However it needed to be exported into third-world nations and cultivated there before it could be effectively imposed at home.

For Grandin this process can then be explained by viewing the Reagan-era interventions in Latin America within the context of North America's long history of exploiting its Southern neighbors in order to redefine its own domestic identity. Latin America is seen in this sense as the crucible in which the American right was able to reunify and reassert US dominance in economic and military terms following the symbolic and material setback of Vietnam:

[I]t was Central America, and Latin America more broadly, where an insurgent New Right first coalesced, as conservative activists used the region to respond to the crisis of the 1970s, a crisis provoked not only by America's defeat in Vietnam but by a deep economic recession and a culture of skeptical antimilitarism and political dissent.⁷⁷

In this way an absolutely central function is ascribed to the process of exporting and subsequently re-importing radical free-market capitalism and authoritarian government, based in the exploitation of the epistemological and ontological schisms between first and third worlds, in the imposition of the single utopian narrative of global neoliberal progression and US authority.

It is something very close to this dynamic which is then echoed by Jameson's system, situated as it is within the precise historical moment that the development Klein describes was taking place. Jameson's model explicitly frames the third world as the originary source of the newly emergent and pseudo-utopian postmodern reality developing in the Americanized first world. The third world therefore becomes the site

at which the brutal material logic which underpins that reality can be identified and assessed. Places like Cuba, Nicaragua, and Chile become “mechanisms that necessarily entail a whole social and historical critique of our current first-world situation.”⁷⁸ Or as Harvey puts it, “not for the first time, a brutal experiment carried out in the periphery became a model for the formulation of policies in the center.”⁷⁹ This is the same critique of US political ideology, therefore, which Klein and Grandin similarly accomplish by examining developments in countries such as Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, and Nicaragua through the 1970s and ‘80s.⁸⁰

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Jameson’s work has repeatedly distinguished itself by the ability to anticipate issues whose significance would only enter into mainstream academic currency considerably later in time. This status as trailblazer certainly applies to his conceptual engagement with the third world, which can be seen in hindsight to have not only reflected but also anticipated in significant ways the subsequent development of neoliberal globalization as a historical discourse and academic concern (not least in his own writing) into the 2000s. At a time when that discourse has reached the point of apotheosis, produced a global economic crisis and entered a period of ongoing turmoil and acute decline, Jameson’s thinking is eminently contemporaneous in the way it also originated in a sense of catastrophe, in “blood, torture, [and] death.”⁸¹ But what made this theoretical forecasting possible were the continuities around the historical situation which conditioned Jameson’s conceptualization, a crucial moment in which the establishment of a global capitalist order along neoliberal lines was emergent but still in development, and where the challenges and alternatives it had later subdued were still operative.⁸²

Notes

1. Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text* 17 (1987): 3-25, and Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65-88.
2. Imre Szeman, "Who's Afraid of National Allegory? Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (2001): 803-827; Neil Lazarus, "Fredric Jameson on 'Third-World Literature': A Qualified Defence," *Fredric Jameson: A Critical Reader*, eds. Douglas Kellner and Sean Homer (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004): 42-62; Ian Buchanan, "National Allegory Today: The Return to Jameson" *New Formations* 51.1 (2003): 66-79; Julie McGonegal, "Postcolonial Metacritique: Jameson, Allegory, and the Always-Already-Read Third World Text," *Interventions* 7.2 (2005): 251-265; Levinson, Marjorie. "News from Nowhere: The Discontents of Aijiz Ahmad," *Public Culture* 6.1 (1993): 97-131.
3. "In hindsight, it appears that almost without exception critics of Jameson's essay have wilfully misread it. Of course, such misreadings are to be expected. The reception given to this or that theory has as much to do with timing as with its putative content" (Szeman, "Who's Afraid?" 804).
4. "Who's Afraid" 820. In a more recent article, Caren Irr has presented a similar argument in regard to Jameson's conception of national allegory, claiming that "national allegory is, however, well suited to the new externalizing, post-post-industrial economy." Caren Irr, "Postmodernism in Reverse: American National Allegories and the 21st-Century Political Novel," *Twentieth Century Literature* 57.3-4 (2011) 536.
5. Betty Joseph, "Neoliberalism and Allegory," *Cultural Critique* 82 (2012): 68-94.
6. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984) 57.
7. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 28.
8. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* (London: Penguin Books, 2007) 141.
9. Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, The United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2006) 163.
10. "All these [postmodernist] texts were written in the era of Reagan, whose Presidency they effectively span.... The domestic euphoria of these years forms the immediate backdrop for Jameson's diagnosis of the logic of postmodernism" (Perry Anderson, "Introduction," *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*, ed. Perry Anderson [London: Verso, 1998] xii).
11. As Caren Irr puts it: "since the 1980s, the conceptual twin — or, better, dialectical counterpart — of literary postmodernism has been the national allegory" ("Reverse" 516).
12. On China, see Xudong Zhang, "Modernity as Cultural Politics: Jameson and China," *Fredric Jameson: A Critical Reader*. Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the Sixties," *Social Text* 9/10 (1984): 178-209.
13. This applies most notably to "On Magic Realism in Film" of 1986, in which Latin America is explicitly framed as the key source behind the conceptualization of a third-world culture which "is to be grasped as a possible alternative to the narrative logic of contemporary postmodernism" (Fredric Jameson, "On Magic Realism in Film," *Critical Inquiry* 12.2 [1986] 302).
14. Fredric Jameson, "Introduction," *Caliban and Other Essays* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989): vii-xiv.

15. Fredric Jameson, "Tomás Borge on the Nicaraguan Revolution," *New Left Review* 164 (1987): 53-64, and Fredric Jameson, "Introduction to Borge," *New Left Review* 164 (1987): 51-52.
16. Fredric Jameson, "Interview with Srinivas Aravamudan and Ranjana Khanna," *Jameson on Jameson*, ed. Ian Buchanan (Durham: Duke UP, 2007) 204.
17. Jameson, "Third-World Literature" 76. See likewise the praise which is heaped in the Retamar foreword upon "the uniqueness of Cuba's cultural and political vocations.... The annual film festival, the selection of Cuba as the site for the new panamerican film school, the almost weekly conferences at Casa drawing artists, writers and intellectuals from all over the Americas, above all the prestigious prizes in a range of genres offered by the Casa de las Américas to Latin American and Caribbean writers" (*Caliban* ix).
18. Jane Mayer and Doyle McManus, *Landslide: The Unmaking of the President, 1984-1988* (London: William Collins Sons, 1988) 51.
19. Mayer and McManus, *Landslide* 47-48.
20. Jameson, "Introduction to Borge" 51.
21. "Indeed, 1959 inaugurated a historical period only ended by the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas 30 years later. After the Revolution, five key dates charted the progress of the left: 1959 itself; the murder of Che in Bolivia in 1967; Pinochet's coup against Allende's Unidad Popular (UP, Popular Unity) government in Chile in 1973; the revolutionary triumph of the Frente Sandinista Liberacion Nacional (FSLN, the Sandinista National Liberation Front) in 1979 and its departure from government following the 1990 elections in Nicaragua." Geraldine Lievesley, *The Cuban Revolution: Past, Present, and Future Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 16-17.
22. "Third-World Literature" 72.
23. "Third-World Literature" 69 (emphasis added), 67.
24. "Third-World Literature" 81.
25. Santiago Colás, "The Third World in Jameson's *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*," *Social Text* 31/32 (1992): 258-270. Hence for Colás the third world in Jameson's thinking embodies a "paradoxical double function," representing both the final enclave of resistance to the global domination by the Americanized first world, and simultaneously the submission to that domination: "both the space whose final elimination by the inexorable logic of capitalist development consolidates the social moment — late capitalism... and the space that remains somehow untainted by and oppositional to those repressive social processes" (258).
26. "Third-World Literature" 85.
27. "Third-World Literature" 73.
28. "Third-World Literature" 74.
29. *ibid.*
30. *ibid.*
31. "Third-World Literature" 74-75.
32. Jameson, "Tomás Borge" 62.
33. "Third-World Literature" 75.
34. Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," February 6, 1985, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=38069>.
35. Jameson, "Introduction to Borge" 52.

36. Peter Kornbluh, "The U.S. Role in the Counterrevolution," *Revolution & Counterrevolution in Nicaragua*, ed. Thomas W. Walker (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1991) 326.
37. "Tomás Borge" 57.
38. "Third-World Literature" 74.
39. The paradigm which had of course dominated Marxism's understanding of imperialism since Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.
40. Jameson, "Periodizing" 204.
41. "Periodizing" 206. This is a transition, incidentally, which Jameson explicitly identifies with US intervention in the development of revolutionary Latin American states: "as for the thing itself, for all practical purposes it comes to an end with the Chilean coup in 1973 and the fall of virtually all the Latin American countries to various forms of military dictatorship" (204).
42. "Periodizing" 205.
43. "Periodizing" 205.
44. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) 184.
45. "Third-World Literature" 65.
46. "Third-World Literature" 68.
47. Szeman has usefully situated Jameson's deployment of the nation within the wider set of debates over its value for Leftist political struggle ("Who's Afraid?" 818).
48. Lievesley, *The Cuban Revolution* 6.
49. "Third-World Literature" 81.
50. Carmelo Mesa-Lago, "The Prerevolutionary Economy and an Overview of Policy," *The Cuba Reader: The Making of a Revolutionary Society*, eds. Philip Brenner, William M. Leogrande, Donna Rich, and Daniel Siegel (New York: Grove Press, 1989) 67.
51. *Caliban* viii.
52. Philip Brenner, "Change and Continuity in Cuban Foreign Policy," *The Cuba Reader* 328.
53. "Third-World Literature" 82.
54. Peter Kingstone, *The Political Economy of Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2011) 44.
55. Harvey, *New Imperialism* 66.
56. Noam Chomsky, *Acts of Aggression: Policing "Rogue States"* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999) 28.
57. "Third-World Literature" 65, and "Postmodernism" 57.
58. Fredric Jameson, "Globalization and Political Strategy," *New Left Review* 4 (2000) 50.
59. Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1991) 494.
60. As Jameson would go on to claim in "Globalization and Political Strategy," "what we may think of as universal Western values, applicable everywhere... are not in fact rooted in some eternal human nature, but are, rather, culturally specific, the expression of one particular constellation of values — American ones — among many others" (59).
61. Theodore Draper, *A Very Thin Line: The Iran-Contra Affairs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991) 20.
62. Cannon, *President Reagan* 380.
63. "Third-World Literature" 85.
64. McGonegal, "Metacritique" 260.
65. "Third-World Literature" 66.

66. "Third-World Literature" 84.
67. "Metacritique" 253.
68. "Third-World Literature" 67, 77 (emphasis original)
69. "Third-World Literature" 68, 72, and 68 (emphasis added), and Levinson, "News from Nowhere" 107.
70. "Third-World Literature" 74.
71. "Third-World Literature" 88.
72. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 256.
73. Benjamin, "Theses" 256, and "Postmodernism" 57.
74. "Third-World Literature" 85.
75. "Third-World Literature" 66 (emphasis original). Jameson's theoretical articulation of this situation is again, incidentally, reflected in more concrete terms in his interview with Tomás Borge. It is precisely the cultivation of this idealist delusion on the part of American subjectivity which Borge critiques at the interview's close: "I asked how it was possible for a serious person — which one supposes the US President to be — to say that we have burned down a Jewish synagogue, in a country where there are no synagogues. Or how can he accuse us of being drug traffickers when the US federal drugs agency says that this is not the case? How is it that there are so many lies, so many? It cannot be by chance. They issue from all the means of communication and the rectifications are obscured. The aim is to lay the conditions for an attack on Nicaragua and to convince the US people that we are criminals" (64).
76. Klein, *Shock* 20 (emphasis original)
77. Grandin, *Workshop* 5.
78. "Third-World Literature" 79
79. Harvey, *Brief History* 9.
80. Jameson's reference to welfare reduction, one of the most visible features of neoliberalism to have been reimported into the first world in this way, is one indication that this kind of dynamic had a meaningful presence in his thinking at the time of "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism": "in a modern economy, this sacred duty to the poor is transformed into a frenzied assault by free-loaders from all levels of society" (82).
81. "Postmodernism" 57.
82. Indeed at this point it is hard to see it as merely coincidence that not only was "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" produced at the height of Reagan's foreign-policy endeavors, but that the focused re-emergence of positive critical interest in the essay took place in the early 2000s, and was thus precisely contemporaneous with the second Iraq War. In sense the essay's renaissance occurred within the very historical moment which (as Grandin so consistently points out) saw the ideology of the Reaganite 1980s so closely repeated and, indeed, by so many of the same political actors.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Marxism: Juan Carlos Rodríguez, Althusser, and the Ideological Unconscious

Malcolm K. Read

A whole superstructure of different and specifically formed feelings, illusions, modes of thought and views of life arises on the basis of the different forms of property, of the social conditions of existence. The whole class creates and forms these out of its material foundations and corresponding social relations. The single individual, who derives these feelings, etc. through tradition and upbringing, may well imagine they form the real determinants and the starting-point of his activity.¹

Juan Carlos Rodríguez, author of the recently published *De qué hablamos cuando hablamos de marxismo*, first came to prominence in the mid 1970s, following the appearance of his *Teoría e historia de la producción ideológica* (1975), a work that, as indicated by its subtitle, charts the origins of the "first bourgeois literatures of the sixteenth century," specifically in the case of Spain but also with an eye to parallel situations elsewhere, notably in England. A seminal text of Althusserian inspiration, *Teoría e historia* argued the existence, politically, of a single structure: a public/private dialectic created by the impact of bourgeois relations upon their feudal counterpart, ultimately favorable to capitalist development but characterized, increasingly throughout the sixteenth century, by the dominance of a resurgent aristocracy. This first work was followed, after a period of seeming quiescence, "off-set by the lecture notes, which circulated in all directions,"² by *La norma literaria* (1984, 2001), which brought together a collection of essays ranging widely over Marxist theory, Western philosophy, the ideology of linguistics ("from Saussure to Chomsky"), Enlightenment dramaturgy ("Arbiter Scene/Arbiter State"), and a broad spectrum of individual writers, including Mallarmé, Raymond Chandler, Bram Stoker, Borges, and many others of Spanish extraction.³ At this point, Rodríguez entered the most productive

phase of his career, with major works on Lorca (1994) and Cervantes (2003) and several that consolidated his earlier investigations, notably *La poesía, la música y el silencio* (1994) and *La literatura del pobre* (1994, 2001), interspersed with monographs on Brecht (1998), Althusser (2002, 2003), Heidegger (2011), Borges (2012), and aspects of popular culture (2003) including the tango (1982, 1996) and the cinema (2005). He may reasonably lay claim to being the best theoretician of literature, even surpassing the achievements of Pierre Macherey, to have emerged from the Rue d'Ulm, which inevitably raises the question as to why his work should be virtually unknown to the Anglophone world.

Given the hostile and ill-informed reception frequently accorded to Althusser's own ideas, it was never likely that a work such as *Teoría e historia*, which announced itself in classically Althusserian terms, as constituting a "break," would be understood or welcomed any more readily.⁴ That said, a number of other, complicating factors combined to render the Spaniard's situation particularly problematic. Principal among these was the need for his texts to be mediated through the discipline of Hispanism, whose British branch was particularly inert, within a less than distinguished academy, which determined that by the time the relevant translations appeared, those scholars in English, Cultural Studies, and History who might at one time have been expected to take an interest in the Spaniard's work had long since pronounced on the "fall" of Structural Marxism, repented of their former sins, or were even busy denying their prior allegiance to Althusserianism.⁵ And doubtless the suspicion also lingered among the more Protestant-minded that little store was to be set by any writer affiliated with a Catholic culture traditionally disparaged for its "difference," which is to say, less politely, for its barbarism and backwardness.⁶

The Marxists among these same Anglophiles should have known better. Did not Marx himself notoriously warn that history progresses by its dark side? Which would explain why Spain's very marginality should have lent Rodríguez a singular advantage when it came to theorizing the history of the subject. For what this marginality translates into, within the context of a long transition (from feudalism to capitalism), is the continuing dominance within Spain of a feudal ideological matrix, based on the opposition between the lord (Lord) and the serf (servant). Set furthermore within the context of a cosmic opposition between the terrestrial and celestial worlds, this matrix visibly excludes the (free) subject, beloved of bourgeois ideology. In its proto-form, it is true, the bourgeois individual will materialize early in Spain — notably through the Petrarchan lyric — or so at least we will see Rodríguez claim, and an alternative Subject/subject matrix will begin to take shape around him. But the period of bourgeois ascendance will prove only too brief — politically, its reversal is signalled by the defeat of the *comunero* rebellion — with far-reaching consequences for the development of Absolutism in Spain. A resurgent, and what will prove to be enduring, feudalism explains how it came about that "freedom" and "democracy" were still for Spaniards something of a historical novelty, achieved in defiance of fascism, when,

with the onset of the recent economic crisis, such “liberties” were rudely snatched from them or, perhaps, more accurately, emerged in their true colours. In Rodríguez’s own words:

Pues si se sabía de sobra lo que podía hacer el partido único con nosotros, se dejaba completamente de lado lo que podía hacer el *capitalismo único* con nosotros y con la mundialización global: sencillamente lo que le diera la gana (como efectivamente está ocurriendo todos los días).⁷

For if it was clear enough what the single party could do with us, absolutely no account was taken of what a single capitalism could do, in the context of globalization: simply whatever it wished (as in effect is happening on a daily basis).

The effect, in the case of Rodríguez, was to focus intensely a theoretical mind already sensitized to the lessons of its own national history. The contrast could scarcely be more marked with the situation in Britain and the States. Here, safely cocooned within a relatively benign liberal democracy, even theoreticians of the Left — we will be considering some test cases — *unconsciously* assumed the “freedom of the individual” (together with the empiricism that was its ideological infrastructure) as a non-transcendable horizon and, by the same token, took as their theoretical starting point the task of reconciling “agency” and “structure.”

It remains in what follows to lend some substance to our claims, which are here stated in broad outline. We will adopt a somewhat oblique approach to *De qué hablamos*, through the critical “interlude” directed against Roy Bhaskar and his school of Critical Realism.

Subjects in History

The first thing to strike one about the Bhaskerian interlude is the petulance, even brutality of the language used to characterize a philosophical school that, at least by its own reckoning, boasts a close affinity with Marxism and socialism.⁸ Critical Realism amounts to a “tomadura de pelo” (a mickey-take), also “otra caricatura del marxismo” (one more caricature of Marxism).⁹ The second is its partiality: Rodríguez analyzes only one section of a single work of Bhaskar’s, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1979), which compares Utilitarianism, Weber, and Durkheim with Marx, and even then limits his discussion to the ontological status of the individual/society dichotomy upon which the comparison allegedly rests. “[M]eter a Marx ahí es hundirlo, es no entender nada” (To insert Marxism there is to sink it, to not understand anything), Rodríguez writes.¹⁰ Why? For the simple reason that, as Marx explains in the *Grundrisse*, contrary to what is implied by the theory of the social contract and, Rodríguez would add, Bhaskar’s Critical Realism, individuals are historical constructs of a determinate set of social relations, which are always relations of exploitation (“lo

que a Bhaskar ni se le pasa por la cabeza” [something that never occurs to Bhaskar]).¹¹ The Althusserian is emphatic: the dichotomy between individual and society “se diluye por completo en Marx” (is completely diluted in Marx).¹² To think from a Marxist standpoint, his argument runs, is to reject any notion that the individual exists *prior* to its social configuration, under pain of remaining captive, *at the level of the ideological unconscious*, to bourgeois categories that are mistaken for ontological realities. In a footnote, Rodríguez will further claim that Bhaskar’s view of the Marxist concept of ideology, through the contrast it draws between the latter and scientific truth, constitutes a series of commonplaces of the kind to be found in “cualquier manual de ‘positivismo racionalista’” (any manual of “rationalist positivism”).¹³

Now, in one fundamental respect at least Rodríguez’s exposition of Bhaskar’s work is quite inaccurate. For contrary to what is implied throughout, the Critical Realist consistently argues that, far from preceding society, the individual must follow it. Thus: “[I]f society is always already made, then any concrete human praxis, or, if you like, act of objectivation can only modify it; and the totality of such acts sustain or change it.”¹⁴ And it is hard to understand how the Spaniard, who is normally an attentive reader, missed an order of priorities that is consistently hammered home. Thus: “...society pre-exists the individual” and “all activity presupposes the prior existence of social forms.”¹⁵ Spontaneous acts have as their necessary condition the pre-existence of a social form by means of which they are generated. Confirmation is found in the fact that — and here Bhaskar is surely echoing the opening pages of Marx’s *Grundrisse* — speech requires (social) language.¹⁶ To conclude, there is a dialectical nuance that Rodríguez is simply not grasping: “society is both the ever-present *condition* (material cause) and the continually reproduced *outcome* of human agency. And praxis is both work, that is, conscious *production*, and (normally unconscious) *reproduction* of the conditions of production, that is society.”¹⁷

It would be wrong, however, to dismiss the Spaniard’s reading of Critical Realism on this account. True, his preoccupation with the pre-existence of the individual is misleading, at least as far as Bhaskar is concerned, but he has every right to be concerned, from his own standpoint, about the philosopher’s insistence on the “ontological gulf” that separates “people” from “society,” for what that gulf blocks is any understanding of the ideological unconscious, as theorized by Rodríguez. To remind ourselves: “I want to distinguish sharply,” Bhaskar writes,

between the genesis of human actions, lying in the reasons, intentions, and plans of people, on the one hand, and the structures governing the reproduction and transformation of social activities on the other; and hence between the domains of the psychological and the social sciences.¹⁸

Bhaskar, we have seen, certainly accepts that the unconscious is operative in the reproduction of conditions of production. But the ontological hiatus upon which

he otherwise insists cuts psychology off from the social, thereby confirming our suspicions that the unconscious he has in mind is of the Freudian, libidinal variety. Nor is the situation solved by reference to the *mediation* of transindividual mechanisms through (discrete) individualities. To think within such categorial parameters, as the Spaniard correctly intuits, is to remain captive to the dominant bourgeois ideological unconscious, which perforce departs from the opposition between structure and agency.

Marxism's point of departure, by way of contrast, is the social formation, articulated on the basis of a mode of production, the latter characterized (according to Althusserianism) by its distinctive economic, political, and ideological instances, each assigned its function by the historical matrix of the structure as a whole. The articulation of these instances, internalized by social individualities, be they masters, slaves, lords, serfs, subjects, and so on, defines all possible practices and gives them a determinate class-based character. The ideological unconscious, understood within this problematic, may be defined as the matrix effect of the social formation, secreted "originally" through the relations of production but "subsequently" legitimated and (consciously?) formalized through the State Ideological Apparatus. Its *modus operandi* is that of a *humus* or *magma* that always already pervades a social formation, in the light of which Rodríguez was surely right to anticipate that the attempt by Critical Realism to locate Marxism within the individual/society framework could only lead, sooner rather than later, to a celebration of the "freedom of the individual" and to the marginalization of the key Marxist concept of exploitation. There is nothing to suggest that the Spaniard has familiarized himself with Bhaskar's subsequent work, but presumably its turn toward a new age spiritualism would hardly come to him as a surprise.¹⁹

Rodríguez's own position, it should be said, is not without its problems. For if, as he insists, individuals are always already pre-determined by an ideological unconscious, it remains a key question, of considerable practical and political interest, as to how these same individuals can possibly come to understand, never mind resist, the forces that oppress them. Rodríguez, to be sure, is careful to qualify the reach of ideological determination: "Por supuesto, esto no quiere decir que uno/a no pueda romper con su propio inconsciente ideológico, haciéndose consciente de su situación y de la estructura real en la que se inscribe (consciente al menos hasta cierto punto)" (Of course, this does not mean that one cannot break with one's own ideological unconscious, by becoming conscious of one's situation and of the real structure in which one is inscribed [conscious at least to a certain extent]).²⁰ But that says little to those critics who have legitimately pointed, firstly, to the absence from Althusser "of any reference to the history of strategic thinking on the Marxist Left — from the Second International to the Bolshevik tradition" and, secondly, to an unresolved tension within Althusserianism between functionalism and voluntarism.²¹ These are by no means minor considerations, and before we proceed to substantiate the

theoretical basis of Rodríguez's work, we will regress, in terms of our review of *De qué hablamos*, to weigh the consequences for politics, and in particular for Spanish politics, of the all-encompassing notion of an ideological unconscious.

"Spain is Different"

The problem facing Marxists, according to Rodríguez, is that the infrastructure of exploitation is so refracted under capitalism as to blind its victims to the reality of their oppression: the extraction of the social surplus, it bears repeating, takes place indirectly, at the economic level, through the buying and selling of lives.²² Particularly afflicted in this regard has been the Spanish Communist Party, notwithstanding the prestige it accrued traditionally as the major oppositional force to fascism. What the SCP failed to see in the post-Franco decades, because it considered it "exterior" to its concerns, was the internationalization of monopoly capitalism, materialized in the financial structures of power and concentrated quintessentially in the presence of the American embassy. "De ahí que la izquierda marxista apenas hablara de la realidad económica que envolvía al franquismo. Sólo se hablaba de como acabar políticamente con el franquismo y de establecer el 'después de Franco, qué'" (Which explains why the Marxist Left hardly spoke of the economic reality that enveloped Francoism. The only talk was of how to finish off Francoism politically and of how to foreground the question "And after Franco, what?").²³ Sustaining such a discourse was the Stalinist allegiance to the notion of "socialism in one country," the equivalent tactically of fighting on the enemy's territory. In effect, the SCP fell into the trap of thinking in terms of an authentic internal isolation. And with predictable results: principally, the Party found itself gradually drawn into a singularly debased brand of liberal politics and, for its own part, affiliating ever more closely to a reformism that would eventually lead to its own eclipse. To explore this process in further detail, Rodríguez turned to the work of the Greek Marxist, Nicos Poulantzas.

Published in 1978 and now neglected, along with the rest of Poulantzas' work ("otra cuestión de enigmas" [one more enigma among others]), *State, Power, Socialism* furnishes an effective prism through which to view the political processes in evidence in post-Franco Spain.²⁴ In direct reversal of earlier work, in which he had emphasized the monolithic power of State hegemony, in this work Poulantzas specifically includes popular struggles within the domain of the state and its relevant apparatuses. According to Rodríguez, this additional complexity was achieved at a price, namely the marginalization of class exploitation. The Greek's covert design was to bypass the Leninist image of *dual power*, otherwise the opposition between the bourgeois state and the party laying siege to it.²⁵ His fear was that the associated narrative, which spoke of the fall of the fortress-state, masked what in all likelihood would ensue, namely the suppression of democratic liberties. Eventually, it would transpire, even the soviets would be absorbed into the party, which accordingly would be identified with the state. While never suggesting that Lenin and Gramsci were anything other

than embryonic Stalinists, Poulantzas had seemingly become distrustful of the power of the masses, and preferred to focus instead upon contradictions internal to the state, understood in terms of the correlation of forces within Parliament and Ideological State Apparatuses.

Now this is all very well, except that, according to Rodríguez, Poulantzas is forgetting one crucial factor, namely that, in the case of Western democracies, the matrix effect of the social formation determines that the state in question is thoroughly capitalist. And what was true of the political instance was equally true at the level of its ideological counterpart, whose central tenet — “I am born free” — was inscribed in every interstice of the social edifice. Indeed, so pervasive was this tenet that, after the death of Franco, liberal ideologues successfully cast the SCP as the “enemy of freedom.” How could it be otherwise, the prevailing rhetoric ran, given the Party’s role as a totalitarian satellite of the USSR? What more was one to expect of what remained a relic of the civil war? For when all was said and done, was not Eurocommunism still communism? And however much the Party surrendered in political terms, notably through the Moncloa Pact, the more vulnerable to this caricature it appeared to be.

But it was not simply the orthodox CP that was under threat — we are still summarizing Rodríguez’s account — but Marxism itself. The message that the market is fundamentally exploitative needed to be silenced, if, that is, capitalist restructuring was to take effect. And silenced it was. Of course, a few figures continued to offer resistance, notably Althusser and his followers, Manuel Sacristán in Spain, some Anglophone historians, such as Christopher Hill, Maurice Dobb, Perry Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm and, in America, Paul Sweezy and Paul Baran, not to mention the odd cultural critic, such as Raymond Williams. But by the mid-1980s it was all over, and some of these same individuals had surrendered to the illusion that it was possible to operate through the capitalist state, even as the latter was being overrun by neoliberalism. Not that parties such as Labour in Britain or the Socialist Workers Party in Spain cared: both were in any case soon abandoning any pretence to be fighting for socialism. And finally the fall of the USSR completely sealed the fate of social democracy in general, so much so that even postmodernism, with its deconstructions and linguistic play, trembled to its roots. “Ahora no hacía falta más que decir sí al neoliberalismo establecido” (There was now no other option but to accept an established neo-liberalism).²⁶ And at this point a terrible truth emerged: capitalism’s capacity to regulate itself was conditional upon its fear of the oppressed; once this fear had dissipated, it felt free to run riot, which is exactly what it proceeded to do.

The Ideological Unconscious

The second section of *De qué hablamos* reproduces the Introduction to *Teoría e historia*, which spells out in detail what Rodríguez understands by the “ideological

unconscious.” As should be immediately apparent, the text is deeply indebted for its own theoretical framework to Althusser and to the latter’s focus upon the “mode of production,” understood as a “structure in dominance,” consisting of its economic, political, and ideological levels or “instances.” The primacy or “determinacy” of the economic, to briefly remind ourselves, is refracted, “in the last instance,” through the matrix effect of the “social formation” as a whole, in which one of the other instances may otherwise be “dominant.” The “relative autonomy” of each instance manifests itself in the form of a transitive or “linear” causality, overdetermined by the intransitive effectivity of the whole. Important though such concepts are for the Spaniard, even more so is, firstly, the Althusserian insistence upon the need to break with the bourgeois subject/object paradigm and, secondly, the notion that ideology constitutes a system of representations that are “secreted” by the prevailing relations of production and legitimized in the Ideological State Apparatus.

While these and other such formulations had the immediate effect of undercutting the notion of a consciousness transparent to itself, much remained to be worked out: the lived relation between individuals and their world, Althusser had argued somewhat confusingly, “only appears as ‘conscious’ on condition that it is *unconscious*, in the same way [it] only seems to be simple on condition that it is complex, that it is not a simple relation but a relation between relations, a second degree relation.”²⁷ To compound the mystification, Althusser had also begun to flirt with Lacanian psychoanalysis, whose category of the libidinal unconscious, along with its associated concepts, was far more developed than its Marxist ideological equivalent, and, once introduced into Marxism, began to corrode the latter’s indigenous categories from within.²⁸

Upon all of this, the work of Rodríguez represents a significant advance. To begin with, while Althusser had emphasized the *unconsciousness* of ideology, it fell to the Spaniard to formulate theoretically the substantive notion of an *ideological unconscious*, an innovation achieved through his focus upon the invention of the proto-form of the bourgeois subject, through which, in the struggle against feudalism, the bound serf turned into a proletarian “free” to sell his/her labour power.

La noción de sujeto (y toda la problemática ahí inscrita) es radicalmente histórica... porque se segrega directamente (y exclusivamente) desde la matriz misma del inconsciente ideológico burgués: el “siervo” no puede ser jamás “sujeto” etc. Pero por ello también los planteamientos teóricos derivados desde esa misma ideología burguesa nunca podrían aceptar que su propio inconsciente de base sea una cuestión ideológica (o sea: histórica), sino que considerará siempre que los sentimientos y la lógica propia de tal “inconsciente” constituyen la verdad misma de la realidad física humana, su propia transparencia.²⁹

The notion of the subject (and the whole problematic inscribed therein)

is radically historical... because it is secreted directly (and exclusively) from the very matrix of the bourgeois ideological unconscious: the “serf” cannot ever be a “subject,” etc. Nor, for the same reason, would bourgeois ideology ever be able to accept that its own unconscious is itself, at root, an ideological, therefore historical, matter; on the contrary, its claim will always be that the sentiments and logic special to this “unconscious” constitute the very truth of physical, human reality, its very transparency.

The ideological unconscious in question sustains, among other things, the modern notion of literature, understood as the “inner truth” or creative intimacy of an interiorized individual, be this an “author” who, by definition, is able freely to express him/herself in “his” or “her” work, or a “reader” who, similarly, is free to interpret a work as s/he sees fit. The object undergoes a corresponding liberation: from a signature (of its Lord), it is transformed into a *literal thing*, exposed to the gaze of the subject. To appreciate fully the force of such cultural transformations, it suffices to draw a contrast with the feudal scribe who “comments” upon the only “books” known to feudalism, namely the Bible and the Book of the World, an activity subject to all manner of interpretive norms and constraints and, in consequence, potentially precarious to life and limb. The bulk of the population was saved from such concerns by the fact that it was maintained in a state of illiteracy.

The message is clear: the Spaniard will have no truck with the Althusserian notion of a universalized subject of ideology and will, more broadly, take his distance from Althusser’s alleged ahistoricism and philosophism. The “serf” and “subject,” according to his view, are to be understood as simply the privileged *categories* or *notions* through which is objectified the basic *functioning* or internal operation of, say, the feudal or bourgeois matrices. It would be a grave error, Rodríguez argues, to confuse the categories with the functioning: the distinction, a crucial one, is that between what a social formation *says it is* and what it *actually is*. Each ideological matrix attributes to its relevant categories the character of essential, unalterable realities that determine the way in which people understand themselves and so live their lives. The ideological matrix, so defined, simply reproduces, at its own level, the basic class contradiction that constitutes a particular set of social relations. The importance that Rodríguez attributes to the latter is what distinguishes him from some of his fellow Althusserians, in whom attention shifts from the matrix effect of the whole social formation to its corresponding Ideological State Apparatuses. And with radical consequences, against which Rodríguez warns: “si la ‘escuela’ es un Aparato Estatal no es ella la que ‘crea’ la ideología, sino, en todo caso, y únicamente, la que la materializa y reproduce” (while admittedly the “school” is a State Apparatus, it is not what “creates” ideology, but, at best, only what materializes and reproduces it).³⁰ The Spaniard elaborates:

la dialéctica inscrita en los textos literarios (la que los produce como tales, su lógica interna) es la plasmación de *un inconsciente ideológico* que no ‘nace’ en la Escuela, sino directamente en el interior de las relaciones sociales mismas y desde ellas únicamente se segrega, etc.³¹

[T]he dialectic inscribed in literary texts (what produces them as such, their internal logic) is the expression of an *ideological unconscious* that is not “born” in the school, but directly within the actual social relations and is secreted only from them.

There is, allegedly, an unmistakable whiff of Weberian “institutional sociology” about the converse claim, namely that it is the material institution (the Protestant church) that creates ideology (the Protestant religion).³² At this point let us return to *Teoría e historia* in order to pursue the details of Rodríguez’s argument.

Private versus Public

Spanish Absolutism, according to *Teoría e historia*, is characterized by the co-existence of two conflicting sets of social relations, the first associated with a feudal aristocracy and the second with an emergent bourgeoisie, whose equally conflictual ideologies, respectively those of *substantialism* or *organicism*, on one hand, and *animism*, on the other, determine the nature of cultural (re)production. These sets combine, according to Rodríguez, in a single structure, a public/private dialectic, that, while ultimately favorable to capitalist development is, as indicated above, characterized increasingly throughout the sixteenth century by a resurgent feudalism. The dialectic translates, in Althusserian terms, into the *dominance* of a *relatively autonomous* political instance, *determined* at the primary level by economic forces struggling to impose the logic of their own development within the *private* sphere but thwarted at the level of the state.

What is it, Rodríguez will ask, that causes the relations of “service” (between serf and lord) to pass over into another, radically different set of relations, involving those between subjects? His answer is categorical: “Obviamente: la aparición de una nueva fuerza social, la burguesía, no sólo como ‘clase,’ sino como comportadora de un específico modo de producción (el ‘capitalismo,’ aquí en su primera fase ‘mercantilista,’ etc.) radicalmente opuesto al modo de producción feudal” (Obviously, the appearance of a new social force, the bourgeoisie, not only as a “class” but as the bearer of a specific mode of production [“capitalism,” here in its first “mercantilist” phase, etc.] radically opposed to the feudal mode of production).³³ It is important in this context, the Spaniard will argue, not to get carried away by one’s enthusiasms. The battle between the feudal aristocracy and the emergent bourgeoisie is one thing, that between conflicting sets of social relations, another. The problem with the former is that it invites the personification of classes, specifically in the form of a transcendental or Hegelian subject. Social relations, by way of contrast, cannot be thought within the category of the subject. As far as these are concerned, the only

important question relates to whether, and in what circumstances, the final exit from feudalism was achieved, whether through the cities, as in Italy in the fourteenth century, or the Absolutist State.

To substantiate his argument, Rodríguez draws upon the *Epístolas familiares* (translated as *The Golden Letters*) of Fray Antonio de Guevara, as they relate to the rebellion of the *comuneros*. Guevara's text, the Spaniard argues, demonstrates irrefutably that it mattered very little precisely which individuals, whether noble or otherwise, were the ones to undertake the defense of "liberties," to resist taxation, to reject the hierarchy of "bloods," to question the existence of "lords," and so on. What mattered was the attempt at implementation of bourgeois relations in their first mercantilist phase, towards which both contending parties, the "State" and the "cities," contributed in their different ways.

Por eso Guevara (como Carlos V, en cierto sentido) al actuar contra los "excesos" burgueses, lo hace ya desde la estructura del "nivel público" que... atraviesa de arriba abajo sus escritos y su actividad personal en general. Un "nivel público" impuesto a partir de la necesidad de "coexistir" tanto con la organización nobiliaria — "dominante" — como con las apetencias insalvables del horizonte burgués, mercantil.³⁴

For this reason, when he came to oppose bourgeois "excesses," Guevara (like Charles V, in a manner of speaking) justifies his actions in terms of a "public level," a concept that... suffuses his writings and personal behaviour in general, from top to bottom. A "public level" imposed in response to the need to "coexist" both with the (dominant) signeurial organization and with the inassuageable demands of the mercantilist bourgeoisie.

Cashing in the details of his analysis theoretically, Rodríguez nuances the concentration of two competing sets of social relations. Although the product of the impact of bourgeois relations upon the feudal organization, the state, we learn, does not represent them to the same degree or in the same way: rather, "tiende irremisiblemente — incluso por su mera existencia — a 'servir' infraestructuralmente a [las relaciones sociales burguesas] aunque 'superestructuralmente' sus aparatos se vean dominados por la nobleza" (it tends unavoidably — through its mere existence — to "serve" bourgeois relations of production infrastructurally, although "superstructurally" its apparatuses are dominated by the nobility).³⁵ The fact that some of its apparatuses are ideological returns us to the question of how the public/private dialectic is played out ideologically.

While in Althusserian terms the State cannot "create" ideologies — that is by definition the task of the ideological instance — it does exert a transitive effectivity over them, both thematically and functionally. Bourgeois relations, it was suggested

above, secrete a very specific ideology, *animism*, which gives rise to the creation of new art forms, notably the new Petrarchan lyric, the theater, the picaresque, the “dialogue,” the novel, and so on. These forms, unsurprisingly, will embrace the public/private dialectic to its fullest extent, relishing in the existence of its two autonomous spaces. But only for a relatively brief period, say to 1530. The same forms will survive under absolutism only to the extent that they are filled with a substantialist content. *Substantialism*, by way of contrast to animism, will “assume” the same dialectic reluctantly, through the pressure of bourgeois relations exerted at the infrastructural level. At the same time, it must also “deny” the autonomy of both spheres, “en tanto que sigue suponiendo como única verdad existente la escritura unitaria (‘totalizadora,’ ‘homogeneizante’) de los signos de Dios sobre todas las cosas” (insofar as it continues to presuppose as the only existing truth a unitary [“totalizing,” “homogenizing”] writing, that of God’s signs over all other things).³⁶ We will be exploring the dynamics of these processes more fully below.

Critiquing the British Marxists

The essence of Rodríguez’s Althusserian “break” is now clear. (R)ejected, on the evidence of his critique of Bhaskar and Poulantzas, is an ideological matrix, of bourgeois extraction, that, in the form of the subject/object binary or variations thereof, has corroded Marxism from within. The Spaniard would presumably accept, again in classically Althusserian fashion, the need constantly to repeat this same “break” in an ongoing battle to keep this insidious, unconscious influence at bay. Still, from his own standpoint, the crucial move had been made, and at the very start of his career. Henceforth, there could be no gainsaying the need for Marxism in the ongoing struggle against fascism; the only task that remained was to discover exactly what this entailed and to take one’s distance from those contemporary scholars whose career trajectories had taken, and would increasingly take, a rather different course.

In *Teoría e historia*, Rodríguez was already weighing the centrality of the subject to the work of an influential British group of Marxist historians.³⁷ For E. P. Thompson, the Spaniard argues, ideology consists of “ideas” (“political,” “religious,” or “scientific”), for Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn, the self-consciousness of a class. But more significant than what divides them, from the Althusserian perspective, was what they had in common, namely the view of ideology as the “contents” of human reason, whether understood individually or collectively. After also reviewing the contribution of Christopher Hill, which he reads along the same lines, Rodríguez further elaborates:

La creencia en una verdad básica del sujeto humano, a la que se llamaría “psicología” y la ignorancia, por tanto, de la existencia de un nivel ideológico y determinante propio de cada tipo de relaciones de clase, he ahí lo que revela siempre en última instancia la presencia del *empirismo*

incluso bajo anunciados — como ocurre en este caso — francamente izquierdistas (economicistas, progresivistas/mercantilizantes, o como quiera llamárselos).³⁸

The belief in a basic truth of the human subject, otherwise in what might be called “psychology,” and the consequent failure to recognize the existence of an ideological level, which determines class relations of every kind: such is what always, in the last instance, betrays the presence of *empiricism*, even in the guise of statements that — as in the present instance — are blatantly Left-leaning in the economicist, progressivist or mercantilizing sense, or whatever you want to call it.

In contrast to this earlier treatment of the British historians, Rodríguez will pause only briefly in *De qué hablamos*, in a footnote reference, to critique the work of Terry Eagleton, whose take on Althusser, *Criticism and Ideology*, appeared in 1976, several years after *Teoría e historia*. Eagleton, allegedly, “no se enteró de la problemática althusseriana” (understood nothing about the Althusserian problematic); and while, admittedly, his *Ideology: An Introduction* (1991) is more nuanced, it still betrays the author’s same “inane” empiricism.³⁹ Rodríguez does not go into further detail, but it might be worth pausing, within the present context, to consider more closely those moments in *Ideology* when the British Marxist flirts with but fails to grasp the notion of the ideological unconscious.

“Ideology,” Eagleton writes, summarizing Althusser,

is not primarily a matter of “ideas”; it is a structure which imposes itself without necessarily having to pass through consciousness at all. Viewed psychologically, it is less a system of articulated doctrines than a set of images, symbols and occasionally concepts which we “live” at an unconscious level.⁴⁰

While admitting the importance of Althusser’s account — it represents a “major breakthrough” — Eagleton quickly proceeds to emphasize its limitations, specifically in relation to Althusser’s insistence that a subject’s ideas are a matter of its material actions, themselves inserted in material practices governed by material rituals as part of a material ideological apparatus. “One does not abolish consciousness,” Eagleton comments, “simply by an hypnotic repetition of the word ‘material.’”⁴¹ True, except Althusser’s text has more to recommend it than Eagleton is leading us to believe, insofar as it addresses the existence of distinct “modalities” “all rooted in the last instance in ‘physical’ matter.”⁴² This surely called for further discussion of materialism, in terms of matter’s emergent properties.

At such a moment as this, one is reminded of Michael Sprinker’s suggestion with respect to Eagleton’s writings, namely that, for all their stylistic elegance, “a fine

rhetorical flourish is used [too frequently] to mask a logical equivocation or finesse a theoretical difficulty.”⁴³ The effect is, allegedly, to leave one vaguely dissatisfied, “wishing for a less virtuoso performance and more hardheaded, systematic engagement with the argumentative structures of the texts discussed.”⁴⁴ If one had any doubts on this score, these are quickly dispelled when, after critiquing Althusser over the issue of materiality, Eagleton castigates the Frenchman for, he claims, unduly inflating the very concept of ideology. “It becomes,” he summarizes,

identical with lived experience; but whether all lived experience can usefully be described as ideological is surely dubious. Expanded in this way, the concept threatens to lose all precise political reference. If loving God is ideological, then so, presumably, is loving Gorgonzola.⁴⁵

Now, it is always very important in this kind of situation to get one’s facts straight, to choose one’s examples carefully and to keep one’s clowning under control, and Eagleton has sinned on all these counts. To begin with, Althusser, at least as I read him, is not *identifying* ideology with lived experience but saying that lived experience is *pervaded* by ideology, either directly, through the mechanisms of the ISA or indirectly and unconsciously, through the matrix effect of the whole social formation. The highly individual preference for Gorgonzola cheese, according to this argument, does not prevent that preference being, *at the same time*, ideologically inflected for class. Indeed, as I should not have to remind Eagleton, working-class mothers habitually viewed Gorgonzola cheese as their one “luxury,” a taste for which they shared with their “betters.”

What may appear at first glance to be a minor aberration is anything but, as transpires from Eagleton’s response to Pierre Bourdieu’s suggestion that “ideology” compares unfavorably with his own, corresponding notion of “doxa.” Specifically targeting Althusser, Bourdieu suggests that many things that Marxists call ideology operate according to very obscure processes. The Frenchman continues:

Such mechanisms are unconscious. They are accepted and that is something very powerful, which is not grasped, in my view, in the traditional definition of ideology as representation, as false consciousness. I think that Marxism, in fact, remains a sort of Cartesian philosophy, in which you have a conscious agent who is the scholar, the learned person, and others who don’t have access to consciousness. We have spoken too much about consciousness, too much in terms of representation. The social world doesn’t work in terms of consciousness; it works in terms of practices, mechanisms, and so forth. By using doxa we accept many things without knowing them, and that is what is called ideology.⁴⁶

He goes on to elaborate on the “invisible pressure” of “symbolic domination” that makes escape from it difficult.⁴⁷ Now these statements clearly called for a fierce rebuttal, not only in defense of Marxism but also of Althusserianism, whose views on ideology they traduce. But by this stage of his career, Eagleton is not up to this kind of battle. “At the same time that you were developing these theories,” he meekly points out, “the Marxist tradition itself in the work of Althusser, whatever its limits, was trying to shift the concept of ideology on to a much less conscious, and much more practical, institutional place, which in a way comes close perhaps to your own position.”⁴⁸ A reference in Eagleton’s recently published *The Event of Literature* to “what might be called the social unconscious,” identified with the “the historical and ideological forces which shape [a text] to its roots,” further confirms the presence of an absence — that of a thoroughly worked out and rigorously theorized notion of the ideological unconscious — that has always lain at the centre of Eagleton’s work.⁴⁹

The Case of the Baroque

In the second section of *De qué hablamos* Rodríguez resumes the critique of period concepts already initiated in *Teoría e historia* with respect to the “Renaissance,” but in the present context directed against the “Baroque.”⁵⁰ From his own perspective the latter is yet one more embodiment of the Hegelian Moving Spirit, wedged somewhere between the “Renaissance” and the “Enlightenment,” albeit with a Kantian overlay. “Evidentemente se trata de una historia prefabricada *ad hoc* por las burguesías capitalistas y triunfantes contra el feudalismo, pero sin duda una especie de fábrica que nos ha surtido de productos de mucho provecho y de engaños evidentes” (Clearly, what we have here is a fabricated narrative, constructed along *ad hoc* lines by triumphant, capitalist bourgeoisies and targeted at feudalism; as a model it was admittedly productive, albeit of evident falsehoods).⁵¹ The problem to be resolved is one arising from the empiricist turn in hard sciences, namely: where does human freedom lie amidst so many fixed laws and causes? The solution was found in Kant’s Third Critique, whose free play of forms allegedly met all the necessary requirements. Rodríguez charts the relevant philosophical transformations, through the Husserlian project, the phenomenological tradition of Wölflin, Worringer, Hauser, Wesbach, and so on; its Spanish manifestation in the hands of Ortega y Gasset and Emilio Orozco; and variations on the theme in Borges and Latin American “magical realism.” “Quiero decir, en suma, que la imagen abstrusa de un mismo Espíritu humano evolucionando a través de las épocas no ha existido jamás, excepto como imagen, del mismo modo que el lenguaje del yo no ha existido jamás...” (My point, in sum, is that the Human Spirit, as a single entity, evolving over the ages, has never existed other other than as an abstruse image; and the same goes for the language of the subject).⁵²

Rodríguez will break with this bourgeois tradition to locate himself on a totally different terrain, that of a social formation, which, in the case of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, finds two modes of production engaged in a life-and-

death struggle. At the ideological level, as already intimated above, this struggle pits an emergent realism, which Rodríguez calls *animism*, after Bachelard and Hegel's beautiful souls (but also in reference to Petrarch's "anime belle de virtute amiche"), against *substantialism* or *organicism*, the ideology of the dominant feudalism. Animism prioritizes the proto-subject that, combined with the image of the *literal life*, gives rise to the "eye that sees the thing." This new realism finds its classic literary form in the amorous poetry of Garcilaso de la Vega, but is subsequently the driving force behind the picaresque, in which poverty emerges no longer as a religious virtue but "una agobiante realidad social" (an oppressive social reality).⁵³ Rodríguez expatiates:

[S]i aparece la vida literal y aparece el alma bella que impregna al cuerpo bello — cualquier cuerpo lo es, sólo por existir —, aparecen también los signos literales sustituyendo a las signaturas divinas. Y esto resulta decisivo, puesto que el intercambio de signos literales es clave en el mercado y en la vida y en el ámbito teórico.⁵⁴

If literal life makes an appearance, alongside the beautiful soul that impregnates the beautiful body — any body is beautiful by virtue of the fact that it exists — also making an appearance are the literal signs that replace divine signatures. And decisively so, in that the interchange of literal signs plays a crucial role in the market, as it does in life and the realm of theory.

Feudal substantialism, *De qué hablamos* further reminds us, is distinguished not by signs but by signatures, each of which bears the imprint of the Lord. Correspondingly the only life that feudalism knows is the allegorical, epitomized by Dante's four exegetic levels, Saint Thomas' reading of the Bible, and the noble legends and lives of saints. Sustaining the whole of this ideological structure is the opposition between the Lord/lord and the serf/servant, the latter bound to the land of his or her lord.

Outside Spain — at this point Rodríguez begins to expand upon his earlier argument — the die was cast: the impact of capitalism created Protestantism. Inside Spain, by way of contrast, a process of resacralization took hold. Olivares, it should be said, tried to put an end to the power of the nobles, but the latter, led by the Braganzas in Portugal, the Híjares in Aragon, and the Medina Sidonias in Andalusia, resisted. In reality, the good Duke asked for very little: only what was necessary to turn the Spanish Crown into a modern state, but even this proved too much. Similarly, in the private sphere, the triumph of the Counter-Reformation was complete, leading to the *disappearance of life* as a textual image, with the result that re-sacralization will linger on in Spain, "prácticamente hasta hoy" (practically until the present day).⁵⁵ However, not all was lost, as Rodríguez concedes, with reference to the two great "baroque" poets, Luis de Góngora and Francisco de Quevedo.⁵⁶

Desnudo el joven, cuanto ya el vestido
 Océano ha bebido,
 restituir le hace a las arenas;
 y al Sol lo extiende luego,
 que lamiéndolo apenas
 su dulce lengua de templado fuego,
 lento lo embiste, y con süave estilo
 la menor onda chupa al menor hilo.⁵⁷

Bare the youth, all that his clothing / of the Ocean has already drunk, / to
 the sand he returns; / and then he spread it out in the Sun, / which hardly
 licking it / its sweet tongue of temperate fire / slowly assails it, and in
 gentle fashion / the least ray sucks [dry] the least thread.

This, the opening section of Góngora's *Soledades*, is referenced to confirm Rodríguez's claim that animism archetypically begins with the nude, no longer operating as a *signature* to be read with reference to sin and corruption, but as a body that is transfused by the spirit, even as it exerts its own materializing force upon the latter. From the ensuing con-fusion, of body with spirit, arises the eminently Spinozist notion of the immanence of life, personified in the figure of the wandering (therefore goal-less) bare-footed pilgrim. Like all such protagonists, this one undergoes a series of unpredictable events or adventures, each one linked to the other by nothing more than the workings of chance. His is a poetic eye/I that delights in the sheer materiality of things, that interact and metamorphose with unaccustomed fluidity and freedom, as indeed do the signs that refer to them. For Góngora, Rodríguez deduces, life is single and inherently valuable — the feudal dualism of the two lives is no more. Yet it is at this level, that of the very texture of his verse, that the reality of ideological contradiction is most pronounced. In the case of the "baroque" poet, it transpires, we no longer bear witness to *plain speech*, of classic animist vintage, but to a textual fabric that, through its metaphoric density and syntactic convolutions, conspires to *clothe* the bare concept. The animist dialectic continues to dominate, to be sure, but is now compromised by an extraneous element, originating in the impact of organicism upon a Platonic infrastructure.

The substantialist soul also undertakes a journey but, in its case, of a pre-ordained kind, towards a place of stillness at the side of its Lord. Its final act will be to relinquish its corrupt body.

Alma a quien todo un dios prisión ha sido,
 venas que humor a tanto fuego han dado,
 médulas que han gloriosamente ardido,

su cuerpo dejarán, no su cuidado:

serán ceniza, mas tendrá sentido,
polvo serán, mas polvo enamorado.⁵⁸

A soul which has imprisoned a whole god / veins that have given fluid
(fuel) to so much fire, / marrow that burned in glory, / will foresake their
body, but not their passion; / will be ashes, but will retain their feeling,
/ will be dust but dust in love.

In this, the conclusion to one of Quevedo's most famous sonnets — again the reference is Rodríguez's — we have a text also torn apart by ideological contradiction, but in which the partiality in evidence in Góngora is reversed: what we have is a substantialist infrastructure impacted by animism. Perforce the poetic voice speaks, in terms resonant with feudal humoreal medicine, of the vanity of *this* world, also of the soul's imprisonment, during the course of its allegorical sojourn, within a body rotten with sin. Yet the sonnet form is in itself a classic animist genre, which, thematically, knows only the language of erotics. The result, in the case of Quevedo, is a final paradox: a body that, while reduced to ashes, is still stirred by the force of love.

Resisting the Ideological Unconscious

While Rodríguez's work was not sufficiently well known to command the attention of Anglophone Marxists, there could be no side-stepping that of Althusser, and, predictably, the reaction to it, when it came, was typically qualified and, in the case of Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory* (1978), positively "rabid."⁵⁹ It is not my intention to replay the controversy thereby generated, but rather to foreground the continuing resistance to the ideological unconscious or, to be more exact (in the case of Althusser), the unconsciousness of ideology.⁶⁰ To this end, I wish to return briefly to the Bhaskerian tradition critiqued by Rodríguez, with an eye to the chief theoretician of Bhaskerian brand of emergentist Marxism, namely Sean Creaven, and specifically to a recent article of his entitled "The 'Two Marxisms' Revisited."⁶¹

The two Marxisms to which Creaven refers in the title of his article are Lukács's Humanist Marxism and Althusser's Structural Marxism. Creaven rightly characterises the former in terms of the centrality it accords to human agency and thereby to *consciousness*.⁶² The only problem with such an emphasis, his argument further runs, is that it ignores the extent to which, in Marx, social structures are seen as shaping human consciousness.⁶³ Creaven's next move is rather predictable: Althusserianism, it is claimed, in effect inverts the Lukácsian emphasis, with the result that human agency is "totally subordinated to a system of social relations."⁶⁴ This leaves the field clear for an emergentist Marxism to theorize social change as "the open-ended resultant of a complex intersection of generative mechanisms — those of structure and agency."⁶⁵

Now there is clearly much about emergentist Marxism, as described by Creaven, that merits very serious consideration, such as the "ontologically distinct status of

structure and agency,” the notion of “objective situational logics,” the causal efficacy of history “by virtue of the practices of the dead,” and so on.⁶⁶ But there appears to be one aspect of traditional scholarship that this same Marxism fails to transcend, namely the agency/structure binary itself. This, as we saw, was precisely the issue over which Rodríguez took issue with Bhaskerian philosophy, and in the strongest terms. To these the letter of Althusser’s text lent immediate support:

For when you begin with man, you cannot avoid the idealist temptation of believing in the omnipotence of liberty or of creative labour — that is, you simply submit, in all “freedom,” to the omnipotence of the ruling bourgeois ideology, whose function is to mask and to impose, in the illusory shape of man’s power of freedom, another power, much more real and much more powerful, that of capitalism. If Marx does not start with man, if he refuses to derive society and history theoretically from the concept of man, it is in order to break with this mystification which only expresses an ideological relation of force, based on the capitalist production relation. Marx therefore starts out from the structural cause producing the effect of bourgeois ideology which maintains the illusion that you should start with man.⁶⁷

Structure and agency, by Althusser’s estimation, are not ontological entities but the ideological categories indispensable to the smooth functioning of a capitalist mode of production, which requires, if it is to reproduce itself effectively, that people imagine themselves to be “free subjects,” free to exploit and be exploited, and, just as importantly, to be *conscious* subjects, otherwise the notion of personal responsibility before the law and so on becomes meaningless. And it is at this point, where ideology enters into consideration, that Creaven’s exposition of Althusser starts to seriously unpick itself. Thus, paraphrasing the relevant text of Althusser’s *For Marx*, he writes: “From this perspective, humans necessarily have an imaginary relationship to the world, and an ideological *consciousness* of reality, in order that they perform their function of reproducing the structure of society through their actions.”⁶⁸ As we have already had cause to observe, Althusser is saying something very different, indeed something that is diametrically opposed to what Creaven is claiming:

It is customary to suggest that ideology belongs to the region of “consciousness.” We must not be misled by this appellation which is still contaminated by the idealist problematic that preceded Marx. In truth, ideology has very little to do with “consciousness,” even supposing this term to have an unambiguous meaning. It is profoundly *unconscious*.⁶⁹

Once the slippage, from unconsciousness to consciousness, has occurred, Creaven

never looks back: the whole conceptual apparatus of Althusserianism, relating to social formations, instances, structural causality, and so on is stripped away in order to prioritize consciousness in its various guises: “ideological consciousness,” “self-conscious subjectivity,” “intentional human agency,” “a sense of self,” “reflection,” “abstraction,” and “self-conscious labor,” located within the framework of a transhistorical narrative centered upon the “unitary human subject.”⁷⁰ Unfortunately, all this came at a price, namely the repression of an alternative narrative, one that relates the historical production of the conscious subject, itself conditional upon the theorization of an ideological unconsciousness or, as it will be alternatively configured, an ideological unconscious. And it is precisely that narrative, we have seen, that Rodríguez was concerned to promote.

Revisiting the *Manifiesto*

Section III of *De qué hablamos*, entitled “*El Manifiesto y el pensamiento marxista*” (*The Manifiesto and Marxist Thought*) centers in classically Althusserian terms on the “break” that, allegedly, separates the early Marx, who focused on the Hegelian image of an alienated human nature, from the mature Marx, characterized by his decentered view of history as a process without a subject. The effort required to make this transition, according to Rodríguez, explains the vehemence with which Marx critiqued Max Stirner, defender *par excellence* of the “free ego.” How otherwise, asks the Spaniard, was he to break out of the infernal circle of bourgeois theories that, their individual idiosyncracies notwithstanding, departed from the same assumption, namely that societies are to be understood in terms of the opposition between agency and structure?⁷¹

Within this framework of analysis, Rodríguez predictably follows Althusser in interpreting the *Manifiesto* as a transitional text, between the early and late Marx, and as such torn between two corresponding narratives, one of which tells of how the productive forces outgrow the prevailing relations of production — Marx will even speak of the rebellion of the productive forces (!) — the other, of exploitation and revolutionary struggle centered around class conflict, the extraction of surplus value, and the need to raise the rate of profit. The preoccupation with the “means of production,” Rodríguez further argues, constitutes less an inversion of Hegel than a *Kantian reading of Hegel*.⁷² Mediated through an attachment to “expression,” it is this dual philosophical legacy, of Kant and Hegel, that explains the preference for a base/superstructure (form/matter) model. The latter constitutes at root a simple recasting of the traditional body/soul dichotomy and accordingly, together with its associated notion of an alienated human nature, gets short shrift from the Althusserian, not least of all in its refurbished postmodern, technological guise.

Si el desarrollo de la técnica es la clave de todo, como... se decía en *La*

sagrada familia y como dirían actualmente los teóricos postmodernos, entonces: ¿para qué hablar de la explotación de clases? ¿para qué hablar en el *Manifiesto* de “burgueses y proletarios”?⁷³

If the development of technology is the key to everything, as... was claimed in *The Holy Family* and as postmodern theoreticians would also claim, then why bother talking about class exploitation? Why the need in the *Manifiesto* to talk about “bourgeois and proletarians”?

His reasoning is quite simple: viewed from this standpoint, capitalism is not going to fall through class conflict but because the productive forces have outgrown the productive relations. But that is not the only or the least danger of prioritizing the productive forces: to confuse the development of capitalism with the development of industrial technique is to fall victim to the notion of a neutral capitalism, which presages the claim that exploitation has disappeared from our post-capitalist age.

Given the importance he attributes to the class struggle, Rodríguez inevitably came to focus upon ideology and specifically upon the version of the “break” operative at this level, between ideology viewed as “false consciousness” and, alternatively, as an immense “humus,” thematized in its juridical, political, religious, artistic, and philosophical forms. The Spaniard naturally favored the latter. That said, he considered Marx to have erred in viewing ideology, so thematized, as a mere superstructure, sustained by the “conflict” between the forces and relations of production. “Lógicamente,” he writes, “esto es un desliz que venimos delimitando desde el principio” (Logically, this is a slip, to which we have been drawing attention from the outset), to counteract which he has developed his notion of an all-pervasive ideological unconscious.⁷⁴

Blow-Up

While, as we have seen, Rodríguez countered from the outset (in *Teoría e historia*) the Althusserian principle that ideology is the discourse of the subject, it was not until a relatively later monograph, *Althusser: Blow-up* (2002), here reproduced as section IV of *De qué hablamos*, that the Spaniard explicitly targeted the interpellation of the subject, as formulated by Althusser. In his classic essay on “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus,” it will be recalled, Althusser illustrated his notion of interpellation through reference to the Scriptures and, specifically, to that passage in which Yahweh addresses Moses in the cloud.⁷⁵ The example, according to Rodríguez, is misconceived on several accounts. “Digamos de entrada,” he writes, “que para Althusser el *Otro* es consistente, es pleno en sí mismo, mientras que en realidad la ideología es inconsistente y llena de contradicciones, es como la inconsistencia de un ‘otro’ cualquiera, o sea la inconsistencia de cualquier ‘yo’” (We insist at the outset that for Althusser the *Other* is consistent, is a self-contained fullness, whereas in reality ideology is inconsistent and full of contradictions, has the inconsistency of any

“other”, which is to say, the same inconsistency of any “I/ego”).⁷⁶ But that is only the beginning: the confrontation between Yaweh and Moses is that between the master and his slave or, alternatively, between the feudal lord and his serf, and not that between the Subject and his subject. The Spaniard is emphatic: all practice may exist through and by virtue of ideology, but not all ideology exists through and for subjects. Finally, Althusser is guilty of implying the existence of a subject that exists *prior* to its insertion into a social formation.

Y aunque Althusser sabe que la individualidad está siempre sujeta por el inconsciente, todo funciona en él (y eso ocurre siempre) como si existiera una individualidad previa a la sujeción. Como si de algún modo Moisés existiera ya antes de ser interpelado por su Señor. O de otro modo, Althusser parece pensar la individualidad histórica sólo como sujeción de un sujeto previo y no como construido “*desde-siempre-ya*”, antes incluso de nacer, y por supuesto antes del “nombre propio.” Es obvio que no existe nada previo a ese estar construido “*desde-siempre-ya*.” Es un problema que Althusser intuye muchas veces, pero que casi siempre acaba por distorsionar, lo difumina y lo convierte en humo. Algo que lógicamente supone un error muy grave a la hora de conceptualizar la noción de lo que podríamos llamar el *inconsciente ideológico*.

And although Althusser knows that individuality is always subjected by the unconscious, he speaks (as was his wont) as if it (the individuality) existed prior to its subjection, as if in some way Moses already existed before being interpellated by his Lord. To put it another way: Althusser seems to think of historical individuality only as the subjection of a prior subject and not as “always already” constructed, even before being born, and of course before the imposition of the “proper name.” It is clear that nothing exists prior to this being “always already” constructed. Althusser often intuits the problem, only to end up distorting it, by diffusing it and blurring it. Something that logically presupposes an error of the gravest kind when it comes to conceptualizing the notion of what could be called the *ideological unconscious*.⁷⁷

Althusser’s failure in this respect continues to haunt his work, shadowing, for example, his discussion of the metaphor of the continent and the epistemological notion of *discovery*, contaminated as these are by an idealist residue: “Althusser ignora aquí, como es obvio, la interiorización capilar del capitalismo en la vida cotidiana de las masas” (Althusser pays no attention here, as is obvious, to the capillary interiorization of capitalism in the daily life of the masses).⁷⁸ Symptomatically, from 1978, Althusser departs progressively from the notion of a “break,” and will even suppress the adjective “historical” — “como si el mundo de las ideas viviera colgado de

las nubes y que la historia sólo funcionase en el mundo de lo terreno” (as if the world of ideas hung from the clouds, and history only functioned in the terrestrial domain below) — in an attempt to cast the opposition between materialism and idealism as a battle between two transhistorical tendencies, operating at the autonomous level of ideas.⁷⁹ Rodríguez, for his part, not only holds fast to the notion of the break, but prosecutes it further. We here arrive at the very core of Rodríguez’s work and may perhaps be excused for quoting him further at length.

El pensamiento “*desde la explotación*” es ya otra cosa. Implica directamente que todo el inconsciente burgués que nos impregna es literalmente un inconsciente de vida. Si el marxismo supone una ruptura — y evidentemente la supone — supone una ruptura con toda la “*otra*” concepción de la vida. Marx no sólo rompió con Hegel (al que por otra parte no abandonó nunca) sino con todo el inconsciente ideológico burgués que le impregnaba — como nos impregna a todos — ya desde el principio (desde su nacimiento y desde el principio de su actividad democrática y/o crítica). Sin la ruptura de Marx con ese inconsciente ideológico de base no puede haber luego una ruptura con el inconsciente/consciente epistemológico, científico o como quiera llamársele.⁸⁰

Thinking *from the standpoint of exploitation* is something very different. It implies directly that the whole bourgeois unconscious with which we are impregnated is literally a living unconscious. If Marxism presupposes a break — as evidently it does — it presupposes a break with every “*other*” conception of life. Marx not only broke with Hegel (whom in certain respects he never abandoned); he broke with the whole bourgeois ideological unconscious that impregnated him — as it impregnates all of us — from the beginning (from his birth and his first democratic and/or critical activity). Without Marx’s initial break with this ideological unconscious, there can be no subsequent break with any form of unconscious/conscious-ness, epistemological, scientific or otherwise.

Brecht

While Rodríguez remains throughout resolutely opposed to those scholars committed to anything resembling a Lukácsian Marxism, it is in the final section of *De qué hablamos*, on “Brecht y el poder de la literatura” (Brecht and the Power of Literature), where he mounts his most sustained challenge. Thus, with Korsch and Lukács in mind, he writes:

Si el marxismo (incluido su carácter teórico), supone una lucha, una

ruptura con el inconsciente ideológico burgués, con su imaginario social basado en la explotación capitalista, ¿cómo podría ser el marxismo una prolongación de ese mismo inconsciente teórico burgués — que se basaba en esa misma explotación — sólo que superando sus insuficiencias?⁸¹

If Marxism (even in its theoretical form) presupposes a struggle, a break with the bourgeois ideological unconscious, with its social imaginary that was based on capitalist exploitation, how could Marxism be a mere prolongation of this same bourgeois theoretical unconscious — an unconscious that was based on the same exploitation? Were bourgeois insufficiencies all that needed to be surmounted?

The place of engagement was carefully selected: Bertold Brecht, it will be recalled, conducted a similar campaign, targeted at Lukács's attachment to the positivist description of realism, to the neglect of the invisible bonds that constitute the real. The relevance of this position to Rodríguez's own understanding of the ideological function should not be lost, and explains why the Spaniard privileges one of the dramatist's lesser known texts, the *Diálogo de fugitivos*, which converges precisely upon the social construction, as opposed to the alienation, of individual identity.⁸² According to this text, individual identity is equivalent to a person's value, conferred, among other things, by the possession of a passport. The Tall Man spells out the consequences for the the refugee:

Puede decirse que el hombre sólo es el titular mecánico de un pasaporte. Le ponen el pasaporte en el bolsillo interior tal como se mete un paquete de acciones en la caja de caudales que, en sí misma, carece totalmente de valor, pero contiene objetos valiosos.⁸³

It could be said that an individual is only the mechanical holder of a passport. A passport is placed in his inside pocket just like a packet of shares in the cash box that, in itself, is totally without value, but that contains valuable objects.

Rodríguez is quick to close down what might otherwise seem to be an opportunity for Hegelians to impose their own agenda: “no se trata ni del fetichismo de la mercancía (eso supondría un *después*, una alienación), ni del fetichismo de los valores espirituales (Scheler, etc.) ni del “homo-economicus,” siempre simbolizado en Robinson, etc.” (it is not a question of commodity fetishism [which would presuppose an *afterwards*, an alienation], nor of the fetishism of spiritual values [Scheler, etc.], nor of “homo-economicus,” symbolized as always by Robinson Crusoe).⁸⁴ What might seem to be a favoured territory for students of reification and commodification is anything but, at least according to the Spaniard's reading:

El hombre es en la medida en que porta valor y si no, no es. Brecht ha aprendido muy bien la clave de la historicidad marxista: no partir del hombre sino de las relaciones sociales que lo construyen, que lo producen, que lo convierten en ser-valor. Con ello la dicotomía entre individuo e individuación se diluye. El individuo está ya siempre individualizado, configurado de arriba a abajo, por las relaciones sociales en las que se inscribe y que a su vez lo inscriben.⁸⁵

Man is to the extent that he bears a value, otherwise, he is not. Brecht has learned well the first principle of Marxist historicity: never set off from man but from the social relations that construct him, that turn him into a being-with-a-value. In this way, the opposition between the individual and individuation loses its purchase. The individual is always already individualized, configured from top to toe by the social relations in which he inscribes himself and at the same time is inscribed.

At this point Brecht will allegedly distance himself from a Hegelian dialectic whose emphasis upon change and transformation he otherwise defends. The unity of opposites is an impossibility: while the exploiters need the exploited, the converse is not true, and it is to the reality of this fact that Brecht will attempt to alert his audience, through the theatrical device of distancing, vis-à-vis what is being enacted on the stage. In the words of Rodríguez:

El capitalismo no puede negar a los trabajadores, ya que vive de explotarlos, ya que necesita producirlos. De ahí que sea absurdo hablar de alienación de los trabajadores al hablar del distanciamiento brechtiano. Brecht no pretende desalienar a los trabajadores para convertirlos en hombres. Brecht pretende sólo que asuman su propia condición de seres contruidos por el capitalismo.⁸⁶

Capitalism cannot negate workers insofar as it lives by exploiting them, insofar as it needs to produce them. Hence the absurdity of speaking of the alienation of workers in the context of the Brechtian estrangement effect. Brecht does not set out to dis-alienate workers so as to turn them into men. Brecht only proposes that they assume their actual condition as beings constructed by capitalism.

The Brechtian dialectic, as the *Life of Galileo* makes plain, takes a specific form: not *either... or*, but *not against... but in favor of*. Thus, not either the Church or scientific truth, but not against the Church but in favor of scientific truth.

Rodríguez's claim, it should be emphasized, is not that Brecht's theatre dramatizes the ideological unconscious, at least in any straightforward manner. In fact, as

the Spaniard readily concedes, Brecht himself does not explicitly make use of the term “ideology,” which he deeply distrusts, for its association (through Marx’s *The German Ideology*) with the concept of “false consciousness.” But Brecht does use the term “morality,” with which to refer to something that lies very close to Marxism’s mature notion of ideology, the latter understood as “ese magma inconsciente de lo ideológico [que] nos convierte históricamente en lo que somos” (the unconscious ideological magma that turns us historically into what we are).⁸⁷ More importantly, for Rodríguez, Brecht addresses the crucial question of how this “morality” is “lived.” This, in turn, raises the issue of how the theatrical machine might be deployed as a vehicle of education, with an eye to breaking the hold of the dominant ideology. And that hold, it cannot be reiterated enough, operates at the level of a textual “gestus” — Brecht’s term — below that of ideas. For gestus Rodríguez reads the ideological unconscious. Thus: “El inconsciente ideológico en cada gesto diario es lo que trata de revelar el gestus teatral de Brecht” (What Brecht’s theatrical *gestus* attempts to reveal is the ideological unconscious [at work] in each daily gesture).⁸⁸

The role of the theater, then, as Brecht conceived it, was to *objectify* those hidden causal relations that determine behavior at the level of the real, which is not to be confused with empirical reality. Such a position accords closely with the Althusserian claim that the relations of production, however mediated through “psychology”, constitute a material reality, operative “out there.” Hence, Rodríguez is careful to specify:

Y si uso el término de alienación lo hago sólo en su significado más literal del explotado que se siente feliz en su explotación. Es decir, la fetichización de un sistema que se interioriza, de una objetividad que se subjetiviza, de un inconsciente ideológico que se plasma en gestus vital y/o teatral, tal como lo percibió Brecht, y tal como lo podemos percibir hoy nosotros.⁸⁹

And if I use the term alienation, I do so only in its most literal sense, to refer to the exploited individual who feels happy in his exploitation. To refer, in other words, to the process of fetishization, whether this involves a system that is interiorized, an objectivity that is subjectivized, or an ideological unconscious that finds expression in vital and/or theatrical *gestus*, as Brecht perceived it, and as we can perceive it today.

From this position follows the importance of understanding the role of *distance*, of the kind referred to above, that separates the stage from the public. Brecht rejects the false distance of the bourgeois theater, which exists to confirm an identity — of the public with what is being represented — and to facilitate the recognition of what is unconsciously given. From the standpoint of the Brechtian theater, the subject is not prior to anything, nor is it an essence to which one can be restored through a process

of Kantian estrangement. The task of the dramatist, rather, is to defamiliarize the subject's subjection to the dominant social relations and, thereby, the process of its construction.

Las cosas — las relaciones sociales — son así y nos han hecho así, pero ¿podrían ser de otra manera y podríamos ser de otra manera? Si no entendemos la relación directa entre *Distanciamiento* y *Proceso a la individuación* no entenderemos apenas nada de los planteamientos de Brecht (y por supuesto, su radical ruptura con la distancia diderotiana o burguesa, que buscaba precisamente lo contrario: aceptar como algo natural la individuación burguesa a través del propio individuo, de la naturaleza humana, de la familia, del amor y del dinero, etc.). Toda esta serie de sobrentendidos inconscientes es lo que trata de borrar Brecht. La individuación y su sistema son algo tan social o tan artificial como cualquier otra cosa, y — como cualquier otra cosa histórica — se pueden cambiar y transformar.⁹⁰

Things — social relations — are as they are, and as they have made us. But could they be other than they are, and could we be other than we are? If we do not understand the direct relation between *estrangement* and the *process of individuation*, we will hardly understand anything about Brecht's presentations (and of course about his radical break with Diderotian or bourgeois estrangement, whose diametrically opposed goal was to present as something completely natural the bourgeois individuation in evidence in the individual, human nature, the family, love and money, and so on). This whole series of unconscious assumptions is precisely what Brecht is trying to erase. Individuation and its system are something as social or as artificial as any other thing, and — like any other historical thing — can be changed and transformed.

Conclusion

Readers steeped in the “post” discourses might think that the form taken by the conclusion to *De qué hablamos*, a discussion of Michel Foucault, would see the Althusserian making his peace with a writer who also radically questioned the notion of “Man.” But that, of course, would be a sign of having misunderstood the nature not only of Rodríguez's whole project but also, by the Althusserian's own reckoning, that of Foucault, which, the latter's “anti-humanism” of the 70s notwithstanding, “siempre se movió dentro del planteamiento sujeto/sistema..., y siempre inclinándose hacia el sujeto hasta su desbordamiento final en la apología del neo-liberalismo y del *yo libre*” (always moved within the framework of the subject/system..., and always with a bias towards the *subject*, until its final over-flowing in the apologia for neoliberalism

and the *free* subject).⁹¹ Foucault, the Spaniard will insist, never transcended the boundaries of a critique of an Enlightenment tradition, whose chief deficiency was never to have scrutinized the figure of “Man” in the light of the “technologies of the subject.” Rodríguez elaborates: “El control de las vidas... permitiría por fin la creación de un *yo libre* asumiendo su *propia vida* y sus *propios* riesgos, aunque el riesgo implique, para Foucault, también una *seguridad* o *governabilidad*, en el propio autocontrol y en las relaciones con los otros” (The control over lives ... would finally permit the creation of the *free subject*, free to assume a life of *its own* and risks of *its own*, although risk always also implied, for Foucault, *security* or *governmentality*, with respect to oneself and in one’s relations with others).⁹²

The attraction of the Foucauldian programme for liberal academics was that it allowed them to indulge their fantasies of absolute freedom. Gays and women, it transpired, were socially constructed. It was as if only the *appearance* had been retained from the classic essence/appearance dichotomy, on the basis that everything consists of arbitrary language, a puzzle of symbols and signs, an oscillation between repetition and difference, in which each is retained for an instant before being wiped clean. Except, of course, that in the midst of so much flux and instability, one thing was never questioned, namely the free subject. Rodríguez deduces: “y a partir de ahí la denuncia de las tecnologías sistemáticas que se imponían sobre el cuerpo libre del *yo libre*” (and so on to the denunciation of the systematic technologies that are imposed on the free body of the free subject).⁹³

The political consequences, as far as the Left was concerned, were catastrophic. Even Rorty, Rodríguez points out, could see the problem with Foucault and his followers: they simply had no political alternative to offer, even as an increasing economic insecurity played havoc with the everyday life of so many. Not that Rorty departed in any radical way from the otherwise all-pervasive view that society was a process of intersubjective communication, nor that he was in any position to ask what was, from the Althusserian perspective, the obvious question, namely: what was it that explained the transition from disciplinary societies to societies of control and eventually to a neoliberal capitalism that offered the possibility of an authentic freedom? The answer, of course, was the evolution of the Human Spirit, to which, from Rodríguez’s perspective, there could be only one response: “Lastimosamente esto es lo mismo que no decir nada respecto a una perspectiva histórica real y objetiva” (Unfortunately, this is the same as not saying anything of interest from the standpoint of real, objective history).⁹⁴ Rodríguez, it should be said, recognizes the Frenchman’s philosophical and historical contributions and the corrective function they have exerted. But for him the fact remains: the winning horse was always subjectivation. And this prepared the ground, by the end of ‘70s, after Foucault’s immersion in American life, for the promotion of the free subject, now converted into the entrepreneur of the self.

And what became of Marxists amidst all of this? Well, that has been the story traced

throughout this article. The desperate search began, among one-time adherents, to discover resources of hope within the best liberal tradition — “adelgazando al máximo su relación con el marxismo” (maximally reducing their ties to Marxism).⁹⁵ Some found them in the construction of the free, democratic European Union, others in God and the classic themes of Good versus Evil. It was all very sad and, after the crisis of 2008, even grotesque. Rodríguez finds it difficult to resist mockery: “Donde están hoy todas aquellas tentativas más o menos fantasmagóricas acerca del bienestar social, los derechos del hombre, la democracia plena y la ciudadanía transnacional?” (Where are all those more or less phantasmagoric attempts to promote social well-being, the Rights of Man, full democracy, and transnational citizenship?)⁹⁶ That is his right: he was one of the few to refuse to compromise with an inalienably exploitative capitalist system; to warn of the dangers of constructing a Marxism based on the “free subject”; and above all to theorize the difficulties involved not so much in changing the world as changing the prevailing ideological unconscious: “Así del ‘nacemos naturalmente libres,’ parece que no se libra nadie” (From the lemma ‘we are born naturally free,’ it seems that nobody is liberated).⁹⁷ But then the inevitable question poses itself: what is to be done? The lesson that Rodríguez has to offer, from the standpoint of his historical research, is that one should never underestimate the force of social contradiction. He is also insistent, in typically Brechtian manner, that the power of instruction, as far as the writer is concerned, consists in his or her ability less to explore the innermost turmoils of the subject than to dramatize, by objectifying it, the ideological unconscious that determines the actions of each and every one of us.

Notes

1. Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” *Surveys from Exile: Political Writings: Volume 2*, ed. and introd. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2010) 173-4.
2. In the words of one of his students, Carlos Enríquez del Árbol. See Juan Carlos Rodríguez, *Theory and History of Ideological Production. The First Bourgeois Literatures (the 16th century)*, trans. Malcolm K. Read (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2002) 7.
3. Translated under the title of *State, Stage, Language: The Production of the Subject*, trans. Malcolm K. Read (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2008).
4. See Robert Paul Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1992) 307n1. Rodríguez confesses to having literally cast all prior formulations “a la calle” (into the street) (*Teoría e historia: Las primeras literaturas burguesas [siglo XVI]*. [Madrid: Akal, 1990] 27).
5. See Malcolm K. Read, *Educating the Educators: Hispanism and its Institutions* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2003); Perry Anderson, “Components of the National Culture,” *New Left Review* 50 (1968): 3-58; Juan Carlos Rodríguez, *Theory*; Juan Carlos Rodríguez, *State, Stage, Language*; Juan Carlos Rodríguez, “Althusser: Blowup (Lineaments of a Different Thought),” trans. Malcolm K. Read, *PMLA* 123:3 (2008): 762-79; Ted Benton, *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism: Althusser and his Influence* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984).
6. At the anecdotal level, older British Hispanists will recall, at a time when Spain was still living under

the Franco regime, those slightly bizarre conversations in university common-rooms during which they were earnestly interrogated by their colleagues in English and French as to why Spain “had no philosophers to talk of and no novelists apart from Cervantes.” For Spanish writers, then, there has always been an initial barrier to the wider circulation of their work. *De qué hablamos* partially resolves this difficulty by tailoring its contents towards a wider readership — symptomatically Althusser and Brecht figure with particular prominence — but at the cost of ceasing to be strictly representative of its author’s work. Even judged on its own terms, one regrets the absence from *De qué hablamos* of extracts from *La norma* and the volumes on Lorca and Cervantes, although clearly, in these situations, issues of length are of prime consideration. Marxists will be the first to appreciate the relevance of marketing considerations in the world of publishing and will not be surprised to hear that several major English-language presses, including some on the Left, turned down translations of Rodríguez’s work on purely commercial grounds. Precisely what kind of audience was there for works, theoretical or otherwise, on a non-existent Spanish literature?

7. Juan Carlos Rodríguez, *De qué hablamos cuando hablamos de marxismo* (Madrid: Akal, 2013) 36.
8. Rodríguez, *De qué hablamos* 46-51.
9. *De qué hablamos* 48-49.
10. *De qué hablamos* 49.
11. *ibid.*
12. *ibid.*
13. *De qué hablamos* 48n28
14. Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989) 34.
15. *ibid.*
16. See Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973) 84.
17. *Possibility* 34-35.
18. *Possibility* 35.
19. For a more detailed critique of Critical Realism, along the same Althusserian lines, see Read, “Educating the Educators: Critical Realism and the Ideological Unconscious,” *Journal of Critical Realism* 12(4) (2013): 443-78.
20. *De qué hablamos* 50.
21. Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (London: Verso 1987): 299. See also 326.
22. According to Rodríguez, this process was further obscured in more recent times by the arrival of the internet: our socio-vital relations are now so deeply rooted in our ideological unconscious “que no las percibimos” (that we do not perceive them) (*De qué hablamos* 10n3).
23. *De qué hablamos* 27.
24. *De qué hablamos* 32.
25. *De qué hablamos* 32-33.
26. *De qué hablamos* 46.
27. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1990) 233.
28. See Read, “Towards a Notion of the Ideological Unconscious: Marx, Althusser, Juan Carlos Rodríguez,” forthcoming.

29. *De qué hablamos* 76.
30. *De qué hablamos* 87.
31. *ibid.*
32. *ibid.*
33. Rodríguez, *Teoría e historia* 129.
34. *Teoría e historia* 141.
35. *Teoría e historia* 147.
36. *Teoría e historia* 148.
37. *Teoría e historia* 379-91.
38. *Teoría e historia* 388.
39. *De qué hablamos* 175n12.
40. Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1999) 148-49.
41. Eagleton, *Ideology* 149.
42. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971) 166.
43. Michael Sprinker, "After the Revolution: Eagleton on Aesthetics," *Contemporary Literature* 32:4 (1991) 573.
44. Sprinker, "After the Revolution" 574.
45. *Ideology* 149.
46. Terry Eagleton, "Doxa and Common Life: An interview," *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 1994) 267-68.
47. Eagleton, "Doxa" 270.
48. *ibid.*
49. Terry Eagleton, *The Event of Literature* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2012) 160, 168.
50. See *Teoría e historia* 122 and following.
51. *De qué hablamos* 95.
52. *De qué hablamos* 100.
53. *De qué hablamos* 102.
54. *ibid.*
55. *ibid.*
56. For the purposes of exposition, I have conflated below the details of Rodríguez's argument in *De qué hablamos* (95 and following) with those of *Teoría e historia*. For the latter, see *Teoría e historia* 94, 106-07, 122 and following.
57. Luis de Góngora, *Soledades*, ed. John Beverley (Madrid: Cátedra, 1982) 77.
58. James M Cohen, *The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964) 269-70.
59. Resch, *Althusser* 371.
60. See Keith Nield and John Seed, "Theoretical Poverty or the Poverty of Theory," *Economy and Society* 8:4 (1979): 383-415.
61. Sean Creaven, "The 'Two Marxisms' Revisited: Humanism, Structuralism and Realism in Marxist Social Theory," *Journal of Critical Realism* 14 (2015): 7-53.
62. Creaven, "Revisited" 17.
63. "Revisited" 18.

64. "Revisited" 25.
65. "Revisited" 44.
66. "Revisited" 43.
67. Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism* (London: New Left, 1976) 205.
68. "Revisited" 23, emphasis added.
69. *For Marx* 232-33.
70. "Revisited" 29.
71. Rodríguez, we have seen, and will see further, is equally unsparing in his criticism of Stirner's modern-day counterparts.
72. *De qué hablamos* 141.
73. *De qué hablamos* 140.
74. *De qué hablamos* 149.
75. Althusser, *Lenin* 178-79.
76. *De qué hablamos* 178.
77. *ibid.*
78. *De qué hablamos* 179, 181.
79. *De qué hablamos* 187, 188.
80. *De qué hablamos* 190.
81. *De qué hablamos* 268. A task still to be undertaken is the comparison between Rodríguez's "Brecht" and Fredric Jameson's *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1998), as part of a larger project dedicated to assessing the Hegelian "political unconscious" alongside its Althusserian "ideological equivalent." For purely circumstantial reasons, Jameson has enjoyed the kind of coverage within the English-speaking academy denied to Rodríguez.
82. To the best of my knowledge, this work of Brecht's is unavailable in any English translation.
83. Bertold Brecht, *Diálogos de refugiados*, trans. Juan de Solar (Madrid: Alianza, 1994) 10.
84. *De qué hablamos* 282.
85. *De qué hablamos* 283.
86. *De qué hablamos* 289-90.
87. *De qué hablamos* 299-300.
88. *De qué hablamos* 299.
89. *De qué hablamos* 300.
90. *De qué hablamos* 310.
91. *De qué hablamos* 324.
92. *ibid.*
93. *De qué hablamos* 330.
94. *De qué hablamos* 338.
95. *De qué hablamos* 340.
96. *ibid.*
97. *De qué hablamos* 342.

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"Why does the other want to destroy me?": The Face of the Other, the Death Drive, and *Surplus Jouissance* in the Time of Late Capitalism

Alexander Bove

I am of the opinion that there has been a break, and this is to be located at the advent of secular capitalist modernity... The crucial shift rendering modernity incommensurable with its own past consists in the emergence of the subject's self-understanding as "free." This consciousness is not unrelated... to the concomitant, overarching shift, on which this work focuses, from spirit to value.¹

[I]f there is one thing that gives a completely different sense to what Hegel proposed, it is what Freud had nevertheless discovered..., which he characterized... as the death [drive], namely the radical character of repetition, this repetition that insists, and which characterizes the psychic reality, if there is such a thing, of this being inscribed in language.²

I.

In the conclusion of her first book, *surplus: Spinoza, Lacan*, A. Kiarina Kordela poses the ambitious and timely question of whether an ethics of psychoanalysis could be formulated as a ground for political action that stresses the inherent contradictions and inequities of late capitalism. Her answer is yes, with a little help from Spinoza and Marx, and in this book she reveals how Lacanian ethics contrasts with ethical theories grounded in an "encounter with the neighbor," insofar as in such ethical models "(e.g., notably, Levinas's face-to-face encounter with the other)... a third term is missing, which would take into account the death drive."³ This means of formulating the distinction between ethical systems in itself demands admiration for its logical

elegance and clarity. But since Kordela's concern here is ultimately to formulate the political implications of this distinction in terms of the structure of "the gaze" under modern capitalism — as soon as capitalism turns surplus into "surplus-enjoyment," as she puts it, the subject is compelled to embody its "internal opposition" objectively in the gaze — she is led to evade (implicitly in the conclusion and explicitly in a lengthy footnote) the direct correlation implied here, albeit a fascinating but initially disconcerting one, *between ethics and the death drive*.⁴ Although this correlation may seem in some ways paradoxical, it is in fact strongly suggested by the logic of Kordela's argument, and, I will argue, more faithful to Lacan, who points repeatedly to the nature of the drive as itself far from straightforward, in fact, as paradoxical in essence. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to pause over this ambiguity and consider at length precisely whether and in what way the death drive introduces a "third term" into the ethical relation between the subject and the other, and further, whether this ethical structure is in some way a function of capitalism.

Kordela's innovation of framing her analysis of the ethics of psychoanalysis in terms of Spinoza's philosophy, which allows her to address modern secular capitalism's surplus enjoyment more specifically by drawing an elegant structural homology between psychoanalysis and Marxism, is quite compelling and deserves, it seems to me, serious consideration. I will try to sketch out in some detail what I think are the most relevant aspects of Kordela's position in order to raise a pivotal question about the way in which she formulates Lacanian ethics and the problem of the death drive. But ultimately, to state the underlying ethical aporia here at the outset, the most significant advantage of Kordela's approach seems to be that it allows her to circumvent the dilemma of the traditional dichotomy between immanent and transcendent ethical systems, inasmuch as Spinoza's "immanent causality," which Kordela sees as grounding psychoanalysis in the form of "transferential knowledge," avoids this dilemma by explaining Being in terms of a "differential substance" whose immanent effects, that is, its "surplus," paradoxically produce its original cause.⁵ This surplus marks the convergence of three fundamental concepts in the various discourses: *God* for Spinoza, *surplus-value* for Marx, and *surplus-enjoyment* for Lacan. Psychoanalysis, however, provides a fundamental concept that inscribes this very convergence in the single term, that of "the gaze," which Kordela argues is the immanent cause of being and therefore of the subjects' reference to good and evil. To quote from Kordela:

In secular capitalist modernity, Being, as follows from Spinoza's immanent causality, is the first cause, insofar as it is lacking. Or, what amounts to the same, Being, as follows from Marx's analysis of capital, is surplus, insofar as it is not given to experience. The surplus in question is conceived as surplus-value in economy, and, as surplus-enjoyment on the level of the signifier and the subject.... Surplus-enjoyment is the first cause, which

is nothing other than the gaze, “not as such but in so far as it is lacking,” and it is always lacking since “the gaze I encounter... is not a seen gaze, but a gaze as imagined by me in the field of the Other.”⁶

This model holds immense promise in its very concise navigation between Marx’s analysis of capitalism and Freud/Lacan’s analysis of the (capitalist) subject elegantly condensed in the single concept of the gaze (which also paves the way for Kordela, especially in her later work, to incorporate biopolitics into her thought as well).

Understandably, then, Kordela’s book is far more concerned with the concept of the gaze, as a term that disrupts traditional systems of ethics, than with the ethical function of the death drive as such, and, as I will explore below, the two terms tend to structurally merge in her book. More specifically, by illustrating the way in which the Lacanian gaze objectifies Spinoza’s radical re-conceptualization of Truth as a modernist break with the past, Kordela manages to foreground the frequently neglected ethical and ontological dimensions of Lacan’s concept. Reading Spinoza “psychoanalytically” against himself, in contrast with Neo-Spinozists, Kordela shows how Spinoza marks the radical modernist shift from truth grounded in “spirit” or God to one grounded in “objective knowledge,” within which, however, truth enters into a value-system.⁷ Thus “objective knowledge” is not to be taken, as the neo-Spinozists seem to do, as a body of unshakable scientific facts, because for Kordela “Spinozian metaphysics is of value only insofar as one understands, against Spinoza’s intentions, the function of fiction in history (discourse) following from the Spinozian conception of truth as the standard of both itself and fiction.”⁸ The fact that truth and fiction are mutually constitutive, coupled with the fact that Being is introduced into the secular world of beings as its immanent cause or surplus (the effect of its own effect), means that the structure of modernity is characterized by a lack in the Other (God/Truth), or “‘the universality of the signifier’ without a Master-Signifier grounding it,” that is at once its ethical potential and its ethical bind.⁹ And here is where Spinoza supplements Lacan so well in grounding and explaining a convergence between modern ontology and ideology, insofar as Being’s status as surplus and its integral relation to a truth/fiction dialectic means that the *telos* of Being must always already be unconsciously provided by the subject; that is, Lacan “adopts the Spinozian conception of history as aimless, and supplements it, according to the Spinozian conception of truth, with a willful and intentional gaze (and, hence, aim) which, however, is ‘a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other.’”¹⁰

Unlike the gaze, however, the death drive in Kordela’s book is not so easily summarized or pinned down, and often seems to slip into ambiguity. It is first discussed in relation to Žižek’s position that the death drive is precisely the concept that eludes Spinoza’s philosophy: “What is unthinkable for [Spinoza],” as Žižek puts it, “is what Freud terms ‘death drive’: the idea that *conatus* is based on a fundamental act of self-sabotaging.”¹¹ Kordela counters Žižek by pointing out that since, according

to Spinoza, God exists only in and through beings in all their aspects, and since God is equally marked by a “radical absence of will or entelechy” then “beings too” will be marked by an opposition to the existential tendency to persist in being themselves, which is “precisely the death drive.” And moreover, “it is in fact only the introduction of a fiction (an end),” and therefore by her own logic a gaze, “that allows the one (the pleasure principle or the death drive) to outweigh the other.”¹² So we see that in this first instance, in objecting to Žižek’s objection, the death drive is contingent on the gaze as that which provides the fiction/truth of “one or the other,” pleasure principle or death drive. And yet no sooner is it introduced in this way than the death drive quickly becomes, like the gaze itself, something that is presupposed in the very distinction between truth and fiction. Thus, as a

being of the signifier,... even when the subject struggles to survive, this process is possible only because of the “foundation” of the death drive that allows the subject to construct a fiction that motivates it to survive. And one of the earliest and most succinct ways of articulating the relation between the pleasure principle and death drive is Spinoza’s ternary conception of truth, as the standard both of itself and of the false.¹³

Although the death drive appears at first to directly oppose *conatus*, or the pleasure principle, we quickly see that “self-interest” actually presupposes the death drive in the same way that “truth” presupposes a fiction of a second order (of a meaningful will or *telos*). In this way, the death drive holds an ethically ambivalent place in this structure, poised between, in the first case, a mechanism of interpellation for the subject (invisibly grounding ideological truths), and in the second, a *surplus* of the system attached in some way to the “third term” of ethics, the gaze.

However, this apparent ambiguity is by no means a self-contradiction in Kordela’s theory. Rather, it reflects the tricky, yet persuasive logic of immanent causality, which is only clearly worked out in another register, that of the gaze. Kordela best uses set theory to explain this tricky logic, a logic that is rooted in the historical break that defines modernity in terms of a system of (capitalist) value, which paradoxically includes infinity in its internal register in order to achieve a universal exchangeability. Kordela uses this “not all of set theory” to define the immanent causality of the gaze, which is at once part of and an exception to (as surplus) the “set” of beings: “Just as money is both inside and outside the set of all commodities, the gaze is both within the field of appearances [vision or representation] and not in it.”¹⁴ Kordela dubs this paradox, in Lacanese, *extimacy*, which “emerges on the level of set theory, and not on that of [Kantian] antinomies.”¹⁵ We will return to this concept of extimacy in relation to the death drive, but here it is important to note that Kordela uses it to explain what eludes Kantian logic, the apparent problem of an element of a system appearing to be at once interior to, and also logically prior to, that system, using the

death drive as her example (thus addressing the ambiguity sketched out above): “While for the dynamic antinomy the death drive is simply not homogenous with the pleasure principle, in terms of set theory it is both heterogeneous and homogenous, since it is both an exception to and a member of its field.”¹⁶ The death drive thus has this structural homology with the gaze, but is not identical to it since the “field” it serves as extimate to (at least here) is not representation (beings) in general but the pleasure principle (Spinoza’s *conatus*). We can only say at this point that the death drive is structurally consistent with, but subsidiary to or subsumed by, the gaze. This is presumably why Kordela claims, in her only straight-forward discussion of the relation between ethics and the death drive in the book, which occurs in a lengthy footnote objecting to Žižek’s objection to Spinoza, “[n]or is the distinction between the death drive and the ethical purely a matter of degree.... As we shall see in the discussion of ethics below, the distinction is genuinely structural.”¹⁷ Although Kordela never makes this structural “distinction” explicit, it seems, as I have explored here, something less than self-evident, although clearly the structural distinction to be made here is with the gaze, which as *the surplus to good and evil*, is not to be structurally distinguished from the ethical: “Paraphrasing Spinoza, we could say that the gaze is the standard of both good and evil. The gaze is the proper level of the ethical insofar as it is the precondition of good and evil.”¹⁸

This distinction comes into sharper focus, however, when Kordela considers more explicitly the significance of the death drive in relation to secular capitalism. The most interesting discussion of the death drive in relation to capitalism (however brief) occurs in support of an explanation of capitalist *jouissance*. Libido, Kordela explains, at first appears as a force belonging to Eros for “binding” members of a group, but it turns out upon closer analysis to do so in the service of the death drive, as a means of making all individual members of the group exchangeable, so that “libido is to subjects what value is to commodities.”¹⁹ Here is Kordela quoting and explicating Lacan in her explanation of why Lacan “eventually replaced the word libido with enjoyment [*jouissance*]” under secular capitalism (with Kordela’s own translations in brackets):

[I]t is “*jouissance* that Freud implies through the primary processes.” For ... [the libido is... organ] — in the sense of the organ insofar as it is lacking, that is, it is *objet a* or gaze — and... its true nature is that of the death drive — because of which the subject becomes “...[the object of the Other’s desire],” thereby yielding to the Other the access to enjoyment.²⁰

We will note that the death drive corresponds with the libido here in its function of binding the subject to an ontology of secular capitalism by transferring *jouissance* to the Other. The death drive, in this brief reference, is the “true nature” of both the *objet a* and the gaze (and by extension *jouissance*) whose action is to transform the

subject into the “object of the Other’s desire” precisely by transforming a fiction into an (epistemological) truth:

[I]t is *no longer* [under secular capitalism] the subject, but the Other (“objective knowledge”) who enjoys, insofar as the subject’s unconditional, self-sacrificial devotion to the Other allows the inconsistent and arbitrary reasons offered by the Other to function as *if* they were necessary causes (truth).²¹

It is this counterfeit “*as if*” function (my italics) of propping up an objective “truth” with a contingent fiction, as the “true nature” of the death drive under capitalism, that I would like to pursue at length later, but for now let us focus on the relation between the death drive and capitalist *jouissance*. This crucial shift of the role of “enjoyment” from the subject onto the Other is for Kordela a cause/effect of the shift from spirit to value that characterizes the ontology of modern capitalism. For Lacan, “[w]ith the advent of secular capitalism” Kordela quotes, “the impotence of adjoining the surplus-enjoyment to the truth of the master... is suddenly voided.”²² This accounts for the paradoxical structure of the “noncoercive” hegemony of the “free” capitalist subject: just as “surplus-value adjoins itself to capital,” “although the Other’s enjoyment differentiates itself as enjoyment... from itself as surplus-enjoyment ..., surplus-enjoyment adjoins itself to the truth of the Master (Other), so that both become one — an objective cause, and no longer an arbitrary reason.”²³

So, if surplus *jouissance* accounts for the “hegemonic discipline” of secular capitalism insofar as the subject is interpolated within a system of semantic and economic values (signs and money), with the death drive representing the “true nature” of this capitalist shift in the gaze “because of which the subject becomes... [the object of the Other’s desire],” then this gives the death drive a central role in capitalist hegemony, but only *insofar as it is seen as bound to or ethically subsidiary to the gaze as the “proper level of the ethical.”* Moreover, from the point of view of the ethical encounter, this means that there is no framework within which to conceptualize the encounter with the little other as such, which means the “missing third term,” is still, in a sense, missing. As Kordela puts it:

[I]n short, in my encounter with the other, I am being placed under her gaze. Therefore, the encounter with the other is in truth directly an encounter with the Other, insofar as her desire and gaze are only imagined by me in the Other — which is why the whole encounter is precisely self-referential.²⁴

Thus, when Kordela comes to her conclusion, and puts the ethics of her model to the test, something interesting happens. For her system works impressively well

when the subject is considered in relation to the gaze of what Lacan calls the big Other (the symbolic Order, or its projection as God, the Law, and so on), but without structural recourse to exteriority as such, her theory seems to stumble upon the problem of the little other, the empirical other, or what she occasionally refers to as the “neighbor.” It is here, of course, that she contrasts an ethics of unmediated intersubjectivity with a Lacanian ethics that recognizes the presence of a third term, the gaze, and here that she gives Levinas (to whom we shall return presently) as a prime example of the former model which neglects the third term. But the death drive only functions in any ethical way for Kordela in the form of the gaze (of the big Other, or as “imagined by me in the field of the Other”), so that in terms of human relations, and to that extent political action, I would argue, her system only closes up on itself again and misses the point of the ethical encounter — and this, moreover, points to an aporia we find in many approaches to an ethics of psychoanalysis (in the form of “secondary narcissism,” for instance, or “imaginary intersubjectivity”). Thus Kordela insists that “[t]he everyday encounter with our neighbor, or the encounter with the random ‘neighbor’... are all encounters with oneself” that are projected as an “external opposition” onto the sphere of the big Other in the form of the gaze.²⁵ Moreover, this convergence of the other and the Other is given specifically in an explication of the structural homology between the capitalist and psychoanalytic conceptions of the subject: “[b]oth use-value or the ‘object,’ the appearance of being..., and exchange-value or the signifier [the subject] are the effects of an empirically not given surplus, that is, in psychoanalysis, of ‘*objet a*,’ and ‘the *objet a* in the field of the visible is the gaze.’”²⁶ So it seems that the structure of capitalism exploits a kind of ontological legerdemain (via a play on the internal/external opposition) in order to create the subject’s (misrecognized) position within it, a legerdemain which is also well defined by psychoanalytic theory. But it remains to be seen whether psychoanalysis provides a “meta” perspective of this legerdemain, a space for the ethical encounter that, even if unrealized, still remains a reference point for the ethics of the late capitalist subject.

II.

In order to address these larger issues I would like to turn for a moment to a discussion of one particular structure of the subject offered in Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis that might be just the one that would help explain the broader ethical function of the death drive and the problem of the little other under capitalism: the structure of *the pre-psychotic subject* and the function of what Lacan calls the “as if” mechanism. As is well known, Lacan explains the structure of the psychotic subject in terms of a “foreclosure” (“*Verwerfung*” is Freud’s term — note the economic allusion which Lacan plays on throughout the seminar on psychoses) on the “master signifier,” the *name-of-the-father*, that quilts the subject’s relation to the symbolic order, a key signifier in allowing the subject to escape from primary narcissism and encounter the otherness of others. This is why little others for Schreber (the subject of Freud’s

famous case study on psychosis, itself the subject of Lacan's seminar on the psychoses) appear as sham beings, or "cursory contraptions," as Schreber calls them. But this introduces a new challenge into Lacan's theoretical exposition by shifting the focus onto a seemingly subsidiary point: for if the subject lacks a quilting, or a grounding, in such a fundamental ontological structure (*langue* itself), how has he or she gone through life up until the point of the psychotic break functioning as a "normal" subject within society (Schreber's occupation as a judge being the most famous case in point)? Lacan's answer at this point, which draws on his dynamic distinction between the symbolic, the imaginary, and real, is as follows:

Here we obviously find the *as if* mechanism.... It's a mechanism of imaginary compensation — you can verify the usefulness of the distinction between the three registers [the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real] — for the absent Oedipus complex, which would have given him virility in the form, not of the paternal image, but of the signifier, the name of the father.²⁷

Whereas, according to the psychoanalytic/Lacanian structure, the subject requires the *primary repression* of a *signifier*, name-of-the-father, in order to "quilt" its relation to the symbolic, if it happens (as in psychosis) that this ontologically foundational signifier has been *foreclosed* instead of repressed, then the subject must substitute an *image*, the "paternal image," in place of a signifier, thereby changing the very structure of the subject such that the *ontological ground* of the subject in the symbolic is exchanged for the *specular ground* of the subject in the imaginary. This later model, the *as if* structure, I am proposing, provides a useful concept in clearing up some of the ambiguities mentioned above regarding the psychoanalytic insights into ethics and ontology under capitalism, particularly with respect to the relation of the other to the Other. For if the relation between the imaginary and the symbolic is structurally fractured, as the case of the psychotic demonstrates, the very nature of the identity of the little other is forfeited, that is, the very function of *particularity* becomes elided, *particular* people and things enter into a system of exchangeability, existing only as *if* they had particularity, despite their phantasmal lack of it.

In order to illustrate the fundamentally ontological significance of the symbolic order, Lacan points out the function of certain sentence structures — such as "Thou art the one who..." or even the simple deictic, "that's it!" — which evoke the necessity of the signifier to call a person or thing out of its undifferentiated multiplicity into its particular structure of *being-towards*, unfurling a temporality before itself. Of course, in the psychoanalytic discourse, this coming into being of the subject is always already defined in terms of a split, introduced by the signifier, which Lacan situates between the imaginary and the symbolic registers, around the "lost object" of the "real"; it is in the gap between these two registers, in the fact of their being "quilted," to use Lacan's

term, by an arbitrary Master Signifier, that *Being* emerges as a lack, an (absent) “real” surplus or Gaze, that supports *jouissance as difference beyond* the enclosed abyss of the specular imaginary of primary narcissism. Lacan is unequivocal about the fact that it is the death drive (of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) that gives *jouissance* its ontological relation to the ego:

There’s no ambiguity here. It’s at the level of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that Freud strongly indicates that what in the end gives the specular image of the apparatus of the ego its real support, its consistency, is that it is sustained within by this lost object, which it merely dresses up, by which *jouissance* is introduced into the dimension of the subject’s being.²⁸

The real, existing for the subject only as *objet a*, an absence beyond representation, is precisely what provides the (split) subject with a beyond, and therefore, a place for the little other in the symbolic order, the big Other, since the little other originates only in the closed system of the mirror image, or the imaginary:

The former, the other with a small o, is the imaginary other, the otherness in a mirror image, which makes us depend upon the form of our counterpart. The latter, the absolute Other, is the one we address ourselves to beyond this counterpart, the one we are forced to admit beyond the relation of a mirage, the one who accepts or is refused opposite us... the one to whom we always address ourselves.²⁹

But by virtue of the ontological legerdemain of psychosis, the psychotic subject is structurally unable to address the Other (otherness/difference) of the other, except imaginarily; her system is altered, unhinged with respect to the Symbolic Order, although it functions as if it were not. Little others are only self-referential reflections caught up in a system of exchangeability; they lack ontological backing.

Similarly, this *as if* structure can be applied to the analysis of capitalism as well, as illustrated in Marx’s analysis of the structure of the commodity form and its internal contradiction. For Marx, the fetishistic aspect of the commodity (its specific relation to desire or *jouissance*) results from a foundational fiction, or concealed displacement, at the basis of the structure of capitalism whereby the relations between individuals (the forces of social production) appear *as if* they were the relations between things (the commodity market). Or, in Marx’s words, “the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labor as objective characteristics of the products of labor themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things.”³⁰ Furthermore, this illusion does not come without a price of its own, one aspect of which is that the object now has a double role to play, at once to function like a *particular* object within a social structure and to fulfill the effective *form* of that structure itself; the commodity,

that is, is split between two heterogeneous registers, use-value and exchange-value. Since the exchange-value doesn't properly belong to it, but is a surplus imposed on it through a concealed displacement of the structure itself, the object acquires the uncanny effect of having a "fantastic" and "supra-sensible" character that is distinct from its materiality:

The commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labor within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material [*dinglich*] relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relations between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the *fantastic* form of a relation between things.³¹

But if we return this question of the ontological causality of commodity fetishism to the context of Lacan's imaginary/symbolic/real dynamic, and the psychoanalytic articulation of the pre-psychotic *as if* structure, we will see that the internal contradiction of the commodity is itself a concealed displacement (experienced subjectively as fetishism) of the contradiction concealed within the false totality of the social structure that gives it its "as if" imaginary status (its surplus enjoyment). That is, since labor is by definition *social* rather than private, and therefore the sum total of labor of any society is the sum total of its *social* product, this labor-production-product network is in fact the economic expression of the social structure's *symbolic form*. But since under capitalism a constitutive element of the symbolic form, its social nature, must drop out of the equation in order to sustain the constitutive fiction of the Master (that is, that commodities are the "products of labor of private individuals who work independently of each other") this lost or foreclosed symbolic element must return somewhere else in the system, which it does in the form of the imaginary "real" surplus value of the commodity itself.³² As the symbolic social relation between producers must now be displaced onto the level of commodities that interact, as if independently, in a system of exchange, which is *surplus* or transference itself, *exchangeability* now becomes the paradoxical "*objective*" *form* of the social structure — and the commodity fetish becomes its material embodiment, its fictional *as if* cause of desire and objectivity. Finally, the money-form "universalizes," or "externalizes," this "naturalized" but invisible contradiction in the commodity-form, materializing exchangeability itself, which therefore structures, according to this *as if* function, the totality of the social system as a whole around the repressed irrational or antonymic truth of the Other, the "social character of private labor."³³ Or, as Marx puts it:

[W]hat appears to happen is not that a particular commodity becomes money because all other commodities express their value in it, but, on the contrary, that all other commodities universally express their values

in a particular commodity because it is money.³⁴

Lacan’s dynamic allows us to add: money, the imaginary object *par excellence*, sutures the now fractured relation between imaginary desire (commodity fetishism) and symbolic form (exchange value in place of social production) by being at once a commodity and the commodity form, a particular and a universal. Money, a product of the *as if* structure, creates the possibility of the *as if* structure of capitalism. Kordela seems to forget the implicit sleight of hand or projection that occurs between the heterogeneous registers of social and libidinal energy here: that the repression of *social* labor and its projection as *private* surplus value is necessary for the transformation of *material* social production into the “*fantastic form*” of commodity fetishism.

This would mean that the subject of modern capitalism is grounded in the imaginary rather than the symbolic and therefore, as Marx noted, subject to the same exchangeability as the commodity. Lacan in fact describes the preconscious/preverbal realm of the imaginary in terms of a de-sublimated bodily repetition and exchangeability comparable to that of the commodity:

Everything of the order of this preverbal thus partakes of what we can call an intraworldly *Gestalt*, within which the subject is the infantile doll that he once was.... Universal equivalence is the law of this world, and it is even this that leaves us sufficiently uncertain whether any structure in it can be pinned down.³⁵

The ontological foreclosure that characterizes the pre-symbolic imaginary order gives it its specular, inert nature, marks its *lack-of-being-towards*, rooted as it is in a primary narcissism wherein the other is always already only the mirror-image of the subject and the subject a reflection of the other. Worst of all, this self-objectified specular subject of the imaginary order is defined by the capitalist inter-subjective cul-de-sac of competition, greed, and envy, precisely *in its relation to itself*: “The aggressive tension of either me or the other is entirely integrated into every kind of imaginary function in man.”³⁶ The realm of the unhinged imaginary, then, like capitalism, is marked by an erotic/aggressive competition that is *exclusively self-reflexive*; it is “in itself an incestuous and conflictual relation... doomed to conflict and ruin.”³⁷

Kordela does in fact also point out that the contradiction inherent in capitalism stems from a structural play between totality and exception, as discussed above, based on a paradoxical relation between part and whole expressed in commodity fetishism, but, of course, without reference to the *as if* structure or the imaginary/symbolic/real registers of Lacan. For Kordela, the “not all” of set theory suffices to explain this logical antinomy: “For the totality of the field of exchange-value to form itself, one commodity (money) must form the exception against which the exchange-value of any other commodity can be directly measured, without comparison to all

other (indefinitely many) commodities.”³⁸ For Kordela, however, this elusive set-theory logic (of the kind invisible from the perspective of the Kantian antinomy) of commodity fetishism reveals a structural identity between Being and Thought: “Commodity fetishism, therefore, is about how both Being and Thought are a Nothing that manifests itself as something either qua appearance or qua real appearance, or, conversely, that Being and Thought are the effect of the fact that the empirical world consists of appearances and real appearances, languages and bodies.”³⁹ Kordela points out here that what Kant considers a “‘transcendental subreption,’ that is, the false projection onto ‘objective reality’ of the ‘idea’ that ‘serves as a rule’ of reason,” is nothing other than a form of “category fetishism,” since what looks like an error from one perspective, actually works, “precisely because of commodity fetishism, that is, the fact that Thought and Being share the same structures. There is no projection, but identity between two structures.”⁴⁰ But by shifting from psychoanalysis and Spinozism to set theory to explain the structure of commodity fetishism, which Kordela calls “the key to both a secular epistemology and ontology,” Kordela, it seems to me, is limited in her explanation, since structural identity does not necessarily entail exchangeability, which leaves a blind spot from the perspective of a capitalist ontology.⁴¹ Thus Kordela draws the following conclusion from the “not all of set theory” explanation of the identity of Being and Thought:

In the era of secular reason and capitalist economy, the status of Being is that of the unconscious, that is, Being has no ontic existence, but only ontological (which is to also say, ethical). From the ontic perspective, Being is (non-)Being, or, by analogy to the unconscious, Un-Being. Something that has only ontological existence, like the unconscious, is a relation of function. *Being is, specifically, the function of self-referentiality.*⁴²

Being, under capitalism, is ontological without the ontic precisely because, in a Spinozian way, the Thought/Being split produces a surplus, as illustrated above. But isn't the move of reversing this logic to posit Being as ontological but not ontic akin to the example of reification Marx gives that “all other commodities universally express their values in a particular commodity because it is money”? If we accept the idea I'm putting forward here, then Kordela is only partly right in her conclusion here: Being under modern secular capitalism is not ontological or ontic, but rather imaginary, which gives it its apparent status of “*the function of self-referentiality.*” That is, set theory elides the fact that, from the perspective of capitalism, money is that *as if* element, taken from the field of the imaginary (the commodity) and projected onto the field of the symbolic (exchange-value). In the psychoanalytic sense this refers to the function of the gaze. Moreover, this *as if* function is precisely the *ethical character of the paradox of the gaze*, and it seems in a sense to have been latent in Kordela's theory all along:

To be sure, there would be no gaze that sees my good as good if it were not “a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other.” But as soon as it is imagined, it functions as if it were an external gaze, giving material consistency to the Other, which otherwise does not exist. The Other emerges as a reality with a set of values only under the precondition that I imagine a second degree Other, a gaze, which makes out of the Other a consistent whole or All. True, “there is no Other of the Other” but this is all the more why I must imagine it in the field of the Other in order to be able to say: “this is my good.”⁴³

As Kordela quite rightly explains, “beyond phenomenality, beyond the two modes of existence of value, there is pure value or the gaze, a Nothing that is Surplus.”⁴⁴ This pure nothing, we could also say, is the space of the pure nothing of inscription into the symbolic order, but what places the gaze in this “beyond,” in the symbolic network of the big Other? The gaze, as Kordela repeatedly confirms, is always “*imagined* by me in the field of the Other” — that is, like the repressed “social character of private labor,” it is the repressed *imaginary* character of the symbolic Other of modern-capitalism.

III.

For Lacan, especially in *Seminar XVII*, where he develops his concept of surplus-*jouissance* in relation to capitalism, the death drive is both a function of and a presupposition of the symbolic, almost a kind of purely material writing at the level of ontology and the real (the “letter” is Serge Leclaire’s term for this). As a pure unconscious inscription of the subject as such into the “signifying chain,” the death drive, which insists on repetition as the return of this Nothingness beyond, thereby defines the very being of the subject: *a relation of nothing or lack to the desire of the Other*. This is why Serge Leclaire claims that “there is no subject conceivable except in this relation of annulment with *jouissance* and no *jouissance* one can speak of outside this relation of oscillation with the subject.”⁴⁵ And this explains precisely why *jouissance* is so important in considering the relation of ethics to the death drive, for “[f]rom a dynamic perspective, *jouissance* designates the immediacy of access to ‘pure difference’, which the unconscious structure prevents and accommodates at the same time.”⁴⁶ Exteriority is therefore inscribed in the Lacanian system only in a paradoxical way, as what he calls “extimacy,” and extimacy is inscription, the ground of the subject in its own annihilation as the “unary trait” and its instance on repetition:

Jouissance is very precisely correlated with the initial form of the entry into play of what I am calling the mark, the unary trait, which is a mark toward death, if you want to give it its meaning. Observe that nothing takes on any meaning except when death comes into play.⁴⁷

Repetition is strictly speaking this “entry into play” of the drive itself, the movement and directionality necessary for the symbolic to exist as such.

But the nature of *jouissance* changes under capitalism, where it becomes “calculable” surplus. As Lacan says in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*: “on a certain day *jouissance* became calculable, could be counted, totalized. This is where what is called accumulation of capital begins.”⁴⁸ And this change in the structure of the relation of the subject to *jouissance* allows for a particular change in the structural *relation to the death drive* that seems to have been overlooked by Kordela. For if the death drive is the beyond of the subject’s impossible encounter with *jouissance* as its point of annulment, the pure inscription of the symbolic structure antecedent to its subjectivization, this can only become manifest in the subject’s unconscious through the primary repression of a master signifier that retroactively names the unnamable inscription, yet under capitalism this master signifier is already foreclosed and introduced into the value system, leaving the subject structurally impotent in relation to the Master Signifier; as Lacan expresses it, “from that moment on [once *jouissance* is calculable]... the master signifier only appears even more unassailable, precisely in its impossibility. Where is it? How can it be named? How can it be located?”⁴⁹ *Jouissance*, potentially the only glimmer of ontological exteriority and the “drive” of the concept of “death drive” — “[f]or the path towards death... is nothing other than what is called *jouissance*” — now becomes the guarantor of sameness within closed totality, an imaginary sameness without repetition (in the Freudian sense), or universal exchangeability.⁵⁰

Therefore the inscription of the subject as death drive, by giving us a beyond of the pleasure principle, is the only gesture the subject has with which to open up the space of exteriority, even if grounded in pure lack, in paradoxical extimacy. To return to Kordela, here we should recall that in opposing the Lacanian third term (articulated variously as the gaze, surplus-*jouissance*, and the death drive) to more supposedly “naïve” ethics of intersubjectivity, Kordela refers to Levinas’s ethical concept of the face as an example of an immediate uncritical access to the other — her only reference to Levinas in the book. Thus, Kordela suggests, where psychoanalysis would see the immediate access to the little other as the structural sleight of hand of modern secular capitalism, a “naïve ethics,” exemplified by Levinas, would be completely besotted with this illusion. But considered more rigorously, and in contrast with some all-too-commonly received notions, Levinas’s concept of the face could be seen not as “naïve” at all, but rather as a useful means both of navigating the difficult aporia Kordela confronts between the Other and the other within psychoanalytic ethics, and of thinking through an ethics beyond the capitalist subject, insofar as Levinas, strictly speaking, defines “the face” *not* in terms of an *immediate encounter* with a little other, but rather in terms of a *lack in the symbolic* with respect to the particularity of this *encountered* other. That is, the concept of the face, for Levinas, does not in fact express the naïve immediacy of the neighbor; the face does not appeal to the I as the

expression of a direct relation (*here I am, face to face, a little other*) but rather as the expression of radical alterity as such (*there is no signifier for my otherness*). And this symbolic/ontological problem of particularity speaks directly to the problem of the enjoyment of the Other under capitalism (that is, its surplus-*jouissance*). The face of the other in the ethical sense, as it were, would stand in where the signifier, as symbolic value, fails in its particularity, and, in the ethical encounter, rather than being a place-holder of inescapable self-referentiality, would *repeat* the ungraspable annulment of a particular (un)signifier within a totality, *this face*, as the extimate *par excellence*. The face of the other is this repetition beyond the pleasure principle of the ego. In this way, reading Levinas in a Lacanian/psychoanalytic sense, Kordela could have found in the concept of the face the potential for a means of formulating the way in which the little other of the ethical encounter functions, under the gaze of the big Other, not as a function of the narcissistic image of the subject, but as a short-circuit of the subject’s imaginary system of mirrors, as the point at which the big Other’s *jouissance* can obliterate the narcissistic sameness between other and other in an act of *non-relation*, that is, “the true nature of the death drive.” The face of the other is (*potentially*) *the pure inscription of the symbolic subject*, both as a non-linguistic gesture of naming and in its essential failure to express anything beyond itself, and hence, as the little other’s “nothingness,” or death-in-the-symbolic, as its “justification before the [big] Other.” As Levinas expresses it,

The absolute gap of separation which transcendence implies could not be better expressed than by the term creation, in which kinship among beings themselves is affirmed, but at the same time, their radical heterogeneity also, *their reciprocal exteriority coming from nothingness*. One may speak of creation to characterize entities situated in the transcendence that does not close over into a totality. *In the face to face* the I has neither the privileged position of the subject *nor the position of the thing defined by its place in the system*; it is... *discourse of justification before the Other*.⁵¹

The face is precisely this entity that, because of the pure difference of being “coming from nothingness,” holds the potential to elude the logic of capitalist Being as “*the function of self-referentiality*”: “Their reciprocal exteriority coming from nothingness” envisions a mutual extimacy of the face to face in an ethical encounter, not a pure immediacy — in fact, the “reciprocal exteriority” *constitutes* its ethical status. The death drive is thus also, in a paradoxical sense, *creation* (in Levinas’s sense), and even *creation ex nihilo*, for as the pre-psychotic subject shows us, to foreclose upon the extimate is to be cut off from meaning (“[o]bserve that nothing takes on any meaning except when death comes into play”) and therefore to be driven to identify oneself in the Other only through violence (“exteriorizing” my ontological contradiction), or conversely, to be driven to be valued by a totality that *effaces the lack* of the desire-of-

the-Other. Lacan explains the ethical paradox of the creation/destruction dialectic of the death drive best in his seminar on ethics, when he points out that the death drive “as such” is “destructive” only insofar as it is a compulsion to repeat “beyond the instinct” as a desire to “return to the state of equilibrium of the inanimate sphere.”⁵² “The inanimate,” Lacan elsewhere qualifies, is here nothing more than a “point on the horizon, an ideal point, a point that’s off the map.”⁵³ This “beyond,” this “pure difference,” is the very essence of the death drive, the “[w]ill to destruct. Will to make a fresh start. Will for an Other-thing, given that everything can be challenged from the perspective of the function of the signifier.”⁵⁴

To return to Kordela, if the little other, or neighbor, then, as she suggests, is counted under capitalism only “as object,” it is because of the very specific relation to the death drive the subject maintains under capitalism, according to which the function of the symbolic, where, let us say, the death drive is at home, is sustained only at the level of the *as if*.⁵⁵ Lacanian ethics gives us a means to articulate not only the position of the capitalist subject, but the subject-position of capitalism that is driven to foreclose on pure difference, whereby there is no “will for an Other-thing,” no ethical face-of-the-other *as such* (only *as if*). For if the death drive is the symbolic consistency of the gaze of the big Other, the face is the inscription of the lack of the little other under the gaze, or the little-other-as-lack-in-the-symbolic, that allows for the *potentiality* of an ethics of the encounter. Crucially, therefore, Levinas’s link between the face and infinity (Being) is paradoxically *grounded in an image of an unquantifiable, incommensurable surplus*:

The inexhaustible surplus of infinity overflows the actuality consciousness. The shimmer of infinity, the face, can no longer be stated in terms of consciousness, in metaphors referring to light and the sensible.... The consciousness of obligation is no longer a consciousness, since it tears consciousness up from its center, submitting it to the Other.⁵⁶

The “creation” that allows for the ethical existence of the face is precisely this paradoxically “destructive” drive from within/without, this surplus that exceeds and therefore “tears” open the closed system of consciousness as self-presence within a totality: it is Spinozist immanent causality with a tear in it, an irrational death drive. While Levinas lacks a theoretical language for this “third term” that is not grounded, however guardedly, in transcendental metaphysics, his concept of the face, read in a Lacanian sense, “against himself” to the extent that the transcendental be supplanted by (torn) Spinozian immanent causality, provides our reference point for addressing the ethical problem of the death drive under late capitalism.

III. i.

It should be noted that Kordela’s ontological analysis doesn’t draw particular attention

to any kind of “stages” of capitalism, however compelling her brief discussions of postmodernism and postcolonialism. While it isn’t within the scope of this paper to provide such a historical analysis, I will take a brief digression here to suggest that Bernard Stiegler’s analysis of the “three limits” that define the historical movement of capitalism may be helpful in this regard. To summarize briefly, Stiegler describes the original limit of a “capitalist system of production” (the industrial revolution) as “the tendency of diminishing returns” on production itself; the result was that “the American way of life invented the figure of the consumer whose libido is systematically put to work to counter the problems of excess production.”⁵⁷ But then, after the transition to a consumerist economy,

This canalization of the libido operated by the capture of attention ends up by liquidating the expertise in living [*savoir-vivre*] of consumers, by the massive development of societies of services which let them off the hook of their own existences, that is, of their diverse responsibilities as adults having reached their legal maturity.⁵⁸

The limit of this second phase is an *internal limit* of the “psyche”; it is overcome by the capitalization of “care” or attention (the ability to project into the long term future) and “primary identification” between subject and other, so that in the third limit “the process of primary identification is short-circuited by psychopower through the psychotechnologies.”⁵⁹

This way of phrasing the third limit as the “question of libidinal energy” has some interesting implications here. Stiegler uses psychoanalytic terms — the libido, the drive, sublimation — consistently but in his own context (only loosely related to psychoanalysis). But I am tempted to correlate the idea that I am putting forward here, with regards to the *as if* structure of late capitalism, with his conception that the *libido* (which is explicitly correlated with *jouissance* and death drive by Lacan) has been exploited by the second phase of capitalism until, in the third limit, the “drives it contained, as Pandora’s box enclosing every evil, henceforth are at the helm of beings devoid of attention, and incapable of taking care of their world.”⁶⁰ The unbound “drives it contained,” which engender a “drive-driven” economy, could here be compared to an imaginary “*as if* drive” rather than a symbolic one, what Lacan calls an “imaginary capture.”⁶¹ This mode of capitalism reigns under an essentially speculative economy, as the “spectator” is one who “pays no attention” and “takes no care” of the object of speculation, thereby creating a consciousness “enclosed... *in the short term*.”⁶² In the same way that the subject of the psychotic “*as if*” construction cannot establish a proper symbolic “being towards” and assume a signifier of responsibility, the subject of speculative psychotechnical capitalism for Stiegler can no longer assume “diverse responsibilities as adults having reached their legal maturity” because its libidinal desire has been liquidated into an egoic drive to consume. As Stiegler puts it:

The third limit of capitalism is not only the destruction of the reserves of fossil fuel, but the limit constituted by the drive to destruction of all objects in general by consumption, insofar as they have become the objects of drives, and not objects of desire and attention.⁶³

That is, *consumption*, as the subject's drive to incorporate the object into itself, thereby depleting it, in fact *overrides the death drive*, which is rather "repetition directed at *jouissance*" or nothing other than "the radical nature of repetition," that is, the symbolic drive of the subject to repeat something *beyond* the narcissistic imaginary at the expense of the ego itself.⁶⁴

IV.

Towards the end of her book, Kordela tests her hypotheses about applying a psychoanalytically-informed ethics to a late capitalist culture by referring to the more traditional ethical dilemma that poses the question "whether one should risk one's life to save another" (for instance from drowning) even if that other ends up killing me to save himself.⁶⁵ This question quickly leads to the more "timely" question of my relation to the other who, perhaps, *must* kill me in order to sustain his own survival, which immediately transforms what was in the first case a "moral impunity" into a "radical evil," or what we frequently call terrorism.⁶⁶ This symbolic transformation of the gaze of the other(/Other) from one of impassive survival to one of malevolent intent is a good example of transferential causality, since for Kordela,

[i]n my encounter with the other, I (i.e., it, the unconscious) provide(s) the gaze that interprets the other's signs as to his or her desire. And this desire, although it should precede the other's signs as their intention, will always already have caused their emergence only after my interpretation.⁶⁷

This is a powerful and persuasive interpretive maneuver by Kordela, but I believe at this point in our analysis we can go a little further and ask why this transference of causality of the will to destroy onto the gaze of the other(/Other), or why is it so characteristic of our particular cultural moment? And here it becomes apparent how theorizing the *relation* to the death drive in a social structure is decisive as a means to analyze the ethics of late capitalism. Having capitalized on *jouissance* or desire *precisely by foreclosing on the death drive*, the subject of late capitalism finds in the *face* of the other, not an encounter with otherness grounded in her own incalculable *jouissance*, in the lack that calls her to responsibility for her own finitude, but only a *short-circuited* specular socio-psychic-ontic imaginary reflection with which the subject is subsumed under a gaze "doomed to conflict and ruin."

Thus when Kordela ends her book with a question addressed to the late-capitalist subject so beset by the radical evil that wants to destroy it, "*What and whose gaze is*

this, which desires so badly to be killed by the other?” the answer would *not* be the gaze of a culture saturated with the death drive, as a too literal-minded interpretation of the death drive might have it, but rather the gaze of a culture that has *foreclosed* on the death drive.⁶⁸ For if the face of the other for Levinas would represent the subject’s extimate relation to the nothingness of creation/death, then it is symbolically overdetermined that, in a late capitalist global world-order defined by the imaginary function’s “aggressive tension of either me or the other,” the most iconic image of our drive towards “stability” and “life” is *the image of the hooded other*, or the faceless terrorist detained in a camp designed to suspend and preempt otherness itself, which is in fact the imaginary mirror-reflection of the question we seem to have framed for our being, under the guise of the gaze, “why does the other want to destroy me?”⁶⁹

Notes

1. A. Kiarina Kordela, *\$urplus: Spinoza, Lacan* (New York: State U of New York) 58.
2. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007) 172.
3. Kordela, *\$urplus* 133.
4. *\$urplus* 134.
5. “Here the cause is itself an effect of its own effects. What enabled Spinoza to see this structure was the fact that... he conceived of nature, insofar as it is inhabited by human beings, as a system of signifiers. Far from being autonomous physical things with inherent qualities, signifiers are differential values. And differential values, by structural necessity, constitute a system of disequilibrium, that is, a system that always produces a surplus” (*\$urplus* 1).
6. *\$urplus* 42, quoting Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998) 103, 84.
7. *\$urplus* 58.
8. *\$urplus* 15.
9. Or, as Kordela translates it into Lacanese, the value of “‘the universality of the signifier’ without a Master-Signifier grounding it... lies in remaining for Lacan the ‘unique’ way of ‘resist[ing] succumbing’ to the ‘sacrifice... to which few subjects can resist,’ and of, consequently, being capable of acting, instead, ethically” (*\$urplus* 15, quoting Lacan, *Book XX. Encore, 1972-1973: On Feminine Sexuality; The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink [New York, W.W. Norton, 1998] 81).
10. Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality* 81, in *\$urplus* 17.
11. Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 34, in *\$urplus* 10.
12. *\$urplus* 10-11.
13. *\$urplus* 11.
14. *\$urplus* 102.
15. *ibid.*
16. *\$urplus* 103.
17. *\$urplus* 146n7.

18. *\$urplus* 68.
19. *\$urplus* 69.
20. Lacan, *Ecrit II* (Paris: Seuil, 1971) 215, in *\$urplus* 70.
21. *ibid.*, emphasis added.
22. Lacan, *Other Side* 207, in *\$urplus* 70.
23. *\$urplus* 71.
24. *\$urplus* 133.
25. *\$urplus* 138.
26. *\$urplus* 138, quoting *On Feminine Sexuality* 95, and *Four Fundamental Concepts* 105.
27. Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses 1955-1956*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993) 193.
28. *Other Side* 50.
29. Lacan, *The Psychoses* 252.
30. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 164-5.
31. Marx, *Capital* 65
32. *Capital* 165.
33. *Capital* 168.
34. *Capital* 187.
35. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and The Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991) 165.
36. Lacan, *The Ego* 95.
37. *The Ego* 96.
38. *\$urplus* 98.
39. *\$urplus* 106.
40. *\$urplus* 97.
41. *\$urplus* 93.
42. *\$urplus* 104.
43. *\$urplus* 67, quoting Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 81.
44. *\$urplus* 105.
45. Serge Leclaire, *Psychoanalyzing: On the Order of the Unconscious and the Practice of the Letter*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998) 97.
46. Leclaire, *Psychoanalyzing* 98.
47. *Other Side* 177.
48. *ibid.*
49. *Other Side* 178.
50. *Other Side* 18.
51. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Duquesne UP, 1969) 293, emphasis added.
52. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-60*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1986) 212.

53. *Other Side* 46.
54. Lacan, *Ethics* 212.
55. *\$urplus* 138.
56. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 207.
57. Bernard Stiegler, “Care: Within the limits of capitalism, economizing means taking care,” *Telemporphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change*, Volume 1, ed. Tom Cohen (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012) 110.
58. *ibid.*
59. *ibid.*
60. “Care” 114.
61. *Psychoses* 205.
62. “Care” 105.
63. “Care” 114.
64. *Other Side* 48, 172.
65. *\$urplus* 139.
66. *ibid.*
67. *\$urplus* 138.
68. *\$urplus* 139.
69. *The Ego* 95.

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Scandals and Abstraction: Financial Fictions of the Long 1980s

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Tropics of Finance

Brent Ryan Bellamy

If there is any logic presiding over the transition from the level of fact or event in the discourse to that of narrative, it is the logic of figuration itself, which is to say, tropology. This transition is effected by a displacement of the facts onto the ground of literary fictions or, what amounts to the same thing, the projection onto the facts of the plot-structure of one or another of the genres of literary figuration.¹

It should be our readings that determine what precisely constitutes the transaction; the transaction themselves cannot come to us performed. Only when we, as critic, re-present the object can we determine whether and how it can or cannot be represented.²

In a discussion of Marx's famous declaration about history repeating itself (first tragedy, then farce), Hayden White strikes on an incredibly useful formulation for understanding the relation between literary texts and financialization. Written at the height of the 1980s, White's essay "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory" offers this tantalizing claim: tropology is the logic that presides over the transition from the level of fact (White's chronicle of events) to the level of narrative (*allegoresis*).³ White characterizes the movement from what takes place, through discourse, to story as allegorical and offers a way to think with Leigh Claire La Berge's excellent book *Scandals and Abstraction*, which I have been tasked with

reviewing here. In what follows I would like to claim that *Scandals and Abstraction* is as much a book about mediation as it is one about political economy and financialization. This observation may be of no surprise to those of you familiar with La Berge's work. The central concern of her book is to demarcate what she names "financial form" and to demonstrate how it operates in the U.S. in the 1980s. Finance, in La Berge's account, is intensely representational, which is why literary form itself offers such a useful way into the boggy mire of financial terminology, operations, and logics. As I hope to show, *Scandals and Abstraction* already thinks alongside White, and other narratologists, and, once it straightens out methodological approaches to studying finance, it has a thing or two to teach us about literary theory.

Part literary analysis and part historiography, La Berge's book does a wonderful job framing objects. The book features everything from the novels and films we might expect from studies of finance and literature in the '80s to high-wheeler autobiographies and cultural theory. You can expect to read about novels by Don DeLillo, Brett Easton Ellis, Jane Smiley, and Tom Wolfe; films by Brian De Palma and Oliver Stone; and, autobiographies by Ivan Boesky, T. Boone Pickens, and Donald Trump. In La Berge's words: "During the period that I examine, finance manifested in multigeneric (novel, autobiography, reportage), multimedia (print, film, computer screen), and multimodal (realism, postmodernism) forms" (7). La Berge adds that financial print culture gets inflected through "ekphrastic and multi-media presentations," enumerating

the novel about the business newspaper; the newspaper article about the financial novel; the movie about the stock chart; the automated teller screen that narrates a story; the credit card statement that refers to an image; the novel that narrates the bank fraud which had already been chronicled in a true-crime exposé. (11)

What you might not expect is to be reading about Walter Benjamin's theory of genre or Paul Ricoeur's articulation of temporality. La Berge skillfully brings the pulp, the literary, and the philosophical together with the gritty, the base, the financial, and the violent workings of late capitalism. In La Berge's words, *Scandals and Abstraction* "is about what happens to narrative form when too much money circulates at once" (3). The central claim in the book is that finance operates through representation, yet this figural life does not mean that it is separate from an "actual economy" (i.e. it is a material process), nor does it mean that it is separate from logics of domination, especially white masculinity.

While financial form seems to share a *modus operandi* that hinges on re-presentation and the inclusion of samples from other forms, it also generates ways of understanding and depicting finance that are in tension. Following these rifts, La Berge seems to understand genre — as I have come to only very recently — as a field of contest. She

defines finance through 1980s generic representations, especially as it appears in the postmodern novel, realist novel, realist film, and, what she calls, financial print culture. These generic forms vie over the terrain of how financialization — which La Berge understands as a recurring historical moment within the capitalist mode of production *vis-à-vis* the work of Fernand Braudel and Giovanni Arrighi — gets represented, and also what it means to be financial subjects.

From the very beginning, we find that the turbulence of financialization creates interpretive problems — from the outside inquiries are baffled (“what exactly is happening within financial processes?”), while from within financial culture itself the line of questioning becomes “what *will* happen?” Put differently, outsiders struggle to pick up on the story, which gets emplotted all too quickly and never in a single form, while insiders take on faith that something like resolution will confirm their anticipated outcome. Indeed, La Berge points out that the term *finance* comes from the “Latin noun *finis* (the end) and French verb *finir* (to end)” and that it can be described as “an orientation and a contestation over futurity” (17, 12). For La Berge, the problems of interpretation that swirl around finance and its orientation towards the future make it especially prone to be understood *vis-à-vis* narrative.

Scandals and Abstraction locates a rift in narrative form within the archive of novels, films, and financial print culture between postmodernism, on the one hand, and realism on the other. In the moment of the 1980s,

the postmodern sensibility called for the radical newness of finance to effect an aesthetic rupture with the present while the realist sensibility called for the repetition of finance to resuscitate the dominant aesthetic mode that had been used to capture and critique finance from the gilded age to the roaring twenties to the Great Depression. (8)

Or, in another formulation that leaps out from the page, La Berge writes, “finance is capitalism’s repetition compulsion in times of crisis” (10). But, she turns away from the compulsion to repeat arguments either for postmodern or realist understandings of finance, and instead develops an incredible sublation of financial form that lives up to both components of her title: indeed, the book generates both a scandal and an abstraction (in the best senses of both words!). Late in the book La Berge makes passing reference to the French structuralist A.J. Greimas, a formative thinker for narratology especially in the work of Fredric Jameson. La Berge comments that “a Greimasian square could easily represent the transmutation between legitimate and illegitimate financial value and between legitimate and illegitimate forms of sexuality and congeniality” in Jane Smiley’s novel *Good Faith* (181). Here’s the scandal: I want to take this opportunity to read *Scandals and Abstraction* as one long elaboration of La Berge’s own Greimasian square — one where financial form gets constituted by the dialectical synthesis and negation of realism and postmodernism as literary

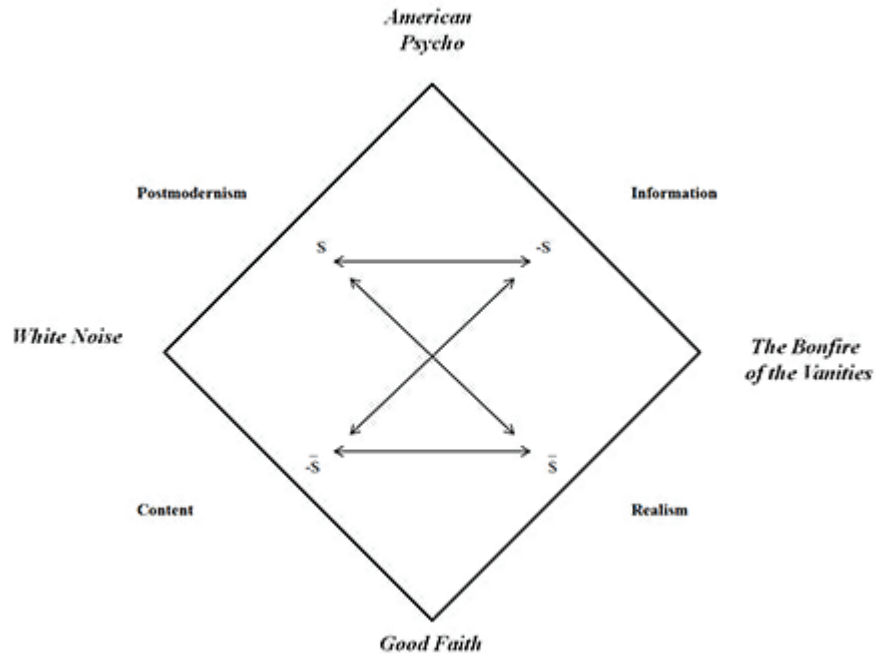


Figure 1: *Scandals and Abstraction*

modes. And here's the abstraction: each chapter of the book can be conceived as an elaboration of one quadrant of the Greimasian dialectic.

Chapter One, "Personal Banking and Depersonalization in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*" delves into DeLillo's 1985 novel and its domestic space of personal banking. The novel is also one of if not the first to feature an automated teller machine (and, as La Berge is quick to point out the technology is so new that DeLillo does not even use the short form "ATM" here). One central insight La Berge gets from the novel is the distinction between narrating and telling, narrator and (automated) teller. The narrator, Jack Gladney, La Berge reminds us, claims that "all plots move deathward" (47). She also draws the distinction between narrating and telling around the inclusion of the separated fragments of text that appear to bear no direct relation to the narrator. For instance, the passage that simply names credit card companies: "Master Card, Visa, American Express" (in Le Berge 61). At stake in these narratological distinctions is the difference between content (of a novel, of a narrative) and information (of a financial transaction). The dialectic between content and information, it turns out, cannot be managed on its own but gests overdetermined by the conflict between realist verisimilitude and the postmodern denial of lived reality — in some sense both content and information become merely content or merely information.

Chapter Two, "Capitalist Realism," moves into realist terrain and offers a reading

of Tom Wolfe's novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987) and Oliver Stone's film *Wallstreet* (1987), both of which espouse to realistically depict finance — something that has been claimed too complex for understanding. Working through these texts' surprising capacity to represent finance through realism, La Berge supplements Mark Fischer's terminology by using the term *capitalist realism* "to indicate the realistic representation of the commodification of realism" (75). La Berge coldly observes both texts turn to melodrama in order to escape the conflict of information and content: Wolfe's novel tracks the fallout from the accidental killing of Henry Lamb rather than tracing racial disparities back to class, while Stone's film dramatizes the manipulation of information through a character desperate for paternal approval. In both cases, the narrativization of finance leads to crises of financial masculinity, rather than crises of finance. Meaning neither DeLillo's postmodern organization of content nor Wolfe's and Stone's realist sorting of information manages to accomplish a complete framing of financial form on their own.

In the third chapter, "The Men Who Make the Killings," we arrive at a synthesis of the two earlier approaches: Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho* (1991) takes the figurative comparison of finance with violence that is so common in financial print culture and inverts it. La Berge argues that the infamous narrator, Patrick Bateman, is actually not a narrator at all, but a teller. Indeed, the ATM enables "Patrick to circulate through the city and to be articulated in a financial network" (134). La Berge directs our attention to a crucial point — violence in the novel tends to happen in the vicinity, spatial or temporal, of the ATM and produces a strange effect: in a narrative, "it is acceptable to have senseless violence. That's the culture of late modernity, after all... but senseless banking," the novel asks, why would someone do such a thing (135)? In this way, La Berge brings together realism and postmodernism, content and information into a synthesis where Ellis's postmodern novel is based in Wolfe's realist novel's plot and the narrator himself embraces becoming teller, in a hyper-violent form of financial masculinity that supersedes Jack Gladny's muted domestic masculinity altogether.

But, La Berge's Greimasian square doesn't end with the synthesis of the first two chapters. There remains a neutral term, a leftover that fuses realism and content with domestic plot and melodrama. Chapter Four, "Realism and Unreal Estate," turns back to the savings and loans scandals of the late 80s, especially as seen in Jane Smiley's *Good Faith* (2003). The plot of the novel revolves around the relationship between two men, a real estate agent and a confidence man. The latter absconds with the cash that the two were going to invest in a construction deal leaving the former, the narrator, in a position of retrospection. The novel, La Berge posits, precisely because of its depiction of the interwoven "sexual, financial, and criminological discourse," captures the bait and switch of the S & L crisis itself (176). In La Berge's words,

The S & L crisis, as a collection of individual transactions and a noneventful financial event, is crucial to the realization of financial value in the

1980s because it disavows narrative in its present representation only to demand it in retrospect; it manages multiple discourses and idioms... as it moves from fraud to fiction, from complexity to aporia. (172)

This unreal estate, in La Berge's account, comes to stand in for the space of possibility opened in the present. Finance may be fictitious capital, ever hopeful to find a material berth in the future, and yet it has very real consequences in the present, as evidenced by the S & L scandal and Smiley's narrativization of it.

In considering the work *Scandals and Abstraction* does to chart the territory of financial form in the U.S., I am reminded of Jameson's useful comment in his introduction to the English translation of Greimas's *On Meaning* (1987):

To see the square as the very image of closure tends to encourage some pessimism about the possibilities of escaping from it in any other way than the Hegelian one: one does not resolve a contradiction; rather, by praxis, one alters the situation in such a way that the old contradiction, now dead and irrelevant, moves without solution into the past, its place taken by a fresh and unexpected contradiction (which may or may not be some advance on the older aporias or ideological imprisonment).⁴

La Berge's thought provoking analysis of 80s financial form has helped to set new terms for the struggle over the future. The elaboration of financial form as a locus of contest over meaning-making contributes much worth to current debates over finance in cultural and literary studies. The book also makes a significant contribution in terms of its display of methodological rigor (take heed fellow junior scholars — this is how to do it right!). La Berge shows what it means to take seriously one's interlocutors, even as one critiques them mercilessly. *Scandals and Abstraction* shows what can come from the careful scrutiny of a problem's complex overdeterminations and in doing so it champions the explanatory power of a Marxism that takes heed of narrative theory, critical race and gender studies, and the study of print culture. If you want to know more about how to elucidate contradiction, or if you just want to know a little more about financialization, this book is for you.

Notes

1. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative, Discourse, and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1987) 47.
2. Leigh Claire Le Berge, *Scandals and Abstraction: Financial Fictions of the Long 1980s* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015) 181.
3. White, *Content* 47.
4. Frederic Jameson, "Foreword to A. J. Greimas' *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory*," *The Ideologies of Theory* (New York: Verso, 2008) 527.

Ryan M. Brooks. "The Struggle is Read: A Review of *Reading Capitalist Realism*." *Mediations* 29.1 (Fall 2015) 129-137.
www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/struggle-is-real.

Reading Capitalist Realism

Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge, editors

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The Struggle is Real: A Review of *Reading Capitalist Realism*

Ryan M. Brooks

In their introduction to *Reading Capitalist Realism*, editors Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge suggest that the concept of "neoliberalism" is insufficient for explaining our "market-dominated present": if neoliberalism designates an "economic and political paradigm," another concept is necessary to account for "the *realization* of market imperatives at an ideological level" (4, 6 emphasis original). The concept they have in mind is Mark Fisher's notion of capitalist realism, "the general ideological formation in which capitalism is the most real of our horizons..." or as Fisher puts it, the "widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that now it is impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it," (Fisher 2, in Shonkwiler 2). At the same time, Shonkwiler and La Berge seem to warn their readers against allowing this more expansive theorization to become a way of *effacing* the "economic and political":

One need not even necessarily accept David Harvey's capsule description of neoliberalism as a "programmatically" restoration of capitalist class hegemony, under the guise of the promise to the masses of increased individual freedoms, to concede a drastic shift in the past four decades toward greater concentrations of wealth in the hands of an elite few... (5)

In other words, even if you find Harvey's influential account of neoliberalism (or neoliberalism itself) reductive, you must acknowledge the deepening inequality he (and many others) have described.¹

Still, statements like these (and anxious constructions like “need not even necessarily”) don’t so much settle as underscore the question of whether it’s possible to come to terms with these effects while resisting the claim they’re the product of a “*political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites.”² One way to think about the essays in this collection is to consider how they perform the balancing act implicit in this question, the necessity of capturing the complex “role of representation and belief in producing that which becomes reality” — including the everyday reality of “commodity, money, and finance” — while also being attuned to the political function of contemporary ideology (6, 11). As Richard Dienst notes in his “Afterword,” most of the volume’s entries are “critical appraisals of realist texts” and thus primarily concerned with “the way realist motifs and methods are being reinvented in order to grapple with their putative object, the life-world of contemporary capitalism”; save for the conversation between Jodi Dean and Fisher (“We Can’t Afford to Be Realists”), these entries are only secondarily concerned with “the specific operations of neoliberalism as a capitalist system” (249-250). The salient issue here, of course, is not whether these literary-critical essays devote equal space to these concerns, but whether their theorization of “realism” articulates, in and of itself, the political struggle at the heart of both the “life-world” and the “system” of contemporary capitalism.

Drawing on the analyses that follow, Shonkwiler and La Berge begin the collection by suggesting that these new realist motifs and methods might constitute a new cultural dominant:

As postmodernism cedes its legacy and organizing forms to capitalist realism, a new desire for objectivity and mimetic certainty emerges with the new, self-reflexive knowledge that the certainties of realism are things to be bought and sold. Ultimately, capitalist realism might describe the logical conclusion of these processes: how realism undergoes the precise processes of capture and subsumption into the circuits of capital it claims to represent. (10)

As this passage suggests, the editors use “capitalist realism” to identify not just an ideological context (the supplement to neoliberalism, described above) but also a set of cultural practices (the sequel or alternative to postmodernism.) As this passage also suggests, it’s not always clear, when they use the term in this way, whether they are describing a self-conscious artistic shift or a critical theorization about such a shift (the equivalent to “postmodernism” or the equivalent to “the cultural logic of late capitalism”). In some of the examples they cite (like Andrew Hoberek’s “Adultery, Crisis, Contract”), this ambivalence about realism is staged by the literary texts themselves; in others (like J.D. Connor’s essay on tax credits and contemporary cinema) these “processes of capture and subsumption” are brought

out only by critical intervention. This difference and these ambiguities matter in terms of determining what type of claim is being made, but also in terms of situating the editors' own perspective in relation to what I think are problematic ideas about realism's "complicity" (9).

This perspective is clarified somewhat in La Berge's own contribution to the volume, "Capitalist Realism and Serial Form: The Fifth Season of *The Wire*." There she contends that the self-referential turn in *The Wire*'s final season, in which "realism is transformed from a mode to an object" (116) through an exploration of the Baltimore newspaper industry, also dramatizes the tension between "money's dual role as a medium of exchange and as a store of value":

In the first four seasons, the tension is managed through tracing money as it is exchanged, representing otherwise obscure connections as they come into contact.... In the fifth season, however, there is a structural reversal between money being exchanged, in order to enable representation, and representation being *sold* as though it were simply another commodity, a store of value that may now circulate as freely as any other. It is the narrative maintenance and exfoliation of this contradiction — between money as medium and as store of value — as a narrative problem that renders *The Wire* what I am calling a kind of *capitalist realism*. (120-121, emphasis original)

The chief "representation being *sold*" in the final season is a melodramatic serial-killer storyline fabricated (in part) to sell newspapers, a sharp departure from the "serial realism" of the show's first four seasons. La Berge argues that this juxtaposition serves to tell us something about serial realism as well, however, namely that it is just as much a "commodity," with generic expectations defined by the marketplace, as melodrama.³ The serial-killer storyline thereby exposes "the structural limits" of serial realism and thus "reconstructs the series by rendering visible its own conditions of production, circulation, and reception" (132-133).

This analysis reads brilliantly, making an exciting, highly compelling case for why *The Wire*'s final season is not a "disappointment," as it was widely received, but the culmination of the show's aesthetic vision (118). And yet, even if we are convinced by La Berge's critical account of *The Wire*, I'm not sure we should embrace what follows from it: the suggestion that by dramatizing a world in which even "perception/representation is ultimately for sale," the show prompts us to relate to that world and to representation itself in an importantly different way (134). Specifically, La Berge suggests that *The Wire* and "new forms, new genres, and new epistemologies" like it — those which insist that, as the introduction puts it, "objectivity and mimetic certainty... are things to be bought and sold" — articulate a perspective that is "more utopian and critical than the regressive fantasy that lurks throughout every season

of *The Wire*: namely, the fantasy of a better capitalism, of a return to the Keynesian days of yore” (10, 134). This link implies there is something intrinsically “regressive” about “objectivity and mimetic certainty” itself, as if resistance to capitalism is a fundamentally epistemological struggle, a battle over the status of reality as a formal category rather than over particular, material versions of this reality, like the utopian claims of neoliberalism or the real abstractions of the value form. The very process of resisting these ideological formations requires speaking and acting in the name of objectivity and mimetic certainty (at least some version of it), even when what’s at stake is showing that the social “real” is ideological and thus subject to change. In this sense, it’s hard to see why a text offering a “deconstruction of a realist aesthetic” is intrinsically less regressive or “conservative” than a text that seeks to paint a “mimetic” picture of contemporary capitalism (a text such as, in this account, *The Wire*’s first four seasons) (130, 15). If anything, the opposite appears to be true, as this new form of “realism” — and the criticism that celebrates it — seems to depend on a logic that disavows the very substance of the political.

This logic is troubling because, as Caren Irr notes in her contribution to the volume, the tendency to evacuate “the site of ‘politics’” reflects a “distinctive contemporary sensibility” (182). Irr is specifically referring to William T. Vollmann’s nonfiction text *Poor People* and the tendency to reframe poverty as a “choice” or “an eternal and endemic feature of human existence” rather than “a social problem to be ameliorated or a structural issue to be corrected” (182-183). We can understand this disavowal of the “structural or material explanations of poverty” as the analogue to the disavowal of ideological disagreement that has tended to play out mainly (though certainly not exclusively) in the realm of criticism and aesthetics (182). Here, indeed, these two types of disavowals go hand-in-hand. As Irr shows, “Vollmann’s pronounced allergy to any ideology of structure” is bound up in a commitment to “an absolute standard of human equality” that prevents him from writing anything definitive about anyone else’s experiences, a “radical egalitarianism” that stops him from passing totalizing judgments on poverty or capitalism or, it seems, much of anything (189, 182, 186). In this sense, Vollmann’s project is the “dialectical antithesis” to the political analysis of Jacques Rancière, David Harvey, and others, who “describe a world organized around collective, structural antagonisms, embedded in geography, ecology, and economy as well as face-to-face violence and ethical double binds” (187, 189).

Irr proposes that *Poor People* should be understood as an example of a writer “wrestling with the challenge of representing a swiftly changing practice on the periphery of aesthetic perception,” a process that “can lead artists to generate usefully indirect or ‘degraded’ figures” for the total system (178). When Irr describes the book as an example of “capitalist realism,” she is suggesting, therefore, that the term can function as periodizing concept like the kind offered by Jameson in his “Cognitive Mapping” essay, which she summarizes as: “an opportunity to name a new set of similarly partial, incomplete, or ‘degraded’ figures for a new phase of capitalist

accumulation” (178). Specifically, Vollmann takes a “metamodern” approach in which he “renews the strategies learned from his predecessors” — prose documentarians like James Agee — “in order to test them against the conditions he observes” (180). Although Vollmann is unable to get a handle on either the poor or the rich — in a way that reflects the solipsistic tendencies of the prose documentary genre but, just as importantly, Vollmann’s own “potentially monomaniacal ethics” — this text and these ethics nevertheless still articulate a social “ideal, however compromised” (179, 189-190). Vollmann calls this ideal a “culture of communalism” and Irr, following Richard Dienst, calls it “solidarity” (189-190).

As this conclusion suggests, in Irr’s account thinking about contemporary literary realism goes hand-in-hand with thinking about the dialectical interplay between political struggle and historical change. In “Things as They Were or Are: On Russell Banks’s Global Realisms,” Philip Wegner provides an even more explicit example of this view, using “realism” in the “sense that the great philosopher of Utopia, Ernst Bloch, defines it, a representation or imitation of a reality that is shot through with the potentiality of the new” (104). Russell Banks achieves this level of realism, Wegner argues, because, in historical novels like *Cloudsplitter* and *The Darling*, he dramatizes the Badiouian “event,” the occurrence that, from the perspective of the status quo, “is impossible and unimaginable, and yet for all that... is nevertheless true” (103). Just as importantly, Banks articulates Badiou’s “fundamental insight” (105) that:

“the essence of the event is to be undecidable with regard to its belonging to the situation,” and hence requires a “decision with respect to its belonging to the situation,” a decision... that is at the basis of any intervention in the world. For Badiou, this decision and the actions that follow from it transform the individual into an authentic subject. Moreover, such a subject remains in effect only as long as the fidelity to the potential of the event continues. (104)

In *The Darling*, the event of 9/11 causes the main character, an American political radical in the 1960s and later a supporter of Charles Taylor’s uprising in Liberia, to abandon this fidelity and to embrace the idea that she *never* had “any real subjective being” (108). Wegner links this disavowal to the death of 1990s-era global activism and “a baleful new sense of capitalist realism and its own set of improbabilities and impossibilities” (108). Banks himself is attempting to counter this loss of fidelity to “the potential for radical change in the world,” Wegner argues, and is thus performing “the labor of the critical realist novelist” (108).

The volumes’s concluding section, “After and Against Representation,” features a series of theoretical essays that also reflect on literature’s capacity to imagine alternatives to capitalist realism, although here again we see a tension between approaches framing this resistance in political terms (Michael W. Clune) and

those which focus on the ideological processes constitutive of capital itself, from the value form (Joshua Clover) to Lukácsian reification (Timothy Bewes, with a useful intervention into current debates on this concept). Clune's essay is the most provocative of these texts, in some ways, but also the most frustrating. Like Wegner, he celebrates contemporary literature that articulates the potential for radical change, though while Wegner locates this radical potential in historical fiction expressing our political agency, Clune finds it in science fiction that imagines specific "alternatives to what exists" (195). Clune intends his intervention here to be methodological rather than interpretive, however: he argues that if literary critics want to tap into fiction's unique capacity to explore the imaginary and thus achieve "a meaningful relation both to other disciplines and to urgent political questions," they must reject the tendency to treat "the fictional as mimetic of the actual" (196, 195). This includes criticism that treats science fiction as a mode of defamiliarization, an approach which, he argues, turns sci-fi into "a species of the mimesis of our world" (199). Rejecting such "mimetic" criticism would entail, moreover, rejecting the habit of distinguishing between "bad fictions that pretend to imitate capitalist reality but actually distort it" and "good fictions that accurately describe reality" (200).

Clune's justifications for moving away from "mimetic" criticism are unsatisfying, in my view, but the deeper (and perhaps more obvious) problem is that his "anti-mimetic" criticism requires "the fictional" to be at once completely distinct from yet also completely relevant to "the actual."⁴ In this essay, he examines *Neuromancer's* depiction of Ninsei, a futuristic black market that — because it is apparently free of all government and corporate interference — "is not mimetic of actually existing capitalism"; as a "frankly imaginary capitalism," Gibson's representation is therefore not subject to the question of whether it presents an "accurate" or "distorted" view of reality (201). To support this claim, Clune goes so far, in fact, as to bracket off the way that Ninsei actually is "mimetic of actually existing capitalism": as he himself notes, "a market without corporations is a fiction even within the space of the novel" because it turns out that this market has been under corporate supervision all along (209). But, at the same time that Clune insists on the distinction between Ninsei and actually existing capitalism, he also insists that Ninsei can be a "resource" for thinking about what capitalism *could* be (203). "We need a strong image of free, unexploitative, ungoverned, collective action," he argues, and this image is provided by Gibson's fictional market: there "we... see not an aggregate of individual interests but a robust, fascinating picture of what the 'general will' might look and feel like" (210, 206). The fact that this picture takes the form of a free market makes it particularly relevant to our present moment, Clune suggests, and to support this claim he goes so far, in fact, as to include part of "the actual" — the contemporary political enthusiasm for free markets — in this exploration of "the gap between literature and the actual" (200).

And yet, as Clune acknowledges, to make this image a guide for action, we would be forced to ask a number of questions about whether such a "left free market" is

even possible, or whether, for example, there are “unacceptable modes of exploitation intrinsic to exchange as such” (210). But this would mean asking, once again, the question of whether *Neuromancer* produces an accurate or ideologically distorted view of capitalism, not in its present moment but in its essence, the question of whether — to use this essay’s terms — the book is a “good fiction” or a “bad fiction.” This is precisely the question, of course, that we are not allowed to ask. Clune’s methodological claim thus forbids us from asking exactly the political questions that his interpretive claim demands, as if the real point of this intervention, indeed, is to make his own political argument — that what the “anti-government left” needs now is a truly “free” market (210) — seem impervious to ideological critique as well.⁵

Still, one doesn’t have to accept Clune’s arguments to acknowledge the concern that prompts them (as, in this collection, only his essay does): the “struggle to legitimate humanistic knowledge in the contemporary intellectual and institutional climate” (195). Here this “intellectual and institutional climate” is defined in terms of literary criticism’s perceived lack of relevance to other disciplines and to “anti-capitalist struggle,” but it might also be defined as capitalist realism itself, the “grim identification of the rule of markets with necessity, practicality, and hard-nosed common sense” (196, 195). This “institutional climate” is reflected, to pick just one controversial recent example, in the justification given by a member of the UNC system’s Board of Governors when explaining their decision to discontinue 46 degree programs in 2015: “We’re capitalists, and we have to look at what the demand is, and we have to respond to the demand.”⁶ To the degree that this climate has also contributed to higher education’s increasing reliance on contingent labor, it seems fair to say that the *main* impact of “capitalist realism” on academic criticism has simply been to make it difficult for most younger literary scholars to do this kind of work, at least in an economically sustainable way. My guess is that for many of the academic readers of *Reading Capitalist Realism*, the struggle to defend “the value of the humanities” has meant (or will soon mean) the struggle to earn a living wage and job stability, the challenge of securing adequate compensation for work done in the classroom, let alone for academic writing and research (196).

More and more contingent faculty members have started to organize to improve their working conditions, however, and I want to conclude by suggesting that the key to how literary critics should respond to capitalist realism, in their role as critics, might lie in how they’ve been responding to capitalist realism in their role as academic labor. Adjuncts and lecturers have surely not suffered from neoliberal governance in the same way as the “service workers and post-industrial throwaways” mentioned by Wegner or the mobilized, fragmented “laboring bodies” described by Alissa G. Karl (in her essay here); nevertheless, by embracing their status as labor, academic workers insist on the reality of the same forces that shape material conditions for other workers and (much poorer) poor people, namely those “collective, structural antagonisms” described by Irr — the same forces that are mystified, of course, when

self-described “capitalists” attribute their decisions to free-floating abstractions like “demand” (95, 76, 189). If, as La Berge notes, part of realism’s function has traditionally been to explore “what is most economically necessary and simultaneously what is most disavowed within capitalism,” then it seems to follow that contemporary literary realism (and those who track its forms) would be concerned with the presence that is most *absent* from neoliberal “realism”: not ever-deepening poverty or even the violence done to laboring bodies, but the specific agents, decisions, and struggles (at once ideological and material) that have made these things possible, as well as the specific agents, decisions, and struggles that might make very *different* things possible (125).

Notes

1. This comment can be read more specifically as an appeal to critics influenced by the Foucauldian analysis of neoliberal governmentality, an approach that has generated a number of useful concepts for thinking about neoliberalism but which is also famously hostile to class-based accounts of political power.
2. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 19, emphasis original.
3. Specifically, if the viewers of melodrama want “serial (white, psychological) violence,” the viewers of *The Wire* want “interpersonal (black, economic) violence” (129); in other words, they “do not want a serial killer, but an economic killer” (131). But, if “the serial killer disavows economy in the construction of his personal melodrama... *The Wire* uses the representation of economy to ground its realism and disavow personal melodrama. Psychology disavows economy; economy disavows interiority” (131). Earlier in the essay, drawing on a well-sourced “genealogy of capitalism and realism” (136), La Berge defines realism in terms of its general representational goal, namely the depiction of money and “Capital itself” (125); since it’s not clear, in light of this definition, why *all* “realist” texts would be required to feature these *specific* narrative features — that is, the racializing logic and disavowal of “interiority” I’ve just described — I think we can assume that when La Berge refers to the “structural limits of the realist mode” (132), she is referring specifically to those with *The Wire*’s particular “conditions of production, circulation, and reception” (133). Whether one accepts this link or this description of the show is, of course, a separate issue.
4. Clune makes his case for why we should reject “mimetic” criticism by suggesting that this approach is bound up, in practice, with the desire to legitimate literary knowledge and (because of this desire) the use of “social or psychological or economic theories whose primary institutional home is the English department” (196). Using Fisher’s “Jameson/Deleuze/Lacan”-influenced account of addiction in *Capitalist Realism* as an example, Clune argues that these approaches read as under-theorized to those trained in other disciplines and that, even worse, seem to rely on fictional examples for their only “evidence.” It seems that the logical conclusion to this argument would be that if critics want their work to matter to other disciplines and to the Left, they should stop using “fiction” as “evidence,” especially for theories that (in Clune’s account) only English departments take seriously. And yet Clune goes even further, suggesting that we should reject “mimetic” criticism altogether. He doesn’t really explain why, for example, a “mimetic” critic couldn’t simply draw on those other disciplines instead, except to suggest that such a critic “might reasonably feel that such a demand places an undue burden” on them (199).
5. In this sense, Clune’s methodological intervention in this essay performs the same function as his

invocation of Marx in the conclusion of *American Literature and the Free Market, 1945-2000*. There he argues that the utopian “economic fictions” he celebrates throughout the book cannot be described as “ideological” because, while they are mystifying from the perspective of the “labor theory of value,” that “does not show us what is ideological in these works, but what is dead in Marx” (158). (Michael Clune, *American Literature and the Free Market, 1945-2000* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010]). For a contentious exchange concerning Clune’s take on the “labor theory of value,” see Michael Clune, Jasper Bernes, and Joshua Clover, “Response to ‘What Was Neoliberalism?’: A Debate Between Joshua Clover / Jasper Bernes and Michael W. Clune,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*. 4 March 2013, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/response-to-what-was-neoliberalism-a-debate-between-joshua-clover-jasper-bernes-and-michael-w-clune>.

6. Sam Schaefer, “Board of Governors discontinues 46 degree programs across UNC system,” *The Daily Tar Heel* (23 May 2015).

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The Last Western: Deadwood and the End of American Empire

Paul Stasi and Jennifer Greiman, editors

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The Last Western's Missing Piece

Jen Hedler Phillis

The Last Western: Deadwood and the End of American Empire is almost everything for which a critic and fan of the HBO series *Deadwood* could wish. Through the nine essays collected here and the excellent introduction by editors Paul Stasi and Jennifer Greiman, the book demonstrates the immense value in serious critical approaches to popular culture. At the same time, however, *The Last Western* calls for more work to be done on a show that has received too little critical attention.

For readers who have not yet watched *Deadwood* — to whom I say, stop what you are doing and go do so — the show follows the titular mining camp as it is first annexed by the United States and then taken over by the Hearst corporation. The first few episodes suggest that *Deadwood* will hew close to Western genre conventions: there are lawmen (Seth Bullock and Wild Bill Hickock) opposed to criminals (Al Swearengen), hookers with hearts of gold (Trixie and Joanie Stubbs), and women who represent the stabilizing force of progress (Alma Garret and, later, Martha Bullock). But this is all quickly undone, as Hickock is murdered, and Bullock and Swearengen enter into an uneasy truce to protect the camp from the forces of nationhood and capitalism, a battle they will lose. As such, *Deadwood* not only rejects the traditional characters found in Westerns, but it also rejects the main plot structure of the Western: this is not the story of a courageous individual bringing civilization to a place with "no law at all." Rather, it is the story of a community struggling against what others call "civilization." As Stasi and Greiman write, *Deadwood* dramatizes "the advance of a modern totality that crushed an individuality which was never actually that heroic to begin with," tracing "the evacuation of personal agency" in the face of the state and multinational capital (3, 9). They situate *Deadwood* in the context of HBO's other

landmark series of the same era — *The Sopranos* and *The Wire* — arguing that the “three shows represent an anxiety over the decline of American power and the evacuation of the American subject at the beginning of the twenty-first century” (2).

Some of the essays do nothing more — and need do nothing more — than remind us of what good criticism is. For example, Mark L. Berrettini “Messages from Invisible Sources: Sight in *Deadwood*’s Public Sphere” examines repeated instances in which characters watch (or attempt to watch) each other from balconies, improvised verandas, and windows. Berrettini reads the abstract theme of the show through these moments, so that Swearingen’s, Hearst’s, and Garret’s struggle against or for nationhood and capitalism depends on their ability to see and read their manifestations. Justin Joyce’s “Listening to the Thunder: *Deadwood* and the Extraordinary Depiction of Ordinary Violence” likewise uncovers the materiality at the heart of the series. He argues that the sweep of the plot — which, on his account, concerns primitive accumulation, Manifest Destiny, capitalist expansion, the subjection of workers and non-white subjects to the will of the state and capital — plays out on the bodies of *Deadwood*’s residents. Both Joyce’s and Berrettini’s are, ultimately, examples of great criticism, reminders of what we can and should be doing when we look closely at a work of art. Further, they point to an aspect of the show that will be central to my intervention at the end of this review by highlighting *Deadwood*’s commitment to bodily materiality.

Other essays deal with the contemporary resonances of *Deadwood* on the register of both the nation and capital. For example, both Ronald Schmidt’s “‘Vile Task’: Founding and democracy in *Deadwood*’s Imperial Imagination” and Erick Altenbernd’s and Alex Young’s “A Terrible Beauty: *Deadwood*, Settler Colonial Violence, and the Post-9/11 State of Exception” demonstrate how the development of the *Deadwood* camp provides viewers with a valuable heuristic for understanding US culture. Schmidt glosses the historical context of *Deadwood*: following the Civil War, the Black Hills were promoted as a site where the US might be “refounded” (26). The 1870s narrative of national rejuvenation depended, he argues, on two things: the discovery of gold to replenish the struggling economy and the shifting nature of race relations, both between white and black Americans and between American citizens and Native Americans. Swearingen and Bullock did not come to *Deadwood* to participate in this great renewal of the United States: both would prefer to be left out of the sights of the nation so that they can attend to their “bidness.” Nevertheless, the city is annexed, and the national narrative continues. Schmidt writes, “[t]he legend moves Bullock and Swearingen to enact this refounding, a fable of retroactive power that speaks to the audience about America through persuasively unlikely actors” (38). Meanwhile Altenbernd and Young demonstrate how the act of founding *Deadwood* speaks specifically to US foreign policy following 9/11. They argue that the establishment of community in the camp depends on otherwise law-abiding (if not law-upholding) citizens ignoring certain kinds of violence in moments of “exception” so as not to

disturb the progress of the camp. They cite a scene in which Bullock, who has just been named Sheriff, ignores a bloodstain — the blood having been only recently inside a South Dakota territory official — so as to preserve the tentative truce he and Swearengen have built. They write:

By allegorizing life in post 9/11 America through a violent yet redemptive narrative of the “terrible beauty” of American territorial expansion, *Deadwood* works to expose — and yet also reinscribe within a familiar representational tradition — the model of sovereign power that underwrites the contemporary state of exception. (145)

These two essays, then, speak to the way *Deadwood* reveals the lie at the center of US statehood; the occasionally heroic and redemptive violence is never all that occasional, let alone heroic or redemptive, and the characters do not enact it in service of building (or rebuilding) the nation.

Perhaps of more interest to readers of *Mediations* are the essays that concern capitalism directly. Economics is a major theme of the series. As Julia M. Wright argues in the opening paragraph of her contribution (which we shall return to shortly), “*Deadwood*... is centrally concerned with economics as ‘the camp’ moves from a mostly barter economy to a banking system, and from individual gold-prospectors such as Ellsworth to George Hearst, a corporate entity with agents and vast resources” (42). Jeffrey Scraba and John David Miles’s article, “It’s all fucking amalgamation and capital, ain’t it?: *Deadwood*, the Pinkertons, and Westward Expansion,” traces the transition from individual, local production — in the form of Swearengen’s saloon, Garret’s bank, and the prospectors — to multinational capital personified by George Hearst. While the main characters mostly survive the final episode, their autonomous economy does not.

Daniel Worden’s essay on race in *Deadwood* is perhaps the most innovative essay in the collection. In “‘Securing the Color’: The Racial Economy of *Deadwood*,” he reads the treatment of non-white characters against the commonplace belief in Left criticism today, namely “that multiculturalism has not created a more equal world but has instead fed into the neoliberal erosion of the welfare state and dramatic increases in economic inequality” (89). Because Swearengen becomes, over the course of three seasons, a force for the public and collective good, he unites the citizens of *Deadwood*, regardless of race, against Hearst’s forces. Worden argues that Hearst’s “racial awareness is more advanced” as “a marker of Hearst’s desire to exploit everyone,” regardless of race (100). He goes on, “[r]acial difference... is not central to Hearst’s desire to assert his dominance over others” (102). The threat to the camp posed by Hearst forces Swearengen to “dra[w] new lines of belonging and identification” that are opposed to the gold magnate. As such, Worden concludes “*Deadwood* finds utopia in a very unlikely figure, Al Swearengen, who understands that social institutions

and collective belonging, not the politics of difference, may be the only ways to struggle against inequality” (103). His claim aligns with the conclusion to Scraba’s and Miles’s article, in which they argue that through Swearengen’s “resistance to corporate control through constructing strategic alliances, fostering democracy, and championing a free press,” he becomes “an ironic mirror image of the lone Western hero, one for whom community, not individualism, is both the end and the means of his frontier past” (80). According to these essays, then, the figure of Swearengen functions as the lost hero of the American past.

The fact that Swearengen is the hero of the series, unfortunately, glosses over the transformation of the character. When we first meet him, he is clearly the villain: he threatens Trixie with murder after she shoots a john in self-defense, hires out road agents to rob and murder families, and orchestrates the murder of Alma Garret’s husband once he discovers that Garret’s gold claim is rich. By the end of the series, he is transformed into a gruff and sometimes violent, but mostly caring patriarch. His final act of violence, when he murders Jen so she can take the place of Trixie and appease Hearst’s desire for vengeance, is presented as a difficult decision made with great regret. On the whole, this stunning transformation in the character is ignored in this otherwise excellent set of essays. In what follows, I will argue that ignoring this element of the show is emblematic of the other large gap in the collection: a thorough analysis of the role of women in the series.

This is not to say that gender does not appear. The final two essays of the collection — Paul Zinder’s “‘The World is Less Than Perfect’: Nontraditional Family Structures in *Deadwood*” and David Greven’s “The Return of the Father: *Deadwood* and the Contemporary Gender Politics of Complexity” — offer opposing views on the presentation of gender, especially in romantic relationships, in the series. Zinder argues that the camp’s invasion by the US and capital is the anvil on which the non-traditional families that ground the show are forged. Governments, corporations, and families are, in creator David Milch’s vision, “ruled by... freedom-limiting interests,” while “non-traditional unions [are]... based on personal choice” (175, 178). For Zinder, then, the relationships — romantic, familial, and otherwise — between Sol and Trixie, Jane and Joanie, Alma and Sofia, and Al, Dan, Silas, and poor, dumb, sweet Johnny — are progressive representations of affective relationships that are strengthened, rather than destroyed, by the onset of nationhood and multinational capital.

In contrast, Greven argues that *Deadwood* masks an “inescapably conservative and orthodox” position on gender and sexuality with “complexity” (194, 197). He writes,

Complexity is the layered, multifaceted, expansive, and generally humanizing process through which difficult, even morally reprehensible characters... are made acceptable to the critical audience... Richly textured and realized, Al Swearengen cannot simply be denounced as a villain because [he] suffer[s] too much and, moreover, [is] introspective enough

to question not only [his] own moral failings but those of their larger social world. (197)

That is, because Swearngen suffers at the hands of Hearst and recognizes his own failures, we are primed to forgive his more reprehensible actions. Just as Bullock ignores a bloodstain to avoid disrupting the tentative peace of the camp, viewers ignore the stack of bodies Al has created and number of lives he's ruined because he is portrayed as a complex character who has reasons for and is haunted by the violence he commits. Greven goes on to argue that the presence of figures more violent and retrograde than Swearngen and Bullock (Hearst, but also Francis Wolcott, who murders three women) allows *Deadwood* to present the normatively patriarchal Swearngen and Bullock as heroes: "*Deadwood* ends up arguing for a primitivist manhood as the only hope for the oppressed in a brutal barren world" (207).

Zinder and Greven, then, offer diametrically opposed readings of the gender and sexual politics of the show. It is a nice addition to *The Last Western* that both are presented. Unfortunately, however, they are the two weakest entries in the collection, as both rely on character generalizations that viewers of the show will find hard to swallow. For example, Greven argues that Alma possesses "formidable business sense" that is both grounded and weakened by her affective tie to Sofia (209). He offers absolutely zero evidence for this claim. In fact, careful viewers will immediately remember scenes in which Garret demonstrated her formidable business ignorance: when, for example, Ellsworth has to explain to her what "A.G." (her initials) signify as she signs a legal document, or when she presents her plan to sell Hearst minority shares in her holdings only to be humiliated and threatened. Zinder likewise misrepresents Swearngen, again ignoring the his transformation from gruesome overlord to town patriarch. Further, although these two authors take up the issue of gender, they do so only under the rubric of how the female characters relate to the male characters — Zinder shows how those women who "choose[... their] mate[s] based on [their] own free will" are happier than those who bend to social conventions (180); Greven is most interested in masculine violence and male homosociality, and not interested in the ways that the female characters are depicted as negotiating that world.

The absence of women in the collection is especially troubling because the women of *Deadwood* are so integral to the end of the series. It is, ultimately, not Al Swearngen, but Alma Garret — who owns the largest and richest of the mines around Deadwood — who stands between Hearst and his desire to dominate the camp. If Hearst fails to convince her to sell her claim, his time in Deadwood will have been wasted. Further, the only character to confront Hearst with the kind of violence viewers have come to expect is Trixie, who, horrified by Hearst's outsourced murder of Ellsworth, shoots him in the shoulder. It is, finally, the female residents of *Deadwood* who confront Hearst on the register of both economics and violence. Trixie's failed assassination

sings with lost possibilities: not just for history (what if George Hearst had been killed in *Deadwood*?), not just for the series (what if the camp won? what if there had been a season four?), but also for viewers whose love of *Deadwood* is founded on the series' portrayal of female agency.

While the series may describe, on the whole, the curtailment of Swearingen's and Bullock's personal agency as they are increasingly boxed in by the encroaching and impersonal powers of state and capital ("what some people think of as progress," as Swearingen describes the arrival of the telegraph), the arc for the female characters runs almost precisely in reverse. Martha Bullock, who arrives in lawless *Deadwood* to suffer in a loveless marriage to her late husband's brother, becomes the camp's schoolteacher and symbolic mother to the children. Calamity Jane, trailing after Wild Bill Hickock in the premiere, ends the series at the start of what seems to be a very good relationship. Her friend, lover, ward, and protector — Joanie Stubbs — has finally left the sex work that made her so miserable. Alma Garret, who arrives trapped in another loveless marriage and engaged in her own kind of sex work, is liberated by the death of her first husband and founds the Bank of *Deadwood*. And Trixie, literally under Swearingen's boot heel when we meet her, leaves the Gem Saloon to work as an accountant (for a short while, she is a clerk at the Bank of *Deadwood*, making it perhaps the only female-owned and -operated financial institution in history, fictional or otherwise). Of course, this summary leaves out a lot: Martha's heartbreak over the death of her son; Jane's alcoholism; the murder of Joanie's business partner and employees at the *Chez Amis*; Alma's laudanum addiction and second loveless marriage; Trixie's own drug relapse, her reluctance to leave sex work, and her near miss with death following her near miss of Hearst's heart in the final episode. But despite the tragedies that befall the women, the female characters end the series with greater personal agency than with what they began. In charting this opposite path, the female characters on *Deadwood* provide a counter-story to the main plot that only makes the series' relationship to contemporary politics and economics richer and more complex.

The one article in the collection single-authored by a woman, Julia M. Wright's "The Gothic Frontier of Modernity," shows the potential upshot of taking the female characters more seriously. She argues that *Deadwood* is

a gothic reading of Enlightenment political economy that represents the benign self-regulation of a market economy and inexorable progress of civil societies as founded upon gothic maneuvers of counterfeiting, the invisible hand's overturning of individual agency, and the more overtly gothic figure of tyrannical violence in the series' "gory finish." (43)

As such, it both aligns with the editors' claim that the series traces the "evacuation of personal agency" and expands on it. The men, who have access to the public sphere, find themselves increasingly unable to impose their personal interest on

it. Adam Smith would argue that in acting in their own self-interest they act in the common interest of the camp, and Wright explains that from the first episode, the series is marked by men who not only do not know how their self-interest relates to the public good, but often do not understand what their self-interest is. Progress comes “through hidden violence, the restraint of patriarchal figures, the magical transformation of self-interested actions into public benefits, and a cast of powerful men who ‘sit mystified’”: Smith’s “invisible hand” is returned to its gothic source (55). The female characters are excluded from the public sphere by virtue of their gender and so cannot act in their own interest. But, as Wright argues, they are central to the economic development of the camp, both as sex workers and as the “foundation of a banking economy... by Garret, the daughter of a con-man” (47). Banking is, of course, a confidence game: depositors must trust the bank; creditors must trust their debtors. The whole arrangement depends on another gothic trope: counterfeits. As Wright explains, banking is fundamentally “the substitution of a less authentic thing for a more authentic thing (deposit slips for currency, currency for gold)” (49). She carefully traces the counterfeits throughout the series, from the very first episode — in which Al blames an attack by road agents on the Sioux tribe — to the camp leaders’ false tranquility following Hearst’s brazen attack on Alma Garret on the main thoroughfare. And, of course, the show concludes with one last, life- and future-saving act of counterfeit: the substitution of Jen for Trixie to satisfy Hearst.

This moment brings together all of the threads we have been tracing throughout *Deadwood*, *The Last Western*, and my review. The substitution reveals, ultimately, how value is distributed through the social structure of the camp: Hearst’s wound is valued the same as the life of a woman; one woman’s life is more highly valued than another’s; one male character’s affective relationship to a woman (Al’s relationship with Trixie) is given more weight than another’s (Johnny’s relationship with Jen). Because Jen’s murder preserves the life of the camp — for now — it also suggests the way “the substitution of a less authentic thing” can satisfy, however briefly, the appetite of multinational capital. The final episodes of *Deadwood* depict Trixie’s lack of restraint and how her impulsive attempt on Hearst’s life requires that another die in her place. That is, it depends on the development of the female characters’ personal agency that is countered by the fact that, despite their forays into the public sphere, their bodies continue to be valued less than the men’s.

As such, we might read what Daniel Worden has to say about the non-white characters of the show and apply to the women. He writes:

Ultimately, what *Deadwood* dramatizes is the dual reality of race in our neoliberal era. Race persists as a site of difference, and that difference connotes historical inequality. However, today, racial distinctions are more often employed in the service not of equality but of increased inequality. (103)

Gender persists as a site of difference; but the easing of gender inequality seems to mark increased inequality generally: the women only gain personal agency as the advance of the nation and capital curtail the agency of the male characters. But what Worden leaves out in his account of race applies equally to my account of gender: the site of difference marked by race and gender is also a site of physical domination. It is a site where non-white and female bodies are counted less in the capitalistic exchange of biopolitics. Or, as Wright argues, “[m]odernity is itself revealed to be a counterfeit — a ‘pretense to civility’ through elections and a banking economy, with the ‘murderous engine’ [Hearst] continued unimpeded” (58). What I would add to Wright, and to *The Last Western* generally, is that the murderous engine of capital is fed by human bodies — bodies that are disproportionately female and non-white.

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