

ARTFUL VISIONS:
AESTHETIC POSSIBILITY AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN ZIZEK, HARDT
AND NEGRI, FOUCAULT, AND THE NEW RELATIONAL ART

BY LISA A. OLIVER
B.A., WHEATON COLLEGE, 1988
A.M., BROWN UNIVERSITY, 1990

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE
AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

MAY 2011

© Copyright 2011 by Lisa A. Oliver

CURRICULUM VITAE

Lisa A. Oliver was born in San Diego, California in 1966. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa in Art History in 1988 from Wheaton College (Norton, MA), where she received the Department of Art History Distinguished Senior Award, as well as the Grace F. Shepard Graduate Fellowship and the Phi Beta Kappa Wieand Fellowship, both for study at the graduate level. In the fall of 1988, she entered the graduate program in History of Art and Architecture at Brown University, earning her Master's degree in 1990 with her paper "Corot and the Romantic Ballet." At Brown, she assisted in mounting two full-scale scholarly exhibitions under the guidance of Kermit S. Champa (*Over Here: Modernism, The First Exile, 1914-1919*) and Catherine Zerner (*Philip II and the Escorial: Technology and the Representation of Architecture*), contributing catalogue entries to each, and was later selected to participate in a Mellon Foundation Dissertation Seminar. She worked as a teaching assistant in Brown's department of History of Art and Architecture and at the Rhode Island School of Design, and served as an academic writing tutor at the Brown University Writing Center. In addition to her teaching at Brown and RISD, she has served as a Lecturer in the Summer Bridge Program for incoming freshmen at risk at the University of Florida as well as a writing tutor at Harvard University's Division of Continuing Education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The interdisciplinary nature and scope of this project would not have been possible without the support and vision of the late Kermit S. Champa, who from the beginning not only tolerated but encouraged my propensity to experiment with the boundaries of the discipline to which he was so very dedicated. The unfailing support and mentorship of Professor Mary Ann Doane, who stepped in to see the project to completion as chair of the committee, were also instrumental to the project, from conceptualization to final revisions. Her intellectual generosity and teacherly patience—and most importantly, her vision of scholarship as both interventionary and transformative—enabled the project to stay true to its interdisciplinary, theoretical, and political priorities throughout its many transformations. I am thankful also to Professor Carolyn Dean, whose course on the History of Sexuality first introduced me to the work of Michel Foucault, and whose always-practical approach and vast knowledge of the material with which I've worked were invaluable to the project's realization. The dissertation also would not have reached completion without the support of Professor Douglas Nickel, who as Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of History of Art and Architecture not only negotiated the project's logistical realities, but joined the committee as a reader and lent his guidance in the crucial final stages.

For sparking my interest as an undergraduate in art and aesthetics, and for nurturing and developing that interest into a passion for scholarship and its transformative potential, I am deeply indebted to Professors Roberta Olson, Leslie Brubaker, and Ann Murray, former members of the faculty in the Department of Art History at Wheaton College. Their commitment to undergraduate education and to the intellectual growth of their individual students laid the foundation, and serves as a model and source of inspiration, for my every scholarly pursuit. I owe more recent thanks to Lynne Layton; my scholarship has greatly benefited from her wise counsel and nurturing support. Finally, I would like to thank my partner Eliezra Schaffzin for her unshakable faith in my work and for her endless supply of intelligent critique, writerly insight, and around-the-clock editorial assistance. Without her, possibility would seem significantly less possible.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Kermit S. Champa.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Curriculum Vitae</i>	iv
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	v
<i>Table of Contents</i>	vi
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Michel Foucault and <i>The Order of Things</i>	57
Chapter Three: Slavoj Žižek's Post-Modern Visions	104
Chapter Four: Hardt & Negri and our "Common Wealth"	149
Chapter Five: Aesthetic Potentials and New Worlds	201

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. A	<i>Untitled (Tomorrow is Another Day)</i> Rirkrit Tiravanija, 1996 Kölnischer Kunstverein, Installation View I Source: db artmag. Accessed April 29, 2011. (www.db-artmag.com/archiv/2006/e/5/1/465.html)	213
Fig. B	<i>Untitled (Tomorrow is Another Day)</i> Rirkrit Tiravanija, 1996 Kölnischer Kunstverein, Installation View II Source: db artmag. Accessed April 29, 2011. (www.db-artmag.com/archiv/2006/e/5/1/465.html)	214
Fig. C	<i>The World Generator/The Engine of Desire</i> Bill Seaman, 1995 Appears with permission of the artist.	248
Fig. D	<i>Forest Stream, Ephémère</i> Char Davies, 1998 Digital still image captured during live performance of immersive virtual environment <i>Ephémère</i> . Appears with permission of the artist.	252

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

One of the key features of much scholarly thought generated since the turn of the new millennium in the humanities and social sciences has been the new and uncharacteristic preoccupation with religion or, more precisely, with theology. In his introduction to the debate between Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank in *The Monstrosity of Christ*, a debate which appears to outline what is at stake for the academy and for the process of social change as a result of the new turn to theology, Creston Davis suggests that the emergence of theology in usually secular forms of thought results from the collapse of communism in the last decades of the twentieth century and the subsequent expansion of capitalism around the globe (3). According to Davis, the rise to global hegemony of capitalism after the fall of the Berlin Wall has led to the emergence of a “feeling...in the collective consciousness of philosophers, critics, poets, and theologians” that “[s]omething [is] being lost, forgotten. The exceeding depth of humanity [is] being overrun by the fiend of mindless material consumption, and the mysterious truths and hopes of humanity and history [are] being sold out to the markets...” (3). A new form of thought, Davis therefore suggests, has had to be developed, one that is able to resist the logic and the dominance of capitalism as well as the “individual will-to-power” which serves as its condition of possibility or what Davis calls its “presupposition,” and one that

can supplement if not replace the humanist-Marxist tradition. For Davis, this new form of thought is theological, and it has become the reigning model for social change, he argues, “precisely because capitalism is ultimately a self-enclosed structure, and so theology gives us a way to transcend capital premised on relationality and not on Ego...” (3).

While Davis’ political hopes for the theological may be a bit inflated, he is perhaps correct in his claim that theology, at least in its present manifestation, may hold the potential to engender new forms of “relationality” that may allow us to transcend capitalism. For Davis, relationality serves as another term for social connection, a structure that, he argues, has been “undercut” in the era of globalization by capitalism and by the instrumental reason, individualism, and the will to power (Ego) that serve as its foundation (10). The move beyond capitalism to a form of relationality, Davis contends, will thus require a move beyond these manifestations of Enlightenment subjectivity, and he suggests that in the contemporary moment, it is once again theology that provides the most coherent blueprint for such a move. Indeed, Davis believes that theology, as a form of thought premised specifically on relationality, is bringing back a mode of thinking that resists both the subject-centered nature of modern philosophy as well as the anti-metaphysical nature of postmodern theory, a mode of thinking, more precisely, which does not shy away from attempts at theorizing the “Truth of Being-in-the-World” (13), or from attempts to construct universalizing theoretical frameworks or models for praxis designed to bring us to this Truth or to a “Whole” in which the “world’s fragmentation” is unified (13-14, 16). For Davis then theology is bringing back a new form of metaphysics and thus a “new universal logic that connects us to each other once again,” a logic that holds the potential to heal the fragmentation and social and cultural nihilism of

contemporary capitalist modernity as it imagines a singular and universal social totality (18).

Of the many disciplines that have begun to embrace theology (Davis counts “philosophy, political science, literature, history, psychoanalysis, and critical theory, in particular” (3)), the history of art, though not included explicitly on Davis’ list, is perhaps the most obvious candidate for a return to the theological, as throughout modernity, art has retained a somewhat sacral nature. Romantic artists and writers from the 18th and 19th centuries as well as many neo-romantics from the 20th century have believed, for instance, that art can open the viewer to experiences of “the infinite, the sublime, the timeless, or the divine” (Morgan, “Enchantment” 15). For many artists and writers who have resisted a Romantic understanding of the aesthetic, art is still understood to manifest a sacralizing nature. Indeed, as David Morgan argues in his introduction to the volume *Re-Enchantment*, a text which engages with the intersection of art and religion as part of a series on recent trends in art history and criticism, “art is widely believed capable of saving a nation’s people or soul,...provoking moral enlightenment,...providing access to timeless and universal goods, revealing truths of transcendent value...Art is intrinsically, undeniably good. Art bears the sacred and keeps it for the ages. In this way of thinking, merely to see art, to be in its presence, is an indefatigably wholesome thing” (17). As a manifestation or a bearer of the sacred, whether religious or civic, art has in fact served as the center of many theoretical and practical projects which have set out to address what Max Weber has lamented as capitalism’s disenchantment of the world,¹ aiming to create new forms of relationality. But while art and religion have shared a linked history

¹ See Weber, *Protestant Ethic and Economy and Society*, especially the latter text’s sections on religion.

throughout modernity, contemporary art historians have until recently, as many authors in the volume *Re-Enchantment* argue, minimized, marginalized, or even ignored these tendencies, especially in the artwork and writings of late 19th and 20th-century manifestations of the avant garde, and artists since WWII have likewise generally kept away from the spiritual in their practice of art making (Morgan, “Enchantment” 17-18).² With the recent return of the theological to the academy, however, art history is being reawakened to some of art’s prior spiritual valences, and is responding to this return in two particular ways. First the new acceptance of religious concerns is allowing its practitioners to reach back into the history of art and to identify those moments, ignored by previous scholarship, that appear to hold some spiritual or theological meaning; it is allowing them to proclaim the religiosity of earlier forms of modernist art and theory and as such to revitalize some of modern art’s older concerns.³ Secondly it is allowing art historians and art critics (and promises to allow practicing artists) to return to an engagement with art’s potential to repair the fragmentation and social and cultural nihilism of contemporary capitalist modernity by aesthetic means.⁴

This second tendency is clearly the more politically focused manifestation of the entrance of theological discourse into contemporary art history, criticism, and practice (and it is the project with which this dissertation will engage). Indeed, as many of the contributors to *Re-Enchantment* observe, theological discourse, as it enters into these

² See also Randall K. Van Schepen’s article “From the Form of Spirit to the Spirit of Form” in the volume *Re-Enchantment*.

³ Art Historians, for example, are returning to the writings of the German Idealist and Romantic philosophers and are tracing their “theo-aesthetic” concerns with subjective and social reintegration through to the late-20th century. See for example Morgan, “Enchantment” and “Art and Religion” as well as Van Schepen “From the Form of Spirit.”

⁴ See Gablik, *The Re-Enchantment of Art*.

fields as well as the academy as a whole, is revitalizing the political concerns of art making/theorizing and of scholarship in general—specifically, I would add, at a time when Marxism has been discredited as an efficacious political philosophy or practice. For art history, criticism, and theory—and potentially for art practice—theology, in its willingness to think the Truth-in-Being and to generate theories or models of praxis to realize this Truth, is helping to shake art free from the primarily critical and pedagogical roles it has served in the contemporary moment and to return art to its political roots in praxis—theology is making it possible once again for art to act as an interventionary force, a force which sets out to mend the rifts of modernity and capitalism. The combining of the theological and the aesthetic into a program of intervention is clearly not a new phenomenon in modernity, as even a cursory glance at aesthetic theory from the 18th and early 19th centuries makes clear. This intersection itself served as a primary foundation of artistic theory and practice at the time of the Enlightenment and reemerged in different forms throughout 19th- and early 20th-century modernity.⁵ But throughout its modern history, the intersection of aesthetics and theology has taken a shape very different from the form it assumed in the period before modernity. In premodernity, what we now call “religious art” was fused into the ritual life of the people, serving as an aid to worship or as forms of worship or even as life itself—here art did not possess an autonomous being or a logic outside its religious function. In modernity, however, where the world became “de-divinized” or disenchanted and the aesthetic began to exist as a value sphere radically separate from that of the religious, the joining of aesthetics and theology became a purely philosophical and political project, one designed not to further

⁵ See Schiller, Ruskin, and Kandinsky, for example.

the glory of God, but to critique and in many instances to begin to address the diremptions and the fragmentation of modernity as well as the splintering of the modern subject.⁶

The current return of the theological specifically to the theorization and practice of art and aesthetics after a period of dormancy provides perhaps the most powerful clue in any attempt to understand the precise meaning of the return of the theological to the contemporary academy as well as what is at stake as a result of this return. It may be tempting to explain the return of theology to the academy and the joining of the theological and the aesthetic as a direct indication of the coming into being of a new religious cultural system or life-world, as a move to an aestheticized and religious post-modernity, one that by its sheer commitment to the moral system or the system of values of the Judeo-Christian tradition (or any other religious tradition for that matter) is able to overcome the loss of the “exceeding depth of humanity” brought about by Capital and to stem the tide of its growth. However a careful look at the new discourse of the theological circulating in the academy in most disciplines, but especially in the history of art, makes clear that despite its apparently non-modern theological intentions, this discourse, in most cases, is working within the exact parameters of what Jürgen Habermas has called “the philosophical discourse of modernity.”⁷ What may appear to be a new academic trend is in actuality, I believe, a continuation of the tradition of combining philosophy, art and religion that served, at modernity’s inception and into the mid-20th century, as one of the most important forms of political and importantly

⁶ For an excellent discussion of the intersection of religion and aesthetics in the 18th and 19th centuries, see Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, particularly his first “Excursus” and Chapter IV.

⁷ See Habermas’ book of the same title.

philosophical resistance to capitalism and rationalization. With the contemporary joining of the theological and the aesthetic, then, we are not returning to a religious cultural system or life-world, nor are we pursuing visions for a religious non- or post-modernity. Instead we are returning to the attempt to define our universal humanity, our social being, so that we may begin to contend with the diremptions of contemporary modernity and modern subjectivity, and in the process we are returning to the foundations of the modern political, philosophical and aesthetic project—we are returning once again to the primary interventionary concerns of the philosophical and aesthetic discourses of modernity which have as their main priority not the creation of a “New Jerusalem,” but the addressing of the ills of modernity, including capitalism, and the creation of models for social change and ultimately relationality.

While committed secularists may find it disturbing that theology in the contemporary moment appears to have inherited the mantle of the philosophical discourse of modernity, in today’s depoliticized academic climate it makes complete sense, in fact, that it is religion that is revitalizing our political aims. As many scholars both secular and religious have argued, the contemporary moment is one of extreme crisis, where the unchecked logic of Capital is bringing us to the brink of disaster.⁸ There is no doubt that as we move in this potentially apocalyptic direction, the academy must once again, as Slavoj Žižek argues, risk the political if it still wishes to intervene into the present state of affairs. If we follow Žižek’s definition, the “political act (intervention) proper is ... *something that changes the very framework that determines how things work*” (*Ticklish Subject* 199), such that “authentic politics” becomes “the art of the

⁸ See, for example, Žižek, *Living in the End Times* and James Berger, *After the End*.

impossible – it changes the very parameters of what is considered ‘possible’ in the existing constellation” (199). But before the academy can re-engage in true political struggle and change, it must be willing to define the center(s) of power and oppression that determine our contemporary socio-political and cultural “constellation”; it must be willing, in other words, to acknowledge the threat of Capital and the ways in which its contemporary manifestation has depoliticized and paralyzed not only the general populations of the West but the academy itself.⁹ Most importantly, the academy must be willing, as both Davis and Žižek argue, to risk imagining the Truth-of-Being-in-the-World, to risk a definition of our universal humanity, our social being—most crucially, it must be willing to risk the building of universalizing theories and models of praxis which may allow us to realize this Truth and with it a better world. While the broader academy has been unwilling, in most instances, to take these risks over the last two decades, theology has not shied away from risking the metaphysical and the political, precisely because its spiritual and moral convictions, even if appearing naïve or misguided, have kept its practice attuned to the goals of social justice and, perhaps most importantly, allowed it to overcome the apathy and careerism—driven by the commodification of knowledge and the fear of the consequences resulting from refusing to follow the latest theoretical trends—that characterize the contemporary academy.¹⁰ It is theology’s moral conviction, then, its committed quest for social justice and its willingness to buck more fashionable academic trends, that, in our present social crisis, has allowed it, I believe, to regain importance in the academy as a model for sociopolitical change. Theology, as it

⁹ For a discussion of the ways in which the academy has been depoliticized in the contemporary moment, and for a theorization of the ways this trend might be reversed, see Barnett, *Being a University*.

¹⁰ Žižek also comments on apathy and careerism in the university: see *The Ticklish Subject* 359.

risers to inter-disciplinary prominence, holds the key to repoliticizing the academy, to re-infusing it with political conviction and integrity, not to mention a sense of hope; theology is in fact reminding the academy of its original socio-political mission as it was laid out at the start of modernity, a mission that in its concern with social justice and change is crucial to the philosophical and aesthetic discourse of modernity itself.

But while theology is reintroducing the coordinates of political change and providing the impetus required to repoliticize the academy, we must be cautious in our embrace of the theological as an interventionary tool to bring us beyond our present social circumstances. It is imperative, in fact, that as we recognize theology's power to reorient the academic project, we refuse the temptation to seek a future social and cultural postmodernity in a religious cultural system or life-world. Theology has been quite justifiably categorized as a pre- or nonmodern phenomenon, and visions of a religious postmodernity have thus been dismissed as backward-looking. But even if we were to concede to the argument made by many secular and religious theorists (including Žižek) that Christianity is, on the contrary, the defining moment of modernity, that it is a modern Event premised on a radical freedom made possible by the Incarnation of Christ—and therefore functions according to the logic of modernity and not according to a premodern logic—Christianity and, as I will argue later in this introduction, the type of radical self-determining freedom that is attributed to it by these thinkers, is not radical enough as a model for social change for a future postmodern social totality. Instead, then, of turning to religion for a model of social change or a future postmodern state, we must embrace the return of theology to the academy for what it really is, a return to the concerns of the philosophical discourse of modernity. With its refusal to bow to religion-shy academic

trends and thus to the market, theology is providing us with the moral and political ethos needed to face and address the problems of contemporary modernity (instrumental reason, rationality, Capital, etc.) that have been with us since modernity's inception. With its willingness to risk the metaphysical, to, in other words, imagine the truth of our humanity and to fashion theoretical paths through to its realization, theology is reminding us that it might be possible once again to begin to repair the diremptions of modernity, to re-enchant our cultural system, and to envision and construct a new social totality or, as Davis would say, a new form of relationality beyond capitalism. It is reminding us, to be more precise, that the critique of modernity and the interventionary goals of the philosophical and aesthetic discourse of modernity are very much relevant for us today.

Most important to this dissertation (and perhaps to those theorists seeking to reinvigorate the philosophical discourse of modernity through praxis) is theology's entrance into the world of art, including the discipline of art history—a phenomenon which, as discussed above, holds the potential to release art from its primarily critical and pedagogical roles, returning it to its political roots in praxis and transforming it into a force of sociopolitical change. This new direction inspired by the theological reminds us that art and aesthetics may still serve, as they did in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, as an interventionary tool for social change and for the imagining of new forms of sociality. But once again, we must be very careful that religion's intersection with art, like its intersection with politics in general, is not used as a means to further the goals of theology or to bring into being a religious postmodernity—theological goals, in other words, must not be confused with philosophical ones. The powerful intersection of art and theology should instead, in my view, be harnessed as a secular force and returned to

the goals of the philosophical discourse of modernity, so that art and aesthetics may again be employed as a means to help address the ills of modernity and to bring us beyond capitalism. As a contribution to the discipline of art history, this dissertation makes a small attempt to reunite art/aesthetics with the original objectives of the philosophical discourse of modernity. Riding the wave of theology's repoliticization of art and the academy, the dissertation revisits the philosophical discourse of modernity and attempts to respond to the line of thought stemming from the works of those 19th, 20th, and 21st century participants in the discourse, including Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Žižek, Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, Jacques Rancière, and Nicolas Bourriaud, whose theoretical and political agendas lean toward the aesthetic as a means for coming to terms with the problems of modernity. Since the philosophical discourse of modernity offers in many instances theorizations of the Truth-of-Being-in-the-World, as well as models of relationality and blueprints for ways beyond instrumental reason and the will to power and thus capitalism, the reading of these works together may help map the parameters of a new aesthetic theory that might be employed in artistically-informed attempts to intervene into capitalism and modernity itself. But before turning to an analysis of the work of these theorists, a project which will be carried out in Chapters Two through Five of the dissertation, the remainder of this introduction will map out the historical and contemporary parameters of the philosophical discourse of modernity and attempt to chart its interventionary path up until the present crisis, and possibly beyond it.

• • •

As Jürgen Habermas argues, the philosophical discourse of modernity has accompanied modernity from its inception, and while the discourse has been unified over the course of its history by a concern with the social and subjective diremptions wrought by modernity and thus with modernity's fate, the discourse has nonetheless been structured around a deep and fundamental division. On one side of the discourse, there are those theorists who are fierce defenders of modernity and all its emancipatory potential, who wish to move beyond the diremptions of modernity brought about by the rise of instrumental reason and capitalism, but not beyond modernity itself. On the other side, there are those "counter-enlightenment" thinkers who find not only instrumental reason and capitalism but modernity itself to be highly problematic and who thus wish to move beyond modernity as a social, cultural and subjective manifestation. But whether the various expressions of the discourse have understood modernity as a potentially emancipatory or a completely diremptive force, the discourse has always been extremely critical of the subject-centered and instrumentalized reason as well as the will to power, domination and control that serve as the foundation of modernity's cultural systems and its form of subjectivity (*Philosophical Discourse* 55-6). Throughout its history, the discourse has denounced the nihilistic nature of modernity's cultural formations as well as their objectifying and dominating tendencies, which, the discourse argues, have prevented the creation of a non-oppressive modern life-world or social system. The discourse's rifts and variations have been continually shaped by the fact that though the discourse has been highly critical of the cultural and social systems of modernity, it has not always dismissed modernity outright. While the discourse's "anarchist" or counter-enlightenment side, inaugurated by Nietzsche, has indeed found no redemptive value in

modernity, the emancipatory arm of the discourse flowing from Hegel and through Habermas, though extremely critical of instrumental reason, has nonetheless appreciated the significant developments made possible by modernity, including “the ‘unthawing’ and ‘reflective refraction’ of cultural traditions, the universalization of norms and generalization of values, and the growing individuation of personal identities” (McCarthy xvii)—and, as such, has continued to find value in modern cultural and social systems as well as the modern form of subjectivity.

In the contemporary manifestation of the philosophical discourse of modernity, the respective stances toward modernity taken by each side of the discourse, “anarchist” and emancipatory, have clearly remained similar to what they were in the discourse’s previous manifestations. What has changed as we have moved from the 20th to the 21st century is the focus of the discourse’s interventionary programs designed to address the cultural nihilism and social pathologies of modernity as well as the growth of capitalism; also changed are the discourse’s visions for a reconciled world. In its 19th- and 20th-century manifestations, the emancipatory side of the discourse, exemplified in the work of Hegel, Marx, and Horkheimer & Adorno,¹¹ set out to heal the cultural, social, and subjective fragmentation brought about by capitalist modernity through modern philosophical and aesthetic means (including praxis philosophy) and to recreate a reconciled and ethical life-world, while simultaneously embracing the “unthawing,” universalization, and individuation made possible by modernity; in other words, this line of thinking sought to heal or to reconcile modernity on modernity’s own terms. However, in the 21st-century embodiment of the discourse’s emancipatory side, which still

¹¹ See Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Chapter V, for a discussion of the conflicted nature of Horkheimer & Adorno’s work in relation to the dialectic of enlightenment.

embraces the universalization, individuation, and social and subjective freedoms made possible by modernity, it is primarily theologians and scholars of religion, among them John Milbank and Graham Ward,¹² who still wish to heal modernity's cultural and social fragmentation engendered by capitalism and to bring about a reconciled and more integrated life-world; leftists of the emancipatory ilk such as Hardt & Negri and Zizek (particularly in his non-theological mode) want instead to radicalize the fragmentation and contingency of modernity as a means to go beyond capitalism and to create cultural/symbolic and social systems founded on this radicalization and ultimately on a form of aestheticization. In its attempts to address the cultural, social, and subjective pathologies of modernity and capitalism, the "anarchist" or counter-enlightenment side of the discourse, in both its 19th/20th-century manifestations and its contemporary forms, has worked to move beyond modern epistemological and ontological frameworks, beyond reason and rationality altogether. The 19th and 20th-century manifestations of this counter-enlightenment discourse, evident in the work, for example, of Nietzsche, Bataille, and Foucault, envisioned non-productivist and non-rationalized "postmodern" social and cultural formations, brought about primarily through aestheticized means, that were to be multiple, plural and ultimately fragmented, closely resembling the radicalized social and cultural formations theorized by today's emancipatory side, particularly in the work of Zizek and Hardt & Negri. The contemporary manifestation of the counter-enlightenment side of the discourse, on the contrary, envisions in scholarly work such as the projects of

¹² See Milbank's "The Gift of Ruling" and *Theology and Social Theory* as well as *The Monstrosity of Christ*, and Ward's *Cities of God*, *Cultural Transformation* and *True Religion*.

Boris Groys¹³ not a multiple and plural postmodern sociality, but rather a reintegrated and ethically reconciled and unified postmodernity, one in which the fragmentation and the contingency of capitalist modernity are completely healed by an aesthetic re-enchantment of social and cultural spheres and the reinstitution of a singular and incontestable framework of meaning.

While it is true that all participants in the philosophical discourse of modernity have repudiated capitalism and have worked to envision forms of sociality and subjectivity beyond the will to power and instrumental reason that sit at capitalism's foundations, the deep divisions in the discourse, especially in its contemporary form, serve to demonstrate that any intervention into capitalism will first require a dialogue on what to do about modern subjectivity and modernity itself as we work to move beyond this system. Indeed, if we are to theorize effective interventions into capitalism and eventually to eradicate it and build a less oppressive and more just social formation, we must revisit the absolutely crucial question which has structured the philosophical discourse of modernity since its inception: Should we push beyond modernity or should we simply rehabilitate it? Modernity has, without a doubt, since its beginnings over three centuries ago, brought into existence radical and important subjective, cultural and social changes. It first and foremost brought into being a form of ontological and epistemological reflexivity that allowed the West, for the first time, to critique the transcendental and naturalized symbolic structures or narratives (the myths) that served as the foundation of its cultural, subjective, and social formations, and in the process, released the West from the violence and the cruel hierarchies of the premodern socio-

¹³ Groys is an art critic, media theorist, and philosopher who in his work has recently taken an interest in religion.

cultural framework made possible specifically by these symbolic forms. This modern form of ontological and epistemological reflexivity, as it critiqued and denaturalized the transcendental structures, the totalizing myths, which had served as the foundation of the premodern system, also released the human being, and nature itself, from the fixity of natural law, from the fixity of “God’s divine plan” or “the Great Chain of Being,” and allowed the human being to approach nature and itself as autonomous entities. This process brought into being both modern scientific consciousness and, most importantly, the possibility, if not the actuality, of the eradication of many types of human suffering and pain including starvation and disease.¹⁴

As modernity’s defenders such as Hegel and Habermas have consistently reminded us, the modern form of subjective reflexivity has also made possible the emergence of the modern structures of abstract consciousness and self-determination. While the defenders of modernity have found these structures to be modernity’s most important gains, celebrating their emancipatory nature unconditionally, in this dissertation, I will take a more cautious stance toward the structures of abstract consciousness and self-determination. While I understand the importance and the value of a form of consciousness which holds the power to critique reflexively those transcendental symbolic structures, no matter how deeply naturalized, that serve as its foundation and the foundation of the socio-cultural formation in which it exists, I hesitate to concede that modern abstract consciousness and self-determination should be fully embraced as emancipatory structures, because they have come, as almost all participants in the philosophical discourse of modernity have demonstrated, at tremendous costs. The

¹⁴ Habermas, Žižek, and Hardt & Negri are the philosophical discourse of modernity’s strongest contemporary defenders of modernity’s emancipatory potential.

most obvious costs of these structures have been the rise of instrumental reason as well as the will to power, domination and control—formations, which, again, have been problematized, along with their effects, by the discourse since its inception, and, as such, need not be analyzed here.¹⁵

But while instrumental reason and the will to power have indeed taken their toll on the West since the inception of modernity, the more insidious and destructive, yet less systematically interrogated costs of modernity, I believe, are desire and the “death drive,” specifically as they have been theorized by Slavoj Žižek following the theories of Jacques Lacan. In his work Žižek refers to both these structures as the “forgotten obverse, the excessive unacknowledged kernel of the cogito, which is far from the pacifying image of the transparent Self” (*Ticklish Subject* 2) and attributes their formation to the human infant’s entrance into a binary linguistic system via sexual difference and an “excessive/traumatic encounter” with the Other’s “jouissance,” events which give rise to the human infant’s withdrawal from its direct immersion in the world (289), or to its radical alienation from Being. This withdrawal, for Žižek, “stands for a kind of ontological ‘Big Bang,’” for “the primordial violence” of breaking out of the unity of Life (295), and it is a withdrawal that situates subjectivity as “the void in the order of being” (288-89). As products then of the subject’s violent withdrawal from being, desire and the death drive, according to Žižek, function as radically negative ontological structures. Desire, for instance, which seeks a jouissance that is “unattainable, always already-lost” and that “forever eludes our grasp” (291, 293), is impossible to satisfy—it exists as infinite striving and an eternal state of dissatisfaction (297). Indeed for Žižek,

¹⁵ See particularly Foucault’s genealogies, *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*; Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*; Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*.

“[d]esire stands for the economy in which whatever object we get hold of is ‘never *it*’, the ‘Real Thing’, that which the subject is forever trying to attain but which eludes him again and again....” (291). As for the death drive, Žizek suggests it stands for “the pure void of subjectivity” (51); it designates Lacan’s “immortal” lamella, “the monstrous ‘undead’ object-libido” (154), and thus exists not as the longing for death as its name would suggest, but for “the very opposite of dying” (292)—indeed, for Žizek, death drive “is a name for the ‘undead’ eternal life itself, for the horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in ... pain,” of which we can never rid ourselves (292). The death drive then, as the void of subjectivity, as a permanent ‘out of joint’ state, stands for the subject’s inability ever to return to its original fullness of being or to a state of bliss.¹⁶ As ontological structures of radical negativity, desire and the death drive, in Žizek’s scheme, lend to the subject a violent ‘unruliness’ (37), a “wild, unconstrained propensity to insist stubbornly on [its] own will, cost what it may” (36), that leads the subject to forsake all relationality and to pursue its own course. But though radically negative and ultimately destructive of relationality, desire and the death drive, for Žizek, function not as inherently dangerous and damaging entities, not as the primary costs of modernity, but rather as catalysts for radical political and social change.¹⁷ Žizek’s understanding of desire and the death drive as forces both affirmative and emancipatory has been made possible by the fact that he universalizes these structures

¹⁶ In Žizek’s model of subjectivity, it appears that the *jouissance* the subject of desire longs for is the *jouissance* of this return or, in other words, the *jouissance* of an impossible reintegration.

¹⁷ See Chapter Three of this dissertation for a discussion of Žizek’s use of radical negativity as the foundation of his political program.

and then essentializes them, as I will show later in the introduction, specifically as the very essence of human freedom.

Because of the widespread influence and staying-power in the academy of psychoanalytic theory (particularly the Freudian and Lacanian variety), the Freudian/Lacanian/Zizekian understanding of desire and the death drive has not often been questioned—indeed, these structures have rarely been identified as deleterious forces or seen as specific to modernity. The dissertation, however, sets out to challenge the hegemony of the psychoanalytic understanding and universalization of desire and the death drive. Following the work of Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*, the dissertation attempts to de-essentialize desire and the death drive by demonstrating that the binary linguistic structures which produce them, whether or not transmitted through the “jouissance” of the Other, are specifically modern structures and are thus found at no other time.¹⁸ It is only by deessentializing desire and the death drive, I believe, that we may begin to understand their specifically modern character and may thus begin to imagine a future state without them. But perhaps most importantly, it is only by deessentializing these structures that we may begin to conceptualize them, I will argue, as the primary foundation or the cause of modernity’s subjective and, importantly, social instability. As forces of radical negativity and “infinite striving” that compel the subject to pursue its own singular course (a course that rarely seeks relation), to pursue, that is, the object-stand-in for its lost jouissance or fullness of being no matter the cost to the

¹⁸ In *The Order of Things*, particularly in the final chapter, Foucault treats desire in a somewhat Lacanian fashion; however, he does not understand desire as an essential human trait but rather attributes desire to the modern mode of being of language and thus conceives of it as a condition of possibility specifically of modern subjectivity. In *The History of Sexuality*, especially Volumes 2 & 3, Foucault no longer treats desire as a product of the modern mode of being of language; instead he sees it as a biological urge.

bonds of the social, desire and the death drive, I believe, have produced a civilization of subjects who are *structurally* incapable of placing the needs of the totality above their own. While it is clear that the disintegrating effects on the social of the desiring subject's pursuit of its own self-interest have been felt since the beginning of the modern period, the cultural apparatus of the previous era of modernity, its systems of law and morality, was nonetheless able to provide an ethical framework that could keep the desiring subject in check and thus provide a form of stability for the totality.¹⁹ In contemporary modernity, however, where capitalism has completely colonized the modern cultural apparatus in its continuous attempts to reproduce itself, emptying it of any ethical content and at the same time unleashing and cultivating the subject's desire by enticing it to consume, the bonds of the social are completely breaking down, as it is almost impossible for the subject to take an uncoerced ethical stance in the face of Capital's cultivation of its desire and in the face of Capital's destruction of the modern cultural sphere and its forms of morality. It seems that in the contemporary moment, only explicit policing and surveillance or the threat to the individual of the withholding of the object of desire²⁰ can

¹⁹ See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*; Beck and Beck, *Individualization*; Žizek, *The Ticklish Subject*, Chapter 6: "Whither Oedipus?"

²⁰ I am thinking here particularly of the national credit and medical databases whose information contained on the individual subject holds the potential to determine the course of the subject's life. Not only do these databases function as a form of direct surveillance, or information-gathering, for the system of Capital, if not the legal institutions of the state; they also function as a means to control the subject's behavior, as the subject is entirely aware that what is written into these databases will fully affect its ability to gain employment and of course to purchase. What I am suggesting here, then, is that it is the menacing presence of these databases, as forms of surveillance and discipline, that ensures—of course by default, as they are not in place to replicate a system of ethics but rather to protect the system of Capital—the "ethical" character of the subject's behavior in the contemporary moment. It is the presence of these databases, in other words, that reminds the subject that if it does not conform to the social behaviors prescribed by Capital as the dominant social relation, it will not be able to partake in the system of consumption or even the system of production. In *The Ticklish Subject*, Žizek himself discusses these databases, albeit in the context of his theories of subjective interpellation and not in the context of consumption. Nevertheless, his conceptualization of the operations of what he calls the "databases that circulate in the corporate cyberspace" reinforces my point: "...I myself am well aware of how, outside the grasp of my knowledge, databases circulate which determine my symbolic identity in the eyes of the social 'big Other.' My very

keep the subject in check and the totality together.²¹ This implantation of morality or ethics by surveillance or threat and the subjective and social instability that it reveals clearly cannot continue much longer without the complete breakdown of the contemporary social system. It is this breakdown that the philosophical discourse of modernity, revitalized by the politicized, imaginative work of contemporary theologians, artists, and art theorists, is poised to address. I believe that if we are to use the tools of the discourse to overcome our present subjective and social instability and create a more just and relational social totality, we might do so most successfully by harnessing the discourse's aesthetic programs.

• • •

Whether we work to rehabilitate modernity or to push beyond it, then—and even as we debate the related question of whether in order to end capitalism once and for all we must move beyond modernity—what seems clear is that if we are to eliminate capitalism and ensure it will not return, we will have to re-evaluate, if not eradicate, the structural presence of desire and the death drive, since they serve as the driving

awareness of the fact that ‘the truth is out there,’ that files on me circulate which, even if they are factually ‘inaccurate,’ none the less performatively determine my socio-symbolic status, is what gives rise to the specific proto-paranoiac mode of subjectivization characteristic of today’s subject: it constitutes me as a subject inherently related to and hassled by an elusive piece of database in which, beyond my reach, ‘my fate is writ large’” (*Ticklish Subject* 260).

²¹ Žižek’s reading of the breakdown of the cultural sphere and his take on its effects on subjectivity stand in direct opposition to mine, since he understands desire as a catalyst for radical political and social change rather than the very cause of cultural breakdown. In his work, Žižek addresses the consequences of the cultural breakdown only for the individual subject and not for the totality; this is because he aims to build his model of a post-modern society on radical negativity and withdrawal, as well as social instability. See Chapter Three of this dissertation for a discussion of Žižek’s theorization of the breakdown of the cultural sphere.

reproductive force of the contemporary system of capitalism and as the primary vehicle of subjective and social instability. But should we worry that the elimination of desire and the death drive will also eliminate the modern form of reflexivity that has allowed the West to critique and importantly revise the naturalized, transcendental narratives/traditions that have served as the foundation for its social and subjective paradigms? If we follow the logic of the psychoanalytic model, it appears that reflexivity cannot survive the demise of desire and the death drive, as it is born of the same symbolic paradigm and the same trauma to the subject that brings desire and the death drive into being. Indeed, as Žižek argues, desire and the death drive serve as the obverse of the modern transcendental subject—thus if reflexivity exists, desire and the death drive will always exist. Are we left with no choice, then, if we wish to rid ourselves of desire and the death drive, but to eliminate reflexivity as well, and would this potential elimination of reflexivity be disastrous for the West?

This next dilemma signals that we will need to question the structural necessity of reflexivity as a foundation of a just form of culture and society if we wish to move beyond capitalism. In its initial stages, such questioning will most likely reveal that, despite the philosophical discourse of modernity's demonstrations of the propensity of reflexivity, as well as reason and rationality, to degenerate into instrumentality and the will to power, these structures, while indeed corruptible, are not inherently destructive forces as are desire and the death drive, since their logic leads to an intersubjective communicational relationality, as Habermas has shown in his theory of communicative

action²². Understood as such, reflexivity appears to be a viable structural foundation for a just and ethical form of culture and society, if not a necessary one. However, in the face of reflexivity's inextricable link to desire and the death drive, whose destructive natures, it may be argued, have precluded the possibility (at least over the last century) of the construction of a just and ethical totality, the viability of reflexivity as a structural foundation for culture and society seems to diminish greatly, as desire and the death drive do not allow reflexivity to live up to its utopian potential. In fact, it may be argued that reflexivity's tie to desire and the death drive makes it almost dangerous to place this structure at the foundation of culture and society. But must the potentially dangerous nature of reflexivity and thus the ultimate unfeasibility of the Habermasian model of communicative reason leave us with no viable options for building a just society, thus dooming us to a fate of living in a state of perpetual instability and dissolution?

I think not. As I will demonstrate in the dissertation, non-modern models for building just alternatives to the social systems of modernity plagued by desire and the death drive do indeed exist, models which, for instance, rest potential social formations on fixed, unchallengeable symbolic orders or narratives (myth), on substantive rationality, or on relational ontologies or epistemologies—none of which are founded on reflexivity.²³ While it may be plausible to assume such non-modern models of sociality are inherently unjust, as they appear to rely on structural conditions of possibility similar to that of premodern social formations—social formations that were indeed highly

²² Indeed, Habermas' communicative totality, utopian as it is and almost impossible to implement, theoretically, at least, appears to hold the potential to embody, to approximate, a just ethical system. See *Theory of Communicative Action*.

²³ For models of relational epistemologies, see Waldau and Patton, eds., *A Communion of Subjects*, and Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy's Point of View*.

problematic from the standpoint of justice and equality—we should remember that it was not the structural conditions of possibility of premodern social formations (i.e. fixity, purposefulness, relationality, etc.), but their symbolic/narrative contents, articulations of hierarchy and uneven distributions of power, that led to the unjust nature of premodern social systems. With this in mind, we should not immediately assume then that non-modern social systems modeled on the structural conditions of possibility of premodern social formations will be inherently unjust. In fact, they hold the potential to function justly, I believe, if the symbolic/narrative content that serves as their foundations does not replicate the content of premodern systems—if, more specifically, this content does not function as a narrative of hierarchy and uneven distributions of power but rather as a narrative of radical equality and fairness.

I want to be clear here, however, that while it may be possible to fashion a just and non-oppressive social system on non-modern structural foundations, avoiding any direct ties to the modern form of reflexivity and importantly to desire and the death drive, we must be careful, I believe, not to take leave of reflexivity prematurely. Even if reflexivity is not necessary to the construction of a just society, it is, we must remember, central to our ability to critique transcendental symbolic structures. Indeed, no matter how well-functioning a social system may appear, there is always the potential for it to shift and to degenerate, and in these instances, it is reflexive critique that holds out the possibility for reevaluation of the disintegrating system—in the face of social disintegration, reflexivity and critique are, it seems, the most powerful catalysts for social change the West possesses and, for this reason, are crucial instruments for combating oppression and the solidified effects of power, whether repressive or productive; they are,

in other words, what allow for revolution. And though it does in fact appear that reflexive critique is failing us today—insofar as we have not yet been able to harness it to rid ourselves of the symbolic structures that maintain capitalism (though we are well aware we possess this potential)—it would be quite dangerous to give up this power without having present an alternative form of critique, as we would be relinquishing our ability to change our present circumstances now and in the future.

So, again, we must ask: Is there a way to retain a form of critique and the ability to change our present circumstances without reflexivity? Is there a way to avoid a split and desiring subject, a self-conscious, transcendental subject, but still retain possibilities for social change, even if these possibilities do not take modern form? These are, of course, enormously complex and challenging questions whose answers will only come from deep interdisciplinary thought and, importantly, collaboration. While the philosophical discourse of modernity in both its past and present forms has not addressed these questions directly, its concern with the genesis, organization, and consequences of modern subjectivity, with subjective rationality, as well as with culture and especially aesthetics as a means to rehabilitate or transcend modernity makes the discourse an ideal starting point from which to begin an interdisciplinary exploration of these questions. What in fact makes the discourse so promising as an initial point of entry into serious thought of a move beyond modernity and of critical social change generally is its commitment to subjective intervention and change through the use of culture or, more precisely, aesthetics, as well as its propensity to valorize the human ability to determine its own forms of subjectivity.

While the privileging of culture and subjectivity as sites of intervention in order to effect social change may be an effective political tactic in the contemporary moment, where the culturalized system of capitalism operates and reproduces itself largely through the production of cultural discourses and forms—via the labor of the reigning mass of intellectual, communications and affective workers, and, of course, through the production of subjectivity²⁴—it appears, generally, to be a considerably counterintuitive move: indeed, if our ultimate goal is to effect social change, to bring about a new and more just social formation, why bring about change indirectly, why target subjectivity and culture in order to shift the social—why not intervene into the social directly? The answer to this question, an answer the discourse in its most compelling manifestations has recognized, is that truly lasting social change requires radical changes to subjectivity, as subjectivity serves as the condition of possibility of the social—and it is interventions into culture or the symbolic order that hold the most power to bring about such subjective changes. Subjectivity, though indeed serving as the condition of possibility of the social, also exists in a co-constituting relationship with both the social and the cultural or symbolic—a relationship in which subjectivity maintains the social and the symbolic while the social and symbolic simultaneously maintain subjectivity, such that each serves as the foundation of the other’s shape and forms of operating and each functions on the same set of structural principles as the other. Subjectivity, however, is the dominant partner in its relationship with each system. Indeed, without the human being’s materiality; its ability to assimilate language and its perceptual framework; or its form of subjectivity, neither the symbolic nor the social can exist. But though subjectivity is the

²⁴ See Hardt & Negri, *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*.

dominant partner in its co-constituting relationships with both the social and the symbolic, each system still holds the capacity to shape or change human subjectivity. The symbolic, however, plays a more dominant role than the social in shaping or changing subjectivity in its mutually dependent relationship with the subjective and in this relationship's shaping of the human being's experience of the empirical world or its reality.

The symbolic's dominance and greater influence in its relationship with subjectivity stems directly from the fact that the human being by nature is, as Žižek following Lacan terms it, a "being of language" (*Ticklish Subject* 156). By virtue of its nature as "*parletre*," (156) the human being is forced, as both Žižek and Lacan argue, to interface with the empirical world through symbols and narratives, through language—through, more precisely, a symbolic apparatus rather than through pure instinct. Within the human organism, this symbolic apparatus—the human being's capacity for language, that is, a capacity that is not limited to the assimilation of only one form of language or linguistic system, but can rather assimilate radically different symbolic systems with radically different modes of being or meaning making, and can create, as Michel Foucault argues in *The Order of Things*, radically different forms of subjectivity—serves, instead of instinct, as the seat of all meaning; it dictates sense and coherence and is the ultimate fashioner of the human being's reality. It is the decisive factor, in other words, in how the human being will make sense of, relate to, and act upon its empirical environment and importantly itself and, as such, it is a totalizing framework, one that controls all aspects of the human being's cognitive capacities including, perhaps most importantly, the manner in which the human being will act on its environment and

organize itself collectively to sustain itself and ensure its survival—the manner in which, that is, it will organize itself socially.

The social then, as a manifestation of human cognitive capacity, exists as a product of the symbolic apparatus through which the human being must know and experience its empirical environment. As a product of the symbolic apparatus that orders the world of the human being, as a structural and empirical formation created by this apparatus, the social is not the primary determinant of meaning for the human being, despite Marx's claims to the contrary.²⁵ And while the social may affect subjectivity, it must go through the symbolic first if radical social change is going to come about, since, again, it is the symbolic which is the primary determinant of meaning—the primary structure that determines subjective sense and coherence and the human being's perception and experience of the world—and not the social, which is instead a product of the symbolic, a second-level operation that can only alter the subjective on the structural and perceptual terms the symbolic has already set for it, and thus cannot radically shift these terms. In a context, then, where the symbolic serves as the primary arbiter of meaning for the human being and where all empiricity and experience must be filtered through the human being's shared symbolic apparatus (through, in other words, the shared perceptual framework made possible by the human being's lack of direct instinctual access to the real and its reliance on symbols to interface with the empirical world), a radical shift of the social would not be accepted and assimilated by the collective form of subjectivity—it would be experienced by the collective consciousness as a foreign, nonsensical, and even traumatic intrusion into its reality and would most

²⁵ See Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* and *Grundrisse*.

likely be rejected. While *gradual* social intervention and change—brought about as a result of changes in social practice that pose challenges to the validity of the symbolic narratives which give subjectivity its shape at a particular time and place²⁶—might be able to cause small shifts in subjectivity, this gradual use of the social to effect subjective change would serve merely as an indirect form of intervention, one whose effects would be difficult to direct and thus difficult to predict. Indeed, *radical* social change can only come about, can be accepted and assimilated by the collective form of subjectivity, if the symbolic itself is first modified because, once again, the symbolic serves as the primary factor in shaping the perceptual framework of a given socio-cultural formation, such that the rewriting of the symbolic codes or narratives of culture can directly refashion our perceptual framework and shift the social.²⁷ Thus, while intervention into the symbolic in order to change the social appears indirect, it offers us, I believe, a far swifter and more effective route than intervention into the social.

It is the ability of the symbolic or culture to transform subjectivity so as to effect lasting social change that has drawn the philosophical discourse of modernity, especially in its contemporary manifestations, to the symbolic or culture as the primary site of political intervention. And it is the discourse's embrace of the symbolic's ability to transform subjectivity in order to bring about a shift in the social that makes it a powerful

²⁶ An argument made by Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* and *Theory of Communicative Action*, Vols. 1 & 2.

²⁷ The widely held view that social change may be brought about directly without first going through the symbolic may indeed hold some validity if the social change we imagine remains within the same symbolic, epistemological and subjective boundaries as the social formation out of which we aim to transition, as in the case of the shift from capitalism to socialism. However, if we want to bring into being a radically different, radically other social formation, one built on the foundations of radically different symbolic, epistemological and ontological structures, then we must first shift our symbolic and subjective structures before we may shift the social.

model for a move beyond modernity or for any critical social change. What also renders the discourse a powerful model for change is its privileging, in its most compelling manifestations, of the human being as the principal site and agent, if not always conscious and direct, of symbolic, cultural and subjective and thus social transformation. The discourse's contemporary, emancipatory manifestations, particularly the work of Žižek and Hardt & Negri, have in fact recognized that in the contemporary moment, the social collectivity, or "the multitude" in Hardt & Negri's terms, is positioned to take full control of the symbolic order (the symbolic apparatus) that structures the contemporary form of subjectivity and the contemporary social system and to dismantle it (Žižek) or to rewrite it (Hardt & Negri)—the multitude is positioned as such, according to Žižek and Hardt & Negri, specifically as a result of the breakdown of the sources of traditional symbolic authority—Nature, God, paternal prohibition—due to the gradual colonization of the symbolic order or the traditional superstructure by Capital in the post-war period.²⁸ These scholars share the idea that the social collectivity, the collective form of subjectivity of a particular society, has always created, maintained, and possessed the ability to change the symbolic order, the transcendent symbolic narratives, that structure its subjective and social formations, but they acknowledge that before contemporary modernity, this process was always an unconscious one, an indirect one, where the collectivity turned authorship, authority and control over to non-human agents, again, for example, to Nature, God, or Tradition, even in its modern forms (i.e. patriarchy).²⁹ In the contemporary moment, however, where Capital has, as Žižek and Hardt & Negri have

²⁸ See Hardt and Negri, *Empire and Multitude*, as well as Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*.

²⁹ See Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 73-78 and Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 313-322.

demonstrated in their work, taken control of the production and reproduction of the symbolic order, and with this control, directly produces tastes, desires, differing subjectivities,³⁰ and most importantly, as Hardt & Negri contend, the shape and constitution of sociality itself, the multitude, as the body of producers responsible for the creation and the reproduction of the symbolic order (as well as the reproduction of the capitalist system), holds the power for the first time to produce its own form of subjectivity consciously and intentionally.³¹

The belief of these thinkers in the power of the multitude to bring the symbolic apparatus under the control of the “collective intellect” appears, however, to return forms of autonomy and self-transparency to collective subjectivity (forms which have been critiqued and discredited by post-structuralist and “postmodern” theorists as foundations for the rise of instrumental reason and the will to power), even if this autonomy comes about through passive acts. While Žižek and Hardt & Negri do indeed understand that the attribution of autonomy and self-transparency to the subject risks the revalorization of instrumental reason (in the case of Hardt & Negri) or the will to power (in the case of both Žižek and Hardt & Negri), they believe nonetheless that they avoid this risk in their models of cultural intervention founded on the return of the control of the symbolic order to the common intellect. The risk is averted in their interventionary models, they assume,

³⁰ See Hardt and Negri, *Empire and Multitude*, as well as Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*.

³¹ See Hardt and Negri, *Empire and Multitude*. See also *The Parallax View*, 381-385: Žižek’s understanding of the collective’s intervention into the symbolic order differs from that of Hardt & Negri in that Žižek’s mode of intervention is passive, not active. In Žižek’s view, Capital’s colonization of the symbolic order and of every aspect of life itself—such that nothing stands outside of Capital—means the contemporary subject can affect the symbolic order only by withdrawing from all aspects of life—including the dictates of the symbolic order—and saying “no” without further explanation. This withdrawal and refusal to offer an explanation shifts the shape and operating of the symbolic order and thus allows for the production of a new form of subjectivity. For a further discussion of Žižek’s interventionary program, see Chapter Three of this dissertation.

because they build them in such a way that ensures that the transcendental, centered subject does not solidify but is radicalized and always fragmenting and reconstituting itself anew so as to avoid the centered position of domination and to experience freedom—freedom from a fixed social and subjective position and thus freedom to determine itself and produce and reproduce its subjectivity continuously.³² But though Žizek and Hardt & Negri attempt to radicalize modern subjectivity so as to avoid its problematic effects, including instrumental rationality and the will to power, their models designed to bring the symbolic order under the control of the collective intellect, though radicalized, clearly remain modern—indeed, the form of subjectivity they theorize is radically self-producing in the case of Hardt & Negri and self-determining both in the case of Žizek as well as Hardt & Negri—and, as such, subject to all modern subjectivity’s pitfalls.³³ In their quest to rid us of capitalism, then, these scholars do not attempt in any way to theorize paths beyond modern subjectivity or modernity itself.

Yet even a project concerned with moving beyond modernity should not dismiss their work outright. The contemporary manifestations of the emancipatory side of the philosophical discourse of modernity, though refusing to rethink subjectivity and even sociality outside of modernity, have nevertheless brought to light, as discussed above, the fact that it is the human being who ultimately produces and controls, though in most instances indirectly and unconsciously, the symbolic order and, as such, who is responsible for subjective and thus social change. By demonstrating that it is the human being who is the principal agent of change, they have offered the first step in taking a

³² See, for example, *Empire* 60-66, and *The Parallax View*, 381-385.

³³ For discussions of Žizek’s and Hardt & Negri’s theorizations of subjectivity, see Chapters Three (Žizek) and Four (Hardt & Negri) of this dissertation.

form of control over systems such as the symbolic order and Capital itself, which, in the contemporary moment, appear to be running on their own logic (*Ticklish Subject* 354). But perhaps most importantly, outside the specific concerns of modernity, the discourse's focus on the human being as the principal site and agent of subjective and social change should remind us that in the specifically human context—where the human being relies not on instinct to make sense of its empirical world but rather is forced to interface with its environment through a symbolic apparatus, a symbolic apparatus that is neither singular in shape nor fixed but instead can be transformed—it is the changeable nature of human symbolic capacities that serves as the most significant site of possibility for subjective and social intervention and change.³⁴

But once again, while the models provided by the contemporary, emancipatory arm of the discourse serve as valuable resources for programs of intervention and change as a result of their compelling theorizations of the human being as the principal site and agent of symbolic and social transformation, we need to be cautious in our embrace and implementation of these models, as their modern philosophical foundations and

³⁴ While Žižek and Hardt & Negri do indeed theorize ways in which to shift the symbolic order so as to bring an end to Capital, none of the thinkers I analyze in the dissertation, including Foucault, directly theorize ways to shift (and here I borrow terms from Foucault that will be addressed below and in Chapter Two) the “mode of being” or the “mode of signification” of language. The reticence of these thinkers on this subject, as well as Saussure’s contention that a changing of language cannot be brought about directly and consciously by the human agent, should not, however, lead us to believe that the human being is incapable of shifting the way in which language operates or signifies. As I will suggest at the end of Chapter Three (pp. 145-48), if we understand the mode of being (signifying, operating) of language as existing in a co-constituting relationship with the symbolic order, then changes to the symbolic order brought about by direct human intervention into it will likely bring about shifts to the mode of being of language as well. Evidence of the co-constitutive nature of the relationship between the mode of being of language and the symbolic order is found in *The Order of Things*, where Foucault demonstrates that reigning narratives that make up the symbolic order, such as the unquestionable belief during the Classical Period in the existence of God, lead to a very particular mode of being or operating of language, as well as a very particular experience of language by the human being, and thus a very particular form of subjectivity. See Chapter 3 (“Representing”) and Chapter 4 (“Speaking”) of *The Order of Things* and Chapter Two of this dissertation. A thorough discussion of Foucault’s mode of being of language will follow later in the introduction and in Chapter Two.

assumptions limit their conceptualizations of human agency and change to a specifically modern framework and, in the end, render them only relevant, as both interpretive optics and models for social change, to modern subjective and social contexts. It is in fact the specifically modern understanding of subjectivity that these models embrace, their essentializing of modern subjectivity, to be more exact, that limits their theories of agency and change. While Žižek's model, for example, does indeed suppose that human symbolic capacities possess a changeable nature, that, in other words, the human species is capable of creating a variety of different symbolic systems as well as languages through which to interface with its empirical environment, it nonetheless has as its underlying assumption the belief that these different systems and languages all possess a similar operating structure, or what Foucault calls a similar "mode of being of language," and thus all produce a structurally similar form of subjectivity, a transcendental and desiring form. This conceptualization of a singular form of subjectivity comes about as a result of Žižek's assumption that the human being's acquisition of language produces, in every historical and cultural instance, a transcendental and desiring subject, a subject, in other words, who is abstracted and distanced from nature or more precisely from its own "animal nature," from its *being*, and, as a result of this distancing, a subject who cannot be bound on the most fundamental and structural level by the limiting system of natural need, but who is instead, because it is abstracted, radically free to determine itself and the world around it. For Žižek, if it happens that a historical form of subjectivity does not take the shape of transcendence and self-determination, or does not appear to manifest desire, it is only because the true nature of the human being has been coded or repressed.³⁵

³⁵ See Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*. Hardt & Negri have a radically different understanding of language and

In designating transcendence, desire and self-determination as the fundamental natures of human subjectivity, in essentializing modern subjectivity, that is, both Žižek and Hardt & Negri lay bare their strong conviction that modern theorizations of subjectivity accurately depict the essential psychic structure, and thus the fundamental nature, of the human being.³⁶ This limiting of human subjectivity to modern subjectivity—to transcendence, desire, and radical self-determination—shuts down the theoretical and ultimately political potentials that might arise from keeping the possibility open that no universal form of human subjectivity exists outside the human capacity for language, only unique forms of subjectivity created by the historically and culturally differing linguistic systems and modes of being of language that the human being by nature holds the potential to assimilate—a possibility that may allow us to consider that the human capacity for language may not necessarily abstract the human being from its nature or its being, or that if some form of abstraction does occur, historically discrete linguistic systems might hold the potential to heal, and not just code or repress, this process of abstraction or transcendence and its potentially destabilizing effects. Perhaps

desire from Žižek's, one that stems from Deleuze & Guattari's conceptualization of desire as an inherently productive and relation-seeking force, a force that is not a form of lack produced by the subject's entrance into language, but is already present as a libidinal force in the biological body. This form of desire, which they have paired with Marx's notion of productivity as the human species-being, is understood by Hardt & Negri to be present but repressed by all symbolic orders up until that of modernity and capitalism, where the productivity of desire is released by Capital's colonization of the symbolic order, but then recoded within its operating systems. In combining Deleuze & Guattari's notion of desire with Marx's notion of productivity, Hardt & Negri have created a notion of subjectivity that sees the subject as transcending its "animal nature" through productivity and thus as radically free and self-determining. The subject can only maintain this human freedom if it fashions for itself a non-repressive, liberating symbolic order. See *Empire* and *Multitude*.

³⁶ Foucault and Baudrillard hold fundamentally different understandings of the origins of transcendence, desire, and self-determination. They attribute these structures specifically to the birth of modernity—to the rise of capitalism and the emergence of a new linguistic and epistemological landscape (a new "episteme"). See Foucault, *The Order of Things* and Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production* as well as this dissertation's second and fourth chapters.

the most troubling aspect of this universalization of modern subjectivity and the shutting down of subjective possibility that accompanies it is that it limits us to a *singular* model of human-centered subjective change, a model where human-initiated change can only be conceptualized as coming into existence as a result of the conscious actions or decisions of a human agent who transcends the symbolic system which it attempts to change, and who thus, as positioned outside the system that gives its subjectivity meaning, can only objectify this system and act reflexively and instrumentally upon it in order to change it.³⁷

There is no doubt that this understanding of subjective change is highly relevant for modernity where the modern symbolic system has produced a subject who is indeed transcendent, reflexive and self-determining and which as a result holds the potential to effect subjective and social change by conscious and directed acts of intervention into the symbolic order and the system of language that serve as its conditions of possibility. In contemporary modernity, then, the interventionary theories of the contemporary emancipatory arm of the philosophical discourse of modernity, particularly those of Žižek and Hardt & Negri, are extremely valuable, as they offer models of change that are tailored specifically to the modern predicament, models that provide a blueprint for the modern subject to build an interventionary program wherein the subject takes control of the symbolic order through acts either passive or aggressive that fundamentally shift its mode of operating and with it the subject's form of subjectivity. Although the subjective shift these theorists posit is, again, one in which modern subjectivity is radicalized rather

³⁷ Žižek and Hardt & Negri do believe that non-human-centered change to the symbolic and social orders is possible. They believe in fact that Capital at its inception acted as a non-human force of change that liberated the human being from its pre-modern coding and released its full subjective potential—i.e. desire and self-determination. They share the opinion, however, that now that the subject has been released from its coding and has the potential to realize its true nature, social and subjective change can only come about through the conscious and directed acts of the self-determining subject.

than transcended, their theoretical tactics for the intervention into culture, their models for ways to rewrite our symbolic order and our symbolic narratives, if reconceptualized with non-modern goals in sight, might nonetheless be used to theorize forms of subjectivity radically different from those of modernity. But once again, while these models hold the potential to bring us beyond modernity, they are not designed to help us conceptualize subjective and social change once we reach a truly “postmodern” state. With much interdisciplinary thought and collaboration we may indeed be able to conceptualize a non- or post-modern form of subjectivity that is integrated, non-self-determining yet still reflexive so that we may continue to recognize the need for change and to act upon it. The greatest challenge here, one that will require extended collaborative effort, is of bringing radically different ontological paradigms together in order to create this ideally hybridized subjectivity. What we face, however, if we make an effort to carry out such a project, a project that ultimately attempts to fashion a non-reflexive reflexivity, is, in essence, a paradox. I do not believe the difficulty of this challenge suggests we should abandon it. But it does suggest we should, as we struggle to bridge these paradigms, also consider other existing models of human-initiated change. Perhaps the most promising alternative is the one offered by Foucault in *The Order of Things*, which demonstrates that human-initiated change does not have to take the form of conscious and directed acts of self determination and, perhaps most importantly, that human freedom does not have to take the shape of freedom from constraint or the freedom to self-determine—it demonstrates, instead, that a lack of self-determination can create the possibility for a different type of change and a different type of freedom, and with it, a different type of subjectivity and a different social system.

In turning to Foucault here, we are moving away from the emancipatory arm of the philosophical discourse of modernity and its concerns with rehabilitating modernity so that it can realize its full emancipatory potential, and turning to the “counter-enlightenment” side of the discourse, the side whose primary intention is to theorize ways beyond modernity and especially modern subjectivity. But though we are moving into new theoretical territory with this turn—territory whose inhabitants’ vision for the future, whose vision for new forms of sociality, is no longer limited or contained by a valorization of the modern structures of self-consciousness, self-determination, and reflexivity—we are not giving up the discourse’s primary concerns and most importantly, primary strengths: the belief that social change will come from subjective change and that subjective change will come from cultural and symbolic change. Nor are we ignoring the fact that as modern subjects we still have the modern structures of self-consciousness, self-determination, and reflexivity at our disposal, and that they are very powerful tools for bringing about cultural, subjective and social change, if, once again, they are used with non-modern goals in mind. Foucault’s work, particularly his theorization of “the end of man” offered in *The Order of Things*, serves as perhaps the most powerful model for subjective change that the philosophical discourse of modernity in all its manifestations has offered. As a follower of Nietzsche and as one of modernity’s harshest critics, particularly in his archaeologies and genealogies, Foucault has in fact provided the discourse’s most systematized theorization of a non-modern form of subjectivity, a theorization that is built specifically on his belief in the changeable nature of the fundamental structure, or the mode of being, of language and, as such, is the theorization that holds the most potential, I believe, to bring us beyond modernity. While the

fashioning of a specifically non-modern form of subjectivity served as an important concern throughout Foucault's career, he realized, nonetheless, that the modern subject would be the agent of the change that would bring us beyond modernity and that this subject had very powerful tools at its disposal that could be harnessed to bring about social and subjective transformation, modern tools that would vanish once we went beyond modernity. These tools for Foucault were of course self-consciousness, self-determination, reflexivity and reason, and in his genealogies they were to be harnessed to construct discourses counter to the hegemonic discourses that served as the foundation of modern subjectivity;³⁸ in his later works on technologies of the self and ethics they were to be harnessed to refashion aesthetically the human being's identity and subjectivity.³⁹

The non-modern subject that Foucault modeled in his theoretical program finds its origins specifically in his study of the epistemological and subjective spaces of what he calls in *The Order of Things* the Renaissance (16th century) and Classical (17th-18th century) periods. Foucault's study of these historical periods in comparison to modernity led him to theorize that each period's epistemological and subjective spaces were radically different from those of modernity as well as from each other's, a difference, he concluded, was determined at the structural level, a level he calls "archaeological" (*Order of Things* xi). Knowledge and subjectivity in each period are structured, Foucault argues, by different "conditions of possibility" (xxii) which are shaped by the period's mode of being of language, a notion that for Foucault goes beyond the obvious functions of language to the manner in which a word forms a relationship with the concept of which it

³⁸ See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1.

³⁹ See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vols. 2 & 3, and "Technologies of the Self."

speaks, or, in more Lacanian terms, the manner in which a signifier forms a relationship with and ultimately articulates its particular signified. The crucial implication of Foucault's approach is that it does not universalize the mode of being of language. Unlike most of his French predecessors and colleagues (including, most notably, Lacan) who universalize their equivalent of the mode of being of language which structures modern subjectivity, for Foucault, the modern mode of being of language, the one to which we are presently subjected, is *not* trans-cultural or trans-historical. It is only in its modern mode of being, according to Foucault, that language exists as an autonomous, self-determining, self-regulating and arbitrary system which serves solely as a means of expression or communication. Within the modern system of language, each signifier attains its meaning not from its connection to the things of the world, but in relation to what it is not—i.e. a word gains its meaning because it is not every other word and meaning is thus produced as a result of the play of differences. Because meaning is not connected to empirical objects but comes into being as a result of the play of differences within a closed, self-contained system with its own set of operating rules (grammar), because language, in other words, is a self-contained and self-determining object, it produces a subject that *experiences* itself as sitting outside of the linguistic system and wielding it as a tool, a tool or instrument of expression—it produces a subject, in other words, that *experiences* itself as transcending this system and thus as separate from it, but whose experience of transcendence, whose subjectivity is, nonetheless, only made possible because it is produced or gains its positivity within language.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Foucault's understanding of subjectivity in the modern period, which follows his depictions of the Renaissance and Classical periods in *The Order of Things*, will be considered in detail in Chapter Two.

In the Renaissance and Classical periods as Foucault understands them, the human being does not sit outside of or transcend the period's linguistic system. This is because the language of these periods did not exist as a self-enclosed object, nor was its being self-determining; rather language's being was determined by its foundation in nature (Renaissance) or the process of thought (Classical period). In the Renaissance, for example, language was experienced, according to Foucault, as a material entity rather than a form of representation (42). For Foucault, in other words, language in this period was not a tool by which one reflects what one knows as in modernity, but rather a thing unto itself that would "reside" among other things of nature (35). Because language existed as a thing among other things of the world, the relation of language to the world was one of analogy rather than signification—the words of Renaissance language, according to Foucault, *were* the things they signified. Language in this period, though a material thing in itself, was not a self-enclosed entity, but rather a fundamental part of the natural world. With the shift to the Classical period, language does not yet possess a purely linguistic existence as it will in modernity, but it does lose its material being and becomes the medium through which the things of the world attain to positivity. Because the human being's intelligibility, in the epistemic space of this period, was limited in relation to the infinite intelligibility of God, the human being could not, according to Foucault, perceive the truth of things directly; language in the Classical period became, therefore, the *process* through which the human being analyzed the truths of the things of the world, a constant patterning and grouping that, Foucault argues, turned language, in this new period, into analytical and thus reflective thought. Language in the Classical period was therefore purely functional, the means by which things of the world were

brought by the human being into positivity or being. Rather than functioning, then, as a system of signification or a means of communication between human beings, language was a “path” through which “representation communicate[d] with reflection” (83).

The linguistic systems of both the Renaissance and Classical periods then, possessing radically different beings than the linguistic system of modernity, produced forms of subjectivity radically different from modernity as well. These systems, in which language functioned not as a self-contained or self-determining object but rather as an element of nature or as a primary generator of meaning and knowledge, did not abstract the human being, as it assimilated these systems, from their operations or from the things of the world or from its own being, producing desire, but rather integrated the human being into the stream of time, the history, of the things of the world that it thought into being and into the stream of time of its own consciousness—the human being here becomes contemporaneous with these elements. In Foucault’s Classical period, for instance, the human being’s consciousness did not exist unless the human being maintained it through the continuous process of patterning its mental representations of the things of the world by using language. The human being, in other words, had to maintain itself and the coherence of its consciousness literally by thinking through language, such that the process of analysis and patterning *was being* itself (here Foucault references and reinterprets Descartes’ “I think therefore I am” (323-4)). Because the human being “thought” the meanings and things of the world—including itself—into being, the human being could not step outside of this process, outside of language, and see itself as an entity separate from its processes of thought. In an epistemic space where the human being existed nowhere else but within its own thought, reflexive thought was

not possible. The human being in this period could not examine itself as an object separate from consciousness, from time or from itself⁴¹—and it could not, therefore, experience desire, since it remained integrated with its being, never becoming abstracted from it and thus desperate to return to it.

It is with his theorization of the mode of being of language of the Classical period and importantly the form of subjectivity which it produces that Foucault ultimately offers us a new model of non-modern subjectivity. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault detected in structural linguistics and contemporary literature a movement of language back to the mode of being of the Classical period; he enthusiastically embraced this movement as a means to take us beyond modern subjectivity, as a way to bring about the “end of man”⁴² or the end of the modern subject. With his model of non-modern subjectivity, Foucault’s understanding of the Classical period offers a new model of human-initiated change and, importantly, freedom—demonstrating, again, that human-initiated change does not have to take the form of conscious and directed acts of self determination and that human freedom does not have to take the shape of freedom from constraint or the freedom to self-determine. The new model of subjectivity that Foucault makes possible with his theorization of subjectivity for the Classical period is one based on presentness, one, more specifically, that situates the human being in a “perpetual present,”⁴³ and one in which the human being thus experiences time in a way radically different from

⁴¹ This ability comes about only with the rise of the modern mode of being of language, where language’s ontological coherence is made possible by its own internal system of grammatical rules rather than by a connection to the process of thought or to Nature (*Order*, 281).

⁴² See *The Order of Things* 385-386.

⁴³ Below, I address the differences between what I see as Foucault’s version of this state and Jameson’s use of the term.

modernity. This presentness is generated in Foucault's model by the fact that through its processes of thought, the subject maintains the stream of time: for the subject who produces its own self through its thoughts, time is not a separate entity that impacts its experience from the outside, but is rather the form of its being—the subject *is* time itself. Because the subject produces and is time (just as it produces itself and the positivity of all things in the world and thus *is* this process of production), it cannot transcend time or itself; it experiences its existence as bringing time, itself, and the world into being. The human being in this model, then, functions as a self- and world-generator: its every thought and every action is a process of creating something anew, of generating new possibilities. But, once again, the human being in this model does not create itself or the world from a place outside of itself or outside of the world as does the modern subject; it cannot dominate the things it brings into being because it can never stand outside of them. Rather, the human being generates these things from within itself or from within the world and in this sense is one with them. It is with this aspect of Foucault's models of non-modern subjectivity—in the potential for a specifically non-modern, integrated, sustained process of world-generation—that the dissertation is most concerned.

Foucault is not the only theorist who has in his work depicted a subject in a state of a “perpetual present.” Such states are described in the work of Fredric Jameson—whose term I have applied here to Foucault—and of Scott Lash, though for these theorists, the subject experiencing a perpetual present is neither pre-modern nor a model for some future state; Jameson and Lash suggest that the contemporary subject is showing indications of being, or already is, a subject reduced to a perpetual present, one who exists in a non-linear, non-abstracted and thus non-modern form of temporality.

Both Jameson and Lash understand the reduction of the subject to a perpetual present to be a consequence of the radicalization of capitalism in the contemporary moment. For Jameson, the contemporary subject's experience of time is increasingly shaped by the new temporal rhythms of finance capital, whose accelerations have narrowed existential time to the point of continuous immediacies ("Temporality" 704). Most of all, Jameson attributes the subject's reduction to a perpetual present to the effects of global decolonization since the mid-20th century, which, he argues, have caused the modern subject to see itself and its experience as inconsequential amongst "innumerable others"—plunging it into an anonymity that deprives it of any sense of its personal place within the span of time (709-10). Despite these convictions, however, Jameson does not believe the subject can be permanently reduced to a perpetual present on a structural level; he insists that the condition he observes is unique to late capitalism and is therefore unrealizable as a permanent subjective state. Jameson's resistance to the notion of a fully-reduced subject, one that exists structurally in a perpetual present, has everything to do with his Marxist stance and its modern, humanist bias: like Žižek and Hardt & Negri, Jameson essentializes modern subjectivity as human nature. For Jameson then, if the human being's essential nature is its ability to transcend its "animalistic" needs and instincts and be fully free to determine itself, it cannot remain human and fully succumb to the condition of a perpetual present that he perceives in the contemporary subject, since this state looks very much to him like a reversion to the "immediacy of the animal kingdom" and, as such, as something less than human (717).

Jameson's refusal to consider the possibility that the human being harbors the potential to exist permanently in a state of "perpetual present" finds what might be called

an opposite extreme in the work of Scott Lash, who, by examining the contemporary subject through the lens of postmodernist thought, concludes that the reduction to a perpetual present has already occurred. In his work on information society, Lash depicts a contemporary subject deceptively suggestive of the subjectivity Foucault ascribes to the Classical period, one who exists in “a series of ‘nows’” wherein time is compressed to the point where past and future no longer have meaning (*Critique of Information* 141). This new temporality, which Lash calls “now time,” is once again the result of the contemporary manifestation of capitalism, specifically the informationalization of society and culture: the production of knowledge-intensive, information-rich goods and services which are exchanged at speeds that the subject experiences as “instantaneous” (137). In this context, differences between one moment and the next, as well as the distinctions between same and other, break down and are eventually erased, such that there is no opportunity to stand outside of information, to separate reflection from reflex (17). Thus the subject’s thought process happens simultaneously with its practice, until the subject’s interiority is itself flattened, and transcendence itself eroded (9). Lash’s vision offers up an insightful theorization of the implications of the contemporary manifestation of capitalism for subjectivity, but its weakness lies in the lack of a theorization of the structural differences in subjectivity (as well as culture and sociality) between contemporary modernity and any other period. Because Lash lacks a theory of periodization for both subjectivity and the social, he claims capitalism has moved us into a truly postmodern state—both social and subjective—without recognizing that capitalism is a fundamentally modern system, one that, because of its reliance on rationalization and control, can only operate with and upon a transcendental, desiring

subject. Lash thus misinterprets the radicalization of modern sociality and subjectivity as a significant break from modernity itself.

These theorizations of time by both Jameson and Lash, then, while aimed at addressing some of modern (or what these theorists call “post-modern”) subjectivity’s most relevant causes, characteristics, and implications, fall short of providing the necessary insight into modernity’s ills and the groundwork for a way to remedy them because both theories suffer from a lack of attention to the specifically modern nature of the states they depict. As I will argue in the upcoming chapter, both depictions lack a rigorous theory of periodization or of social, subjective or cultural/epistemological change, preferring instead to see contemporary Capital as post-modern instead of recognizing it for the radicalized modernity that it is. This dissertation aims to propose a solution to this absence in the form, once again, of Foucault’s work in *The Order of Things*, which, in laying out a theory of periodization and epistemological and subjective change, allows us to theorize the possibility of bringing into being a truly non- or post-modern subject. As I will argue, what Foucault’s theorizations offer us is the possibility of negotiating the crucial challenges typified by the shortcomings of Lash and Jameson’s work as well as those challenges noted earlier in this introduction: not only the deessentialization of desire, but also a new understanding of human-initiated change and human freedom; in other words, the inklings of a solution to the paradoxical question of how to abandon modern subjectivity without losing some form of reflexivity and the capacity to effect change. By turning to Foucault’s understandings of subjectivity prior to the modern period, the dissertation turns, also, to radically different understandings of change, not the change required to move us beyond modern subjectivity (since, as I’ve

argued above, scholars such as Žižek and Hardt & Negri present us with promising models of how we might use modern notions of change to enact such a shift), but a form of change that would ensure that we could transcend problematic but solidified social structures in a non- or post-modern context. As argued above, change in a truly post-modern model of subjectivity and sociality cannot come about as a result of reflexivity or self-determination, because the non-modern subject is not reflexive and does not determine itself from a point outside itself. Instead it determines itself—creates its being, its existence—from within the stream of time, in every moment of its existence. And it is in this presentness, in this persistent self-creation, where we find the potential for a specifically non-modern form of change. Change in the non-modern subject is, in fact, if we follow Foucault's model, being itself, such that change is never experienced as the process of traumatic destabilization and re-stabilization typical of the modern period and radicalized in Žižek's and Hardt & Negri's visions for our subjective futures. In this non-modern model of change, everything is experienced anew at all times, including the self as well as the social, and every moment is a moment of change. In such a context then, to remedy a problem is no different from any other moment or gesture of being.

Similarly, in this vision of non- or post-modern subjectivity, freedom itself takes on new shape and meaning: freedom is, once again, defined by the new form of subjectivity itself, the integrated state of presentness and constant self-generation, in which the subject is no longer burdened by the structures of transcendence, self-consciousness and desire. This conception of freedom is, of course, precisely the opposite of the freedoms celebrated and sought in the programs of Žižek and Hardt & Negri, which are predicated on the belief that human nature lies in the freedom to self-determine

and in the freedom from transcendental constraint. Foucault's model provides us, then, not only with the tools to question this essentialized notion of freedom, but also, importantly, with the possibility of an alternative form of freedom, one in which the subject/object split, self-consciousness, and desire and the death drive are abolished without a return to the hierarchies and inequalities of the past. In modeling this future subjective state on the more integrated states Foucault describes from the Classical period, we might achieve a recreation of the previous forms of organic consciousness that were free—not in the modern sense, but in the sense of being free to exist and, importantly, to create oneself continually anew in the stream of thought and time. True freedom for the human being would be, then, freedom from the pain of alienation from self or separation from the fullness of being and freedom from the experience of the passage of an abstract external time; this freedom might be experienced as what Jackson Lears calls “psychic abundance”—a freedom from psychic scarcity and want.⁴⁴

Without doubt, Foucault's work in *The Order of Things*, particularly his theorization of the mode of being of language and the Classical period's form of subjectivity, provides a powerful starting point from which to effect cultural/epistemological, subjective and social change. Indeed, in *The Order of Things*, Foucault offers coherent and systematized theories of the fundamental nature and operations of language and subjectivity and, importantly, coherent and systematized theories of linguistic, subjective and epistemological change. These theoretical depictions provide a detailed and comprehensive vision of a non-modern form of subjectivity and, as I have argued throughout this introduction, offer us a compelling and extremely useful

⁴⁴ See Jackson Lears, “Reconsidering Abundance.”

model of the form subjectivity could take beyond modernity. But while Foucault provides us with a useful working model of a non-modern form of subjectivity, he does not map out the path by which we might reach this form of subjectivity, nor does he provide us with a vision of the potential form of sociality the realization of such a vision of subjectivity might bring into being. Foucault does indeed show us that subjective change will come about as a result of the shift in the mode of being of language, and this is an immensely helpful starting point; however, he does not theorize potential ways to go about shifting the mode of being of language. Fashioning a model for such a shift will no doubt be an enormously difficult task. Foucault does, however, offer us some hints, particularly through his aesthetic concerns. As a follower of Nietzsche, Foucault has been accused of a Nietzschean aestheticism, of a preoccupation with the realm of radical experience and with the “other of reason”⁴⁵ and thus a preoccupation with the world-destroying tendencies of the aesthetic. While elements of such an aestheticism are found throughout Foucault’s work, they do not, however, serve as the primary manifestation of his aesthetic concerns. Foucault understood from the time of his archaeologies that the transcending of modernity would be a world-generating and not a world-destroying project,⁴⁶ and that it was the world-generating and not the world-destroying nature of culture and art that ultimately held the tools, the potential, and, in particular instances that Foucault himself explored, the inclination to help us shift the mode of being of language

⁴⁵ For examples of this accusation, see McGill, *Prophets* and Wolin, “Foucault’s Aesthetic Decisionism”; see also Best & Kellner’s response to McGill’s and Wolin’s arguments in *Postmodern Theory*, 66.

⁴⁶ As early as *The Order of Things*, Foucault appears to privilege scholarship over radical aesthetic experience as a way beyond modernity, as he gives primacy to structural linguistics—over the highly aestheticized literature of Artaud or Roussel—as a path that is moving us in a direction beyond modernity. See Foucault’s Chapter 10, “The Human Sciences.” See also Rajan, “The Mask of Death” and “The Phenomenological Allegory.”

and to bring us beyond modernity. While Foucault never explicitly theorizes the use of art, culture or aesthetics to shift the mode of being of language, in his later work he does attempt to apply the world-generating power of the aesthetic to the self, to the singular body of the human being, by theorizing an “aesthetics of existence,” a practice, or a “technology of the self,” in which the subject creatively fashions through discipline or aesthetic stylization its identity and ultimately its subjectivity. In Foucault’s words, these practices or technologies “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (“Technologies of the Self” 225).

I believe it is this model of aesthetics, art, or culture as self- or world-generator, as generator of new possibilities of meaning, being and even positivity, found not only in the work of Foucault but throughout the philosophical discourse of modernity in both its emancipatory and counter-enlightenment manifestations, that might serve as a foundation for a way to shift the mode of being of language and to move beyond modern subjectivity and modernity itself. A return to the aesthetic concerns of the philosophical discourse of modernity with the goal in mind of shifting the mode of being of language, however, must be carefully focused. First, it must avoid both the project of the emancipatory side of the discourse to use art/aesthetics to rehabilitate or radicalize modernity as well as the propensity of the counter-enlightenment side to embrace the world-destroying tendencies of the aesthetic, to embrace, in other words, irrationality, limit experiences, or in Habermas’ words, “experiences of self-disclosure of a decentered subjectivity, liberated

from all constraints of cognition and purposive activity, all imperatives of utility, and morality” (*Philosophical Discourse* 94). More importantly, it must search out those places within the discourse where the aesthetic is posited as world- (and possibility-) generating, for example in Nietzsche’s idea of an “aesthetically renewed mythology,”⁴⁷ Foucault’s aesthetics of existence, and Boris Groys’ theorization of the human being’s and religion’s mediality, all three of which possess in common the desire to use the aesthetic to generate a new symbolic or spatial narrative, a new cultural form, and with it to bring into being new forms of subjectivity (that avoid the pitfalls of modern subjectivity) and new forms of sociality. It is these places in the discourse that will assist in the task of mapping a new interventionary aesthetic theory for the pressing socio-political needs of contemporary modernity: places that share with the new theology a concern for world-creation and a vision of culture and sociality where the diremptions of modernity are healed and “authentic meaning” is reintroduced into human life, a project that will require what one scholar of religion has called “the imagination to think the world otherwise,” to be “fantastic” in our theorizing (Smith 11). The aesthetic theory the dissertation will join in envisioning will also have as its aim the goal of making art again a tool of praxis, not just one of pedagogy and criticism—a tool that truly holds the potential to bring us beyond modernity.

...

⁴⁷ This is Habermas’ term: see *Philosophical Discourse*, 88.

What follows in the final section of this introduction is an overview of the dissertation's chapters, beginning with Chapter Two, which opens with a continuation of the introduction's consideration of Foucault's theories of language and subjectivity in *The Order of Things*. The goal of this chapter is to provide a careful reading of Foucault's theorization of the operations of language and the shape of subjectivity for the Classical period, demonstrating, through a systematic elucidation of Foucault's vision for this period, the ways in which this theorization, in its situating of the Classical human being in a "perpetual present," supplies a compelling model for a non- or post-modern form of subjectivity. The chapter then compares in greater detail Foucault's theorization of language and subjectivity for the Classical period to the work of Fredric Jameson and Scott Lash, who themselves offer models of post-modern subjectivity which situate the subject in a "perpetual present," but who, in neglecting to recognize the structural differences that distinguish one period from another, fail to see the potential to shift human subjectivity (Jameson) or the fact that human subjectivity is, at this juncture, still modern, only radicalized (Lash). Foucault, on the contrary, provides a theory of period change, one that, as the chapter will elucidate, demonstrates that subjectivity, culture, and sociality are not trans-historical. With this theory of periodization at its disposal, the chapter goes on to demonstrate that the modern form of subjectivity and importantly desire as it is conceptualized by Žižek via Lacan are specific to the modern period, and to lay the groundwork for a critical lens through which to consider the programs of Žižek and of Hardt & Negri (which, as the chapters concerning those programs argue, problematically valorize as well as essentialize modern subjectivity).

The dissertation's third and fourth chapters are devoted to an explication and

analysis of the current work of Žižek and the team of Hardt & Negri respectively. The first section of each chapter is dedicated to outlining the theoretical program of each, and to demonstrating the ways in which each essentializes and universalizes modern subjectivity and its key structural states—for Žižek desire and for Hardt & Negri productivity. In detailing such tendencies, the dissertation points to the dangers of essentializing and universalizing desire and productivity as well as the dangers of valorizing them as ideal states, or of positioning them as the foundations of political intervention—a practice which I argue these theorists carry out uncritically. The second section of each chapter employs a close reading of French post-structuralist theory to demonstrate that the modern subjectivity both Žižek and Hardt & Negri essentialize and valorize is not a universal form of consciousness, but is rather specific to the modern period and can thus be transcended. The dissertation's chapter on Žižek utilizes Foucault's theory of language and subjectivity from *The Order of Things* to demonstrate that desire, and what Žižek calls the "death drive," are distinct products of the modern period and the modern mode of being of language, while the chapter on Hardt & Negri employs Baudrillard's notion of the "mirror of production," from his text of the same name, to show that productive consciousness can only arise with the birth of capitalism and thus modernity. While the first and second sections of each chapter function as stringent critiques of the theoretical programs of each of these theorists, each chapter's third section is structured to remind the dissertation's reader that the systems of praxis outlined by these theorists, if harnessed to interventions into culture and/or the symbolic order other than those designed to liberate and radicalize modern subjectivity, may be called into service in order to help produce the non-modern forms of subjectivity that

Foucault theorized in *The Order of Things*.

The fifth and final chapter of the dissertation reconsiders, in the context of the political projects charted in the chapters that precede it, the political potential of art as well as the “world-generating” potential unique to aesthetic programs, considering how contemporary art’s current tendencies might be harnessed and enhanced in order to create an “aesthetically renewed mythology”—to rewrite, in other words, our contemporary symbolic order. The chapter briefly considers the political trajectory of art since the mid-20th century and argues that art must abandon its recent confinement to a critical and pedagogical role and return once again to an interventionary one, where intervention takes aim at the social in a systemic manner. Entering into debates on the emergence, since the last decade of the 20th century, of “relational art,” Chapter Five considers the many criticisms of the relational art “movement” by art historians and critics taking their cues from the work of neo-Marxist thinkers such as Ernesto Laclau, Étienne Balibar and Jacques Rancière, and most notably by Rancière himself, who believe this art is insufficiently political. The chapter responds to these criticisms by arguing (in qualified support of the writings of curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud and art historian Grant Kester) for the important potentials that lie within relational art’s focus on the diremptions of modernity, manifested in its concern with healing the ailing social bond. The chapter goes on, however, to point out where relational art falls short of fostering systemic social change, considering how its unique commitment to confronting the damage wrought by both Capital and modernity might be expanded and deepened to consider our present social and subjective state in more highly theorized terms and indeed to envision, and enact, changes to modern subjectivity and thus to modernity itself. Here

the chapter returns to the value of Foucault's theorization of language and subjectivity, including his theories of period change that release us from any limiting trans-historical notions of subjectivity, culture, and sociality, and the implications these theorizations have for the potential of the aesthetic to create new narratives that might bring about new worlds. With the notion of "world-generating" art in mind, the chapter turns briefly, in its final section, to the work of Bill Seaman and Char Davies, who have developed works of digital media that begin to envision alternative languages, subjectivities and worlds. Seaman's work includes an interest in what he calls "virtual world building system[s],"⁴⁸ and Davies combines a background in painting and software to create works of immersive virtual reality.⁴⁹ While the dissertation's vision for an aesthetic practice that intervenes into our present subjectivity is not confined to art created through technology, the work of these artists, with its implications for the creation of alternative symbolic orders, offers promising examples of the kind of artistic practice that harbors the potential to find the means to create radically new forms of subjectivity and sociality.

⁴⁸ See <http://www.billseaman.com/>

⁴⁹ See <http://www.immersence.com/>

CHAPTER TWO

Michel Foucault and *The Order of Things*

Among the counter-enlightenment theorists of the philosophical discourse of modernity, Michel Foucault has been one of the harshest critics of modernity as well as the theorist perhaps most willing to envision a path beyond modernity, specifically in an imaginative and aesthetic manner. With his theorization of the “end of man” offered in *The Order of Things*, Foucault provides one of the most systematized and thus powerful models for a non- or post-modern subjectivity that the philosophical discourse of modernity in all its manifestations has offered, a model that is built specifically on his belief in the changeable nature of the fundamental structure, or the “mode of being,” of language. With the program he develops in *The Order of Things* to bring about the end of man, Foucault lays the groundwork for the dismantling of the linguistic and thus the structural foundation of modern subjectivity and with it the subjective experiences of transcendence, rationality and, by implication, desire. Indeed, Foucault believes the end of man will come about when the fragmented modern mode of being of language is unified and the human being is integrated with the time of language and with its own being—when, as in the pre-modern period Foucault terms Classical, the human being no longer understands and experiences its being as lying outside its process of thinking the world into being through language: man will come to an end, in other words, when the

human being is no longer alienated from its being and thus can no longer stand outside language itself and the things of the world and work on them instrumentally or dominate them. In concerning himself with the being of language and with ontology generally, and, most importantly, in positing the Classical mode of being of language and the form of subjectivity it fashions if not as the “Truth of Being-in-the-World” then as ontologies to be embraced,¹ Foucault, like the new theology, is grappling with a definition of our universal humanity, and in the process is risking a metaphysical stance as he attempts to theorize ways to reunite the modern subject with its alienated being. In fact, in *The Order of Things*, with his totalizing critique of the transcendental, dominating modern subject alienated from being and, most importantly, with his willingness to posit an alternative to this subject in the form of a consciousness that is unified with language, time and thus its being, Foucault is not only at his most aesthetic and imaginative—and of course metaphysical—but interestingly, in thinking unity, he is at his most “theological.” In *The Order of Things*, the “cryptonormativity” Habermas detects in Foucault’s genealogies is nowhere to be found;² instead we encounter Foucault’s normative assumptions laid bare, assumptions that the modern linguistic, epistemological and ontological frameworks must be transcended, so that we may dispense with the diremptions of modernity and modern subjectivity and exist in a more exalted fullness of being.

While *The Order of Things*, with its author’s willingness to take a strong normative stance in his critique of modernity and to offer compelling models of subjective change, serves, I believe, as Foucault’s most powerful and important text,

¹ See *The Order of Things*, 381-7 for Foucault’s embrace of the Classical mode of being of language and form of subjectivity.

² See Habermas’ two chapters on Foucault in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*.

throughout the past four decades *The Order of Things* has been overlooked by scholars in favor of the theoretical programs offered by Foucault in his “genealogies” and his later work on governmentality and ethics. Scholars have tended to shy away from the theoretical concerns with which Foucault engaged in his archaeologies, particularly in *The Order of Things*, not only because of the metaphysical nature of these concerns, but because they have also detected a form of linguistic idealism in Foucault’s singular attention to discourse and knowledge, and thus a structuralist tendency in his attempt to theorize the unconscious “rules of formation” or the mode of being of language that he believed served as the conditions of possibility of the forms of knowledge and discourse he analyzed and thus as the conditions of possibility of subjectivity. The avoidance of Foucault’s archaeologies is not surprising, since Foucault himself with his genealogical or “post-structuralist” turn abandoned his concerns with the structural conditions of possibility of subjectivity and knowledge along with the ontological and metaphysical concerns they raised;³ indeed, with the introduction of his genealogies, Foucault became less concerned with the notion of the mode of being of language—and the forms of being its various manifestations made possible—and much more concerned with the way in which subjectivity was constructed through the material manifestations of discourse in social and cultural institutions and practices or, in other words, through power.⁴ But while the initial caution surrounding Foucault’s early work—and surrounding idealist, structuralist, or metaphysical theoretical programs in general—was at first a theoretically

³ This turn occurs as early as Foucault’s writing of *The Archaeologies of Knowledge*, a text that is usually understood as a bridge between his archaeologies and genealogies. See Rajan, “Mask of Death” and “The Phenomenological Allegory,” as well as Dreyfus and Rabinow for a discussion of this turn.

⁴ See, for example, *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, v. 1.

and politically progressive impulse, as it opened a space for more plural and materialist theorizations of the conditions of possibility of knowledge and subjectivity, since the fall of the Berlin Wall this impulse has turned, I would argue in agreement with Creston Davis,⁵ into a limiting orthodoxy that holds the potential to rob intellectuals of the tools—such as the notions of structure and universality that allow for the construction of a comprehensive view of subjectivity, power, and the workings of the social, a view that is absolutely needed in order to understand the highly complex and integrated workings of contemporary capitalism—required to carry out not only a multidimensional theorization of the workings of capitalism and modernity but perhaps most importantly an effective assault on the capitalist system itself.

Though criticized for its ontological and metaphysical concerns as well as its “linguistic idealism,” *The Order of Things* was written by Foucault ostensibly as an alternative history of science, one which challenged the notions of historical continuity and the centrality of the observing and knowing subject that informed the writing of the history of thought during the mid 20th century. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault sets out to demonstrate that the epistemological landscape of the West from the 16th through 20th century was marked by three separate epistemic divisions which he terms Renaissance (16th century), Classical (17th and 18th centuries), and modern (19th and 20th centuries). The general space of knowledge of each of these divisions was arranged, according to Foucault, in ways fundamentally different from the spaces of the others and, as such, produced ways of knowing and bodies of knowledge specific to each period. In Foucault’s scheme, each period’s way of knowing and bodies of knowledge were

⁵ See Davis’ introduction to *The Monstrosity of Christ*.

grounded by different “conditions of possibility”—or more specifically, by different “rules of formation” or “systems of regularity” which functioned at a structural level Foucault calls “archaeological” and which had to serve as a discursive formation’s foundation in order for it to be understood or recognized as scientific knowledge or as knowledge at all.⁶ But perhaps most importantly, as the conditions of possibility of an epistemic formation and its attending form of subjectivity, these rules or regularities determined the way in which the elements of the empirical world were carved out and ordered; they determined “the mode of being of things and the order that divides them up before presenting them to the understanding” (xxii). It was these rules and regularities, in other words, that determined the specific way in which each socio-cultural formation experienced and understood its empirical reality—they determined the shape of a socio-cultural formation’s collective consciousness and its collective system of knowing. It is in fact Foucault’s theorization of a subtending level, of structural rules or regularities, that serves as the cornerstone of his critique of the knowing subject and thus his reformulation of the way in which the history of thought has been written. Indeed, in *The Order of Things*, Foucault attempts to demonstrate that it is these archaeological rules and regularities and not the genius or the experience of the knowing and observing subject that serve as the conditions of possibility of scientific knowledge and, as such, should be the focus of historical analysis of scientific discourse (xiv).

But while the explicit focus of *The Order of Things* is the attempt to address specific problems in the history of thought, its implicit goal, and its primary and most pressing concern, is, once again, philosophical and most importantly ontological. In *The*

⁶ See the Forward and the Preface to *The Order of Things* for a discussion of these structural notions.

Order of Things, Foucault is particularly concerned with knowledge as a manifestation of being or subjectivity and with the way in which both knowledge and subjectivity are given their shapes by the structural foundations or the mode of being of language. As he sketches out the general contours of human subjectivity and knowing, language functions, for Foucault, as the most binding condition of possibility of the human being, of its consciousness—this is, he argues, because it is through and within language that “thought is able to think” (381) and that the human being is able to build a body of knowledge (351); it is language that carves out the human being’s perception and its experience of order or the empirical world. When Foucault invokes the term “language” in *The Order of Things* then, he understands language not as a tool tied to the human being’s intentionality or its conscious productions, a tool that the human being wields and molds to its own purposes, but rather as an independent system with its own internal structure and operations. In Foucault’s model, “man” does not breathe life into language—it is not man’s dictates that give language meaning—rather language breathes life into man, generating its meaning and shaping man’s subjectivity on the basis of its own internal laws or its own particular mode of being (381-84).

The concept of the “mode of being of language” as Foucault conceptualizes it in *The Order of Things* may be defined in the simplest manner as the way in which a culture experiences language. For Foucault, this experience of language is an unconscious process and is thus never directly analyzed or articulated by the culture in which it exists. However, it may be unearthed and given positivity as an object of knowledge, as Foucault believes and wants to demonstrate, through a rigorous analysis of the ways in which language is analyzed and understood as an object of knowledge within the

scientific, linguistic and philosophical texts of the culture in question. Foucault indeed devotes the majority of *The Order of Things* to an analysis of language and the way it was conceptualized in the epistemic formations of the three periods he examines, and what he determines from such a study is that language was experienced in radically different ways in each. In the Renaissance, according to Foucault, language was experienced as a thing of nature, in the Classical period as pure function; in the modern period, language is experienced as an object. Foucault's approach to language in *The Order of Things* is quite different from the approach of most of his French predecessors and colleagues, in that unlike many of these thinkers (such as Lacan) who in most instances have universalized their equivalent of the mode of being of language which structures modern subjectivity, Foucault sets out to demonstrate that the modern mode of being of language—the being of language to which, I believe, we are still presently subjected—is in itself *not* trans-cultural or trans-historical. Through his engagement with the bodies of knowledge of each period he studies, Foucault concludes that language has had “modes of being” different than that of the modern in different time periods and cultures—modes of being in which language has existed as something other than an object, other than a self-determining, self-regulating and arbitrary system which serves primarily as a means of expression or communication. These alternate modes of being of language, along with the alternate ways of knowing they make possible, are what ultimately allow Foucault to suggest that the experiences and forms of subjectivity of non-modern socio-cultural formations differed radically from those of the modern period. These alternate modes of being of language also signal to Foucault that forms of

subjectivity radically different from the modern can be brought into being if the modern mode of being of language is dismantled or shifted.

The notion of the mode of being of language that Foucault introduces in *The Order of Things* is clearly an abstract and difficult concept and one for which Foucault never provides a definitive explanation. This concept, however, serves as the cornerstone of the theories of subjectivity and knowledge that Foucault puts forth in the text and most importantly as the cornerstone of his interventionary project. It also serves as the guiding theoretical force of this dissertation and therefore must be carefully elucidated. Since the concept of the being of language resists a concise definition, the most effective way to introduce the concept, I believe, is to summarize Foucault's account of how language exists and operates in each of the three periods he studies. In the period Foucault terms the Renaissance, language exists as "a treasury of signs linked by similitude to that which they are empowered to denote." Possessing an "ageless affinity" with that which it indicates or "unveils" (34), language in the Renaissance, according to Foucault, exists as a material entity (42). For Foucault, language in this period is not a "neutral element" in which one reflects what one knows (38)—but rather "an opaque, mysterious thing, closed in on itself" (34) that is "force[d]...to reside in the world among the plants, the herbs, the stones, and the animals" (35). Because language exists side by side with the things of the world, Foucault suggests, "[t]he relation of languages to the world is one of analogy rather than of signification; or rather, their value as signs and their duplicating function are superimposed..." (37). Indeed, for Foucault, the signification of signs did not exist in the Renaissance "because it was reabsorbed into the sovereignty of the Like..." (43). Renaissance language, in other words, could not signify in Foucault's model because it

derived its power to indicate from the fact that it *was* what it “unveiled” or what it “denoted.” Because it was what it unveiled, language in the Renaissance was experienced and thus understood and approached as an integral part of nature—as integral as the natural elements it denoted. A complete knowledge of a “thing” of nature in the Renaissance, then, had to include not only the empirical observation and description of the thing but also a comprehensive grouping together of all words that had been written about it. In this period as Foucault has portrayed it, language could therefore serve as the locus of truth of a thing as authoritatively or reliably as empirical observation (39-40). Again, this became possible, in Foucault’s view, because the being of language was exactly its materiality—its existence as an object in the world.

With the shift of the western episteme in Foucault’s model to what he deems the Classical period, language, while not yet possessing a purely linguistic existence, loses its material being and no longer exists as “part of the fabric of the world” (41). In the Classical period, Foucault explains, language was “still to have the task of speaking that which is, but it was no longer to be anything more than what it said” (43). And what it said, what it spoke, was the process of reflective thought. In the Classical period as Foucault conceptualizes it, the human being perceived itself as possessing a limited nature and intelligence in relation to the infinite nature and infinite intelligence of God. This limited intelligibility, defined by the period’s cultural framework, meant that the human being was unable to perceive “directly, and in their analytic truth, the identities and differences of things” (70). The human being could therefore only find the truth of “things” by analyzing its own representations (its impressions, perceptions, wants (69 & 73)) of the empirical world—the human being itself, in other words, was required to

bring into existence both its own experience and knowledge of the world and the things found within it. In the Classical period, language served as the means by which this process of analysis was carried out; language served, according to Foucault, as the “immediate and spontaneous unfolding of representation; it was in that order [language] in the first place that representations received their primary signs, patterned and regrouped their common features, and established their relations of identity or attribution...” (295). What allowed language to play this “decisive role in representation” (82), Foucault suggests, was its ability to analyze the simultaneous and multilayered representations of the human mind “according to a necessarily successive order”(82). Foucault argues that the language of the Classical period when patterning representation “replaces the simultaneous comparison of parts (or magnitudes) with an order whose degrees must be traversed one after the other. It is in this strict sense that language is an *analysis* of thought: not a simple patterning, but a profound establishment of order in space” (83). In Foucault’s reading then, the mode of being of language shifts radically from the Renaissance to the Classical period. Unlike the language of the Renaissance, which itself existed as a “thing” in the world and which operated through analogy rather than through signification or representation, the language of the Classical period becomes the process of analytical and thus reflective thought: to speak in the Classical period is to think, to analyze and to reflect. Language therefore no longer exists side by side with the material things of the world. Instead its being in the Classical period becomes purely functional, and its function is to analyze and order or, more specifically, to re-present the human being’s impressions and perceptions of the “things” of the world so that the human being may know the identities of things in their “analytic truth”; language in this

period becomes the medium through which the things of the world attain to positivity.

Language is thus the foundation of all knowledge, becoming so by serving as the *process* by which the human being knows:

The profound vocation of Classical language has always been to create a table – a ‘picture’: whether it be in the form of natural discourse, the accumulation of truth, descriptions of things, a body of exact knowledge, or an encyclopedic dictionary. It exists, therefore, only in order to be transparent; ...in the Classical age, discourse is that translucent necessity through which...representation renders beings visible in their truth. The possibility of knowing things and their order passes, in the Classical experience, through the sovereignty of words: words...form...a colourless network on the basis of which beings manifest themselves and representations are ordered. (311)

As Foucault suggests then, the language of the Classical period “is not so much the instrument of men’s intercommunication as the path by which, necessarily, representation communicates with reflection” (83). It is only with another shift of its mode of being that language can indeed become an instrument of communication.

This shift takes place in Foucault’s model with the transition from the Classical to the modern period. In the modern period as Foucault conceptualizes it, language loses its purely representative function—the process of speaking is no longer the process of thought—and reemerges once again as an object. As Foucault argues, “[f]rom the nineteenth century, language began to fold in upon itself, to acquire its own particular density, to deploy a history, and objectivity, and laws of its own. It became one object of knowledge among others...” (296). As object, however, language does not join the “things” of the world, returning to the position it held in the Renaissance; it does not regain its materiality, but rather “acquires a being proper to itself” (295), that is a particularly linguistic being. In the Renaissance and Classical periods the being of

language was not self-determining. Rather language's being was determined by its foundation in nature (Renaissance) or the process of thought (Classical period). In the modern period, language becomes a self-contained object with its own set of operating rules. Its ontological coherence and importantly its ability to indicate, denote or "unveil" are maintained by nothing other than its internal grammatical structure—"a grammatical totality which in relation to the word, is primary, fundamental, and determining" (281). That language has become an autonomous, self-determining and self-regulating entity in the modern period, Foucault argues, serves as an indication that "the ontological transition...between speaking and thinking [has been] removed" (295), that language, in other words, no longer serves as the process of thought and the seat of knowledge, and thus that it is now possible for thought and knowledge to exist outside of language (297-98). And in fact once language no longer serves as the actual process of thought and the center of knowledge, language can become a tool or an instrument of expression (290). Perhaps most importantly for Foucault, with this "demotion" (296) of language to the status of a self-contained object, language loses the ontological and operational unity that it maintained during the Renaissance and Classical periods resulting from its singular tie to nature or its position as the locus of possibility of thought and, importantly, knowledge. In the modern period, language's being becomes fragmented and it begins to exist in a "dispersed way"; language, in other words, is no longer understood to exist in a singular way or to have a singular being. Instead in the modern period, language has a "multiplicity of modes of being," and as such, according to Foucault, it may be conceptualized in a variety of ways: as an object with an historical density and past; as a formalized object which "must strip itself of its concrete content and leave nothing

visible but those forms of discourse that are universally valid”; as an object of interpretive curiosity that must have its hidden meaning unearthed; or as “an act of writing” in the form of literature “that designates nothing other than itself” (304).

In the modern period, then, when language becomes an object and is dispossessed of its unity, fragmenting into multiple modes of being and losing its “validity as the locus of origin of living beings, needs, and words, or as the primitive seat of their truth” (313), a new experience of order, time, and knowing radically different from that of the Classical period comes into being. In this new linguistic and epistemic space, where language is no longer understood to render the things of the world visible in their truth (311), the truth of these things withdraws into the things themselves and becomes a product of their own interior laws and their own internal time, rather than a product of the process and the time of representation (313). Once the things of the world find their locus of being no longer within language as the process of representation but rather within their own internal structures, once, in other words, language as the process of representation is no longer the “locus of origin” of the things of the world, a new object of knowledge, man—“the difficult object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge” (310)—enters the episteme for the first time in the history of western thought. “Man,” according to Foucault, like the things of the world, is conceptualized in the modern period as possessing a being which is withdrawn into the depths of himself: he is understood as that individual whose existence is found in the organic structure of his body, in the labor that he is forced to perform in order to sustain himself, and in the being of a new objectified language by whose boundaries his thought is limited (313). In the modern conceptual framework, in fact, when man and the things of the world roll up into

themselves and find their identities, beings and truths in their own internal laws, man experiences the things of the world as external to his representations, his language, and his time. Once dispossessed of the integrated being and time he shared with the things of the world—due to the fact that he no longer has to think the things of the world into being—man no longer exists as the center of being and time and is left to find both his history and the histories of the things of the world, as well as his being and theirs, outside himself.

As Foucault makes quite clear, modern “man,” understood as a consciousness existing outside of representation and language, could not exist in the thought of the Classical period:

The modern themes of an individual who lives, speaks, and works in accordance with the laws of an economics, a philology, and a biology, but who also, by a sort of internal torsion and overlapping, has acquired the right, through the interplay of those very laws to know them and to subject them to total clarification...are excluded by Classical thought... [A]t the place in which we believe nowadays that we can recognize the primary, irrefutable, and enigmatic existence of man[,] what Classical thought reveals is the power of discourse. In other words, language in so far as it represents—language that names, patterns, combines, and connects and disconnects things as it makes them visible in the transparency of words. (310)

As Foucault suggests here, the human being’s existence—its *being*—as far as it was understood in the Classical period, found its locus of possibility in language, in language that represented thought. To be in the Classical period, as Descartes suggests, was to think and, as Foucault adds, to think through language—through language that “provided the link between the ‘I think’ and the ‘I am’ of the being undertaking it...” (311). Indeed, in the Classical period, as long as language was used to pattern representation, to bring into being the identities and truths of the things of the world—that is, as long as the

human being had to think the meanings of the things of the world and thus itself into being, the human being could not step outside of this process—precisely because this process was the site of the human being’s *being*—and see itself “by a sort of internal torsion” as an entity with an internal nature separate from its process of thought. In attempting to understand its being, the human being of the Classical period was limited to the analysis of its representations, or in other words, its thought processes. The human being could not therefore interrogate its own being as an object outside of and separate from its processes of thought or itself (311-12). However, when the mode of being of language of the Classical period shifted at the end of the 18th century and brought about the beginnings of the modern episteme, the being of “man” and its maintenance, Foucault suggests, was understood to reside, like man’s thought, no longer in his process of representing representation, but again in realms outside of it, including his body, his labor, and his spoken language. And because man’s being comes to reside outside his processes of patterning his representations through language—outside, that is, of his consciousness—because, in other words, man does not have to maintain his being by thinking and speaking, he can now interrogate reflexively not only his thought but himself and his being, since he can carry out this interrogation from a position outside himself. Man will also be able to interrogate, like himself, the things of the world reflexively from a position outside of the being of the things of the world, since he no longer thinks their beings into existence or shares their being with them. Modern man then, released from the process of maintaining his being and the being of the things of the world through thought, becomes not only (self-)reflexive but self-sufficient, self-assertive and self-aggrandizing⁷—and will become, for Foucault of the genealogies, the

⁷ The first two of these terms (“self-sufficient” and “self-assertive”) are used by McCarthy in his

embodiment of the will to power and thus a force of instrumental rationality which dominates and subordinates nature, society and the self.⁸

“Man” of the modern period then, as Foucault understands him, is not the same entity produced by the mode of being of language in the Classical period; once again, the human being of the Classical period, is not, by Foucault’s definition, “man” at all, because it was only with the linguistic system of modernity that “man” came into being. Foucault’s claim that “man” as an ontological category did not exist during the Classical period is directly attributable, in his theoretical scheme, to the mode of being of language of the Classical period. Thus far, we have considered the mode of being of language through the more experiential notions of the ways in which a language exists or a culture relates to language within a given period. The mode of being of language as Foucault conceptualizes it, however, is more precisely characterized as the function of the sign—as, that is, the manner in which a word forms a relationship and ultimately correlates with the concept or object of which it speaks, or, in more modern terms, the manner in which a signifier forms a relationship with and ultimately articulates its particular signified. The modern mode of signification—and, importantly, the subjectivity it produces—has been thoroughly and prevalently theorized, but since it is Foucault’s model of subjectivity for the Classical period that most promisingly suggests a model for a future alternative to modern subjectivity, it is his understanding of the Classical period’s mode of being of language—a system of signs different from that of modernity,

introduction to *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (xv); the third term (“self-aggrandizing”) is offered by Habermas in the same text (214).

⁸ This trio is also used by McCarthy in his introduction to Habermas, in his more general discussion of the counter-enlightenment arm of the philosophical discourse of modernity (xiii).

producing an entirely different subject—that requires our closest attention here. Foucault suggests that the manner in which the sign functioned in the Classical period—the way in which the sign represented its meaning—was similar to the way a picture might represent what it depicts. The sign, he argues, was always experienced as transparent to its meaning and thus never as arbitrarily connected to it. According to Classical thought, the sign’s transparency to its meaning stemmed ultimately from the fact that God, as creator and master of all things, limited the human being’s intelligence and its power to master meaning. As experienced by the human being of the period, God limited its ability to access the truth of meaning by forcing the human being to make sense of its environment obliquely. Maintaining mastery over the truth of meaning for himself, God only allowed the human being to experience limited impression of His creations (nature) which He then required the human being to order through the process of analysis and recall in order to produce meaning. Because the human being’s impressions did not serve as direct representations of the truth but rather had to be ordered to create meaning, the human being experienced its impressions not as complete and meaningful entities in themselves but rather as building blocks in the process of ordering its environment and producing meaning—impressions were experienced as the basic units of the human being’s process of thought or cognition.

God may not have provided the human being with the ability to see the truth of meaning directly, but as experienced by the human being of the Classical period, He did endow the human being with an intelligence, one that made specific use of the powers of analysis and recall. These powers were especially useful since the human being was required to distinguish resemblances between its impressions in order to link them. As

explained by period thought, it was the inherent disorder of nature that produced relations of resemblance between the human being's impressions and that thus activated the process of signification in its mind. Nature was so thoroughly disordered, "...due to its own history, to its catastrophes, or perhaps merely its jumbled plurality..." (70), that its contents resembled one another very closely, so closely that nature was no longer able to provide the human being's mind/intelligence and thus its impressions "...with anything but things that resembled one another" (70). The human being's impressions, because they were bound to contents which resembled each other so closely, perpetually repeated, recalled and duplicated themselves such that they engendered signification and thus ordered thought. Nature, in other words, served as a catalyst for the human being's process of thought.

However, it was the human being's receptivity to nature's communicative properties and its God-given ability to analyze and recall—what the period termed "imagination"—that allowed the human being to perceive and to read the resemblances between its impressions, and most importantly, to give them a sense of order. As Foucault explains:

...in effect, if we suppose in the uninterrupted chain of representation certain impressions, the very simplest that can be, without the slightest degree of resemblance between them, then there would be no possibility whatever of the second recalling the first, causing it to reappear, and thus authorizing its representation in the imagination; those impressions would succeed one another in the most total differentiation—so total that it could not even be perceived, since no representation would be able to immobilize itself in one place, reanimate a former one, and juxtapose itself so as to give rise to a comparison: even that tiny overlap of identity necessary for all differentiation would not be provided. Perpetual change would pass before us without guidelines and in perpetual monotony. If representation did not possess the obscure power of making a past impression present once more, then no impression would ever appear as either similar to or dissimilar from a previous one. This power of recall implies at least the possibility of

causing two impressions to appear as quasi-likenesses (as neighbours or as contemporaries, existing almost the same way) when one of those impressions only is present, while the other has ceased, perhaps a long time ago, to exist. Without imagination, there would be no resemblance between things. (68-69)

“Imagination,” or the process of analysis and recall, not only allowed the human being to perceive and read the resemblances between its impressions, it also allowed the human being to make sense of its impressions and thus to give them meaning. To give an impression meaning, the human being was required to analyze the impression and then to link it with impressions that resembled it. When the human being had linked the impression to all that it resembled through analysis and recall, the impression was placed in a context of resemblances and was thus given a coherent meaning. With a meaning attached to it, the impression could now facilitate the human being’s understanding of a portion of its lived environment. And importantly, as a facilitator of meaning, the impression could now function as a sign, but not as a sign of the truth of the element(s) of nature that produced the impression on which the sign was based—the human being was denied all access to this—rather only as a sign of the context of resemblances in which its originating impression was placed by the process of analysis. Indeed, because the impression possessed no meaning prior to the process of analysis and placement (recall), the meaning of the impression as sign was dependent on the act of placement and not on an essential quality of the impression (it possessed no such qualities for the human being). The impression, as a sign’s meaning, articulated, therefore, nothing more than the impression’s connection to its resemblances, and importantly, the way in which this connection was produced.

In fact, it was the sign's articulation of the process of its analysis into being that insured that the sign served as a transparent window onto its meaning—no opacity intervened between the sign and its meaning. This transparency of sign and meaning resulted from the fact that both entities were mutually constituted through the processes of analysis and placement—the sign and its meaning were not arbitrarily assigned to each other. Dependent as they were for their existence on analysis and placement, neither the sign nor its meaning could hold alternative meanings outside these two processes, nor could they exist without each other. According to Foucault:

...the signifying element has no content, no function, and no determination other than what it represents: it is entirely ordered upon and transparent to it. But this content is indicated only in a representation that posits itself as such, and that which is signified resides, without residuum and without opacity, within the representation of the sign. (64)

Indeed, the sign's only function in this system was to provide intelligibility to the impression from which it was analyzed; its purpose, in other words, was to represent its meaning. Without this representativity, the sign could not be read. Foucault explains:

In its simple state as an idea, or an image, or a perception, associated with or substituted for another, the signifying element is not a sign. It can become a sign only on condition that it manifests, in addition, the relation that links it to what it signifies. It must represent; but that representation, in turn, must also be represented within it. (64)

The sign, that is, in order to be recognized and to function as a signifying entity, had to represent the process of its analysis into being, since the representation of the sign's process of analysis into being served as the marker that allowed the sign to be read. For Foucault, the sign, in its ability to represent its analysis into being (or its process of

representing), functioned like a spatial and graphic representation. “[T]he picture,” he argues, “has no other content...than that which it represents, and yet that content is made visible only because it is represented by a representation” (64). The sign, in other words, was “...the representativity of the representation in so far as it is representable” (65). It was the sign’s representativity, in fact, that ultimately made the sign transparent to its meaning. For example, when the human being had ordered one of its impressions of nature and created a sign, it came into possession of the meaning of the impression, which, consequently, was nothing more than the process of the sign’s analysis into being. Because the sign possessed no essential truth—its meaning was only produced by the placement of the impression into the context of its resemblances—the sign was forced to represent the process by which it was connected to its meaning (its representativity), that is, the process by which it was analyzed into being, in order to gain its intelligibility and to be known as a sign.

In the Classical period, the fact that the human being was made to produce meaning through the process of ordering its impressions ensured a period-specific form of subjectivity in which the human being would be unable to separate from and master meaning, since outside this process of ordering, nothing maintained the human being’s cognitive capacities. Because its cognitive capacities could not exist outside the production of meaning, the human being’s processes of conceptualization and thought would only take the shape of a continual attempt to maintain a space of meaning, and importantly, a space of consciousness. Furthermore, since meaning could never exist outside the human being’s continuous production of it, meaning would only take the shape of a process—the process of its own creation. Meaning would never be tied to a

truth, would never possess an essence, and would never function as a fixed and stable entity or object. Because the human being constructed and maintained its cognitive capacities and integrity (its consciousness) in the process of producing and maintaining a space of meaning, it would never be abstracted from its own being; rather, as process, it would be integrated into the stream of time of its own consciousness, so that it would ultimately be contemporaneous with its being. Integrated into the stream of its own being and its own time, the human being could never create for itself a stable, unchanging and autonomous self—it could never become a center of mastery.

This is not to suggest, however, that the human being did not possess a complex subjective and cognitive structure. Indeed, it has been common to read the inability to master meaning or to assume positions of subjective agency as the inability to make sense or to engage in the process of cognition—one requisite for the ability to make sense, especially in the psychoanalytic model, has been the ability to separate from meaning. Such a reading is called into question and problematized by the workings of the sign of the Classical period, which allowed thought and intellection to take place only in the absence of the subject's separation from meaning. In fact, the human being's inability to separate from meaning gave its cognitive and subjective structures—its experience of thinking, knowing and being—a unique shape. As argued above, the Classical human being's inability to separate from meaning was due in part to the fact that neither meaning nor the human being's cognitive capacities could exist as autonomous entities outside of their mutual construction into being—in order for the human being to separate from meaning, the human being's cognitive capacities would have had to exist as an autonomous and self-contained entity prior to the production of meaning, and likewise,

meaning would have had to exist in the same manner prior to its construction into being. Because the production of the human being's cognitive capacities and the production of meaning were mutually dependent and thus were unable to stand as autonomous and self-contained entities outside their mutual construction into being, the human being's processes of cognition or thought could only be devoted to maintaining the space and the integrity of meaning, and most importantly, to maintaining the human being's subjectivity. The human being's thought processes, in other words, were devoted to maintaining coherency, specifically the coherency of the human being's reality/lived environment or, in other words, the positivity of the things of the world. But, as suggested above, coherency and stability did not exist outside the act of process. In order to maintain coherency the human being had continually to order and to analyze or to produce meaning—coherency only existed while the human being participated in its construction. Positivity, in fact, was not experienced without effort nor was it experienced as an already-constructed space that the human being moved through.

As the above discussion makes clear, the human being of the Classical period did not perceive or experience a ready-made world, a world whose coherency or positivity had nothing to do with the human being itself. Rather, the human being was forced to maintain the positivity of its surroundings, and importantly the coherency of its own consciousness, through its cognitive processes—cognition was limited to the maintenance of positivity and consciousness because the entity that thought did not exist as an entity separate from and outside of the process of cognition. Because the human being's processes of cognition or thought were completely consumed by the effort to maintain positivity and its own consciousness, these processes could be devoted to no other

function. Thought, for instance, would never take the form of contemplation or interpretation. For thought to do such, the human being would have to experience itself—its consciousness—and the positivity of the things of the world as two separate and pre-formed entities. The human being, in other words, would have to experience itself as an autonomous, hollowed-out center of mastery capable of holding a stable, codified body of knowledge within itself as a point of reference from which to read or more importantly to contemplate and interpret pre-set meanings. Without this sense of mastery, the human being would not only be unable to engage in contemplative or interpretive thought, it would be unable to interrogate its own being as an object outside of and separate from time, its processes of thought, or, for that matter, itself (311-12). Nor could it experience desire, since the Classical period's mode of being of language as well as its form of cognition did not serve to abstract the subject from its "fullness of being" but rather kept it integrated with this being and with time, as well as the being and the time of the things that it thought.

It is with his theorization of the mode of being of language of the Classical period and importantly the form of subjectivity that it produces that Foucault ultimately offers us a new model of non-modern subjectivity as well as the means to de-essentialize desire and conceptualize a new form of human freedom. This new model of subjectivity that Foucault makes possible with his theorization of subjectivity for the Classical period is one based on presentness, one, more specifically, that situates the human being in a "perpetual present,"⁹ and one in which the human being thus experiences time in a way radically different from modernity. This presentness is generated in Foucault's model,

⁹ Below, I address the differences between what I see as Foucault's version of this state and Jameson's use of the term.

once again, by the fact that the human being has to maintain its being through its process of thought, through its maintenance of meaning and the positivity of the things of the world, processes in which the subject maintains the stream of time, existing in time and not outside of it—that is, in a perpetual present—and perhaps most importantly, is the producer of the time of its being and the time of the world, and exists *as* time—*is* time itself. For the subject of the perpetual present, then, time is not an abstract entity outside itself to which it is subject, but rather the form of its being. And existing as time and its producer as well as the producer, through thought, of the positivity of the things of the world and itself, the subject cannot transcend time or itself—once again, it cannot know itself or determine itself reflexively. Instead the subject experiences itself as the pure process of time and of thought and, importantly, as pure being, and thus as bringing itself and things of the world into being through its very existence. The human being in this model, then, functions as a self- and world-generator: its every thought and every action is a process of creating something anew, of generating new possibilities. But the human being in this model does not create itself or the world from a place outside of itself or outside of the world as does the modern subject; it cannot dominate the things it brings into being because it can never stand outside of them. Rather, the human being generates these things from within itself or from within the world and in this sense is one with them.

Foucault is not the only theorist who has in his work depicted a subject in a state of a “perpetual present.” Such states are described in the work of Fredric Jameson—whose term I have applied here to Foucault—and of Scott Lash, though for these theorists, the subject experiencing a perpetual present is neither pre-modern nor a

model for some future state; Jameson and Lash theorize that the contemporary subject is showing indications of being, or already is, a subject brought to a perpetual present, one that exists in a non-linear, non-abstracted and thus non-modern form of temporality. Both Jameson and Lash understand the subjective state of perpetual present to be a consequence of the radicalization of capitalism in the contemporary moment. According to Jameson, for instance, the movement of capitalism away from industrial production to the forms of speculation (on the stock market, futures, and land) which serve as the foundation of finance capital has created new economic and importantly social rhythms—rhythms which have been “disentangled from the older cyclical rhythms of capitalism generally: boom and bust, accumulation of inventory, liquidation, and so forth, a process...that imprints a kind of generational rhythm on individual life” (“End of Temporality” 703). These new rhythms are calibrated to “the newer processes of the consumption of investments as such, the anxious daily consultations of the listings, deliberations with or without your broker, selling off, taking a gamble on something as yet untested,” and create, according to Jameson, “a novel and more universal microtemporality,” one, in fact, which brings about a “narrowing” and an “urgency” of existential time (704). For Jameson, the operations of finance capital and the rhythms of compression it produces are made possible in part by new communications and information technologies. These technologies, which permit rapid processing of information and rapid transfers of money, people and information, allow instant communication and thus the linking of distances and entities normally separated over time. With their use, Jameson argues, “[o]lder habits of clock time are thereby eclipsed,

the 'signifier' of the single day called into question; some new non-chronological and non-temporal pattern of immediacies comes into being" (707).

While the temporal rhythms of finance capital do indeed hold the potential, in Jameson's program, to decenter the subject and to "reduce" it to a perpetual present in time (709), for Jameson, the most important determinant of the subject's decentering has been the processes of decolonization which resulted from the nascent stages of globalization brought into being by the reorganization of capital after WWII and which continue through to the present day.¹⁰ In Jameson's view, the collapsing of geographic space triggered by the communications and information revolutions of globalization has revealed to the modern subject, in an "explosion of otherness," the multiplicity of people and lives that were previously concealed from it under the systems of colonization and modernity where geographies and demographics were spatially separated. Jameson relates:

It is the explosive fact of decolonization ... that confronts me with an immense multitude of others, which I am called upon to recognize as equals or as freedoms. But in our present context the point to be made has to do with the impact of this recognition on the experience of the bourgeois self, for it is the proliferation of all these innumerable others that renders vain and inconsequential my own experience of some essence I might be, some unique life or destiny that I might claim as a privilege (or indeed as a form of spiritual or existential private property). The stripping away of that form of temporality—the security of the ego or the unique personal self—is comparable to the stripping away of universals in a nominalist age; it leaves me alone with my unique present, with a present of time that is anonymous and no longer belongs to any identifiable biographical self or private destiny. (709-10)

Despite the effort expended by Jameson on his theorizations of the compression of existential time and the reduction of the subject to a perpetual present, he nevertheless

¹⁰Jameson sees this as the most important and viable root of the perpetual present because it is the most material and political.

refuses to concede that a full phenomenological or structural reduction of the subject is possible. For Jameson, no matter how significantly the system shrinks existential time and no matter how radically it disorients, destabilizes, or decenters the modern subject, the reduction of the subject to a perpetual present can be understood only as a tendency of the late capitalist system and is therefore, in his own words, “unrealizable”:

... human beings cannot revert to the immediacy of the animal kingdom (assuming indeed the animals themselves enjoy such phenomenological immediacy). There is a resistance to this pressure which I hesitate to call natural for political as well as philosophical reasons... (717)

The reduction to the present, according to Jameson, is only to be conceived of in a “political way,” that is in terms of the “demographic plebeianization” of subjectivity which I discuss above.

Jameson’s refusal to acknowledge the possibility of the subject’s reduction to a perpetual present finds its opposite manifestation in the work on information society by Scott Lash. Unlike Jameson, Lash contends that the subject has indeed already been brought to a perpetual present, specifically by the informationalization of contemporary society and culture. For Lash, we have entered an era of “lite capitalism” (*Critique of Information* 208), an era where the production of knowledge-intensive, information-rich goods and services (electronics, software, knowledge, design, brands, etc.) and the operations of finance capital serve as the foundation of the economy (141) and ultimately create a new experience of temporality. In this new era, where consumption has become increasingly specialized and where product markets have become increasingly unpredictable, the ability to compete and to generate profit relies more and more on

innovation and importantly on the generation of prototypes or intellectual property (22, 82). According to Lash:

Real property is based on the accumulation of capital; intellectual property on the accumulation of information. Real property is based on the accumulation of the same: as Marx said, 'homologous congealed labor time'. Intellectual property is based on the accumulation of difference. Every prototype must be different than the one before. Intellectual property is based on the accumulation of symbols, of meaning. To have meaning, there must be intelligible difference. Today, the production of prototypes (of intellectual property) has become routinized. Today production entails chronic invention, the chronic repetition of difference.(23)

The need to innovate constantly in order to generate profit and remain competitive has required, Lash claims, a speeding up of the processes of production and importantly of the social. This acceleration of production (and with it the circulation of finance capital) has been made possible by increased reliance on information and communications technologies, which in turn have made both the rapid processing of information and the rapid transfers of information, money and people a reality. According to Lash, the speed at which these technologies have allowed individuals and firms to operate—that is, to calculate and to communicate and circulate information and people (and thus to innovate and produce rapidly)—has led to a compression of time: “The now time’s chronology is the speed of light: the instantaneous time in which—as increment between departure and arrival incessantly shrinks—there is the simultaneous arrival of everything without there ever being a departure” (137). This “now time,” which Lash designates as “the new post-time temporal experience of *speed*,” is experienced as “a succession of jolts as ‘nows,’” in other words, as a perpetual present where past and future no longer have meaning (134).

Because he understands speed and the information and communications technologies which generate it as the primary conditions of possibility in the creation of profit(s) and thus sociality (16), Lash argues that the social and cultural orders in the contemporary era have become fully informationalized. For Lash, as society and culture are colonized by informationalization, differences begin to break down and are eventually erased. This erasure of difference collapses the distinction between same and other and thus “tends to erase the possibility of a transcendental realm”:

In the information age, cultural experience is displaced from the previously existing transcendental dualisms of the reader and the book, the concerto and the audience, the painting and the spectator. Culture is displaced into an immanent plane of actors attached or interfaced with machines. Now we experience cultural things not as transcendental representations, but instead as immanent things: as objects, as technologies. In this generalized immanence, superstructures collapse as the economy is culturalized, informationalized. (9)

For Lash, the speed and immediacy of socio-cultural processes (6) and the ensuing flattening of all traditional transcendentals (16) has created a condition where for the subject there is neither time for reflection (xi, 1) nor space to stand outside of information from which to reflect. Under these circumstances, where the subject is no longer able to distance itself from the everyday in order to move into a separate space from which to reflect, reflection takes place, according to Lash, in practice. Here, the distance between knowledge and practice is collapsed: “...knowing no longer reflects on doing; instead, doing, is at the same time knowing” (17). Indeed in Lash’s scheme, theory and practice are fused—more precisely, “[t]heory is ‘incarnate’ in practice”—as the two no longer operate in a dialectic. Under these conditions, where there is no longer an outside from which to reflect, for Lash, “reflexivity is closer to a ‘reflex’ than the distance of

reflection.” In Lash’s model then, the subject, as a “substance” which operates through reflex rather than reflexivity, eventually loses its depth and has its interiority flattened—the subject’s expressive subjectivity, which presumed consciousness as an interior monologue, is, in fact, eroded (17). This flattened-out human being, whose sense-making has been externalized, becomes, according to Lash, a “body without organs...” (138). Clearly for Lash, in the informationalized society, the modern, centered and transcendental subject disappears as it is externalized into the immanence of information.

While these theorizations by both Jameson and Lash of the compression of time in the contemporary moment add further dimension to our understanding of the way culture operates in contemporary capitalism, their theorizations of the contemporary subject do not fare quite as well, as they are limited by the methodological stances taken by each theorist, Marxist and Postmodernist respectively, stances which have led Jameson to the conclusion that a reduction of the subject to a perpetual present is impossible and Lash to the conclusion that it has already occurred. In refusing to consider the possibility of a subjective state entailing a perpetual present, Jameson is unable to conceal his modern, humanist bias: like Žižek and Hardt & Negri, Jameson has followed Marx in universalizing and essentializing modern subjectivity as human nature. For Jameson, like these other Marxism-informed thinkers, the essential nature of the human being appears to be its ability to *transcend* “the immediacy of the animal kingdom” and thus its instinctual state¹¹ (“End of Temporality” 717). Because Jameson understands the essential nature of the human being (as do Žižek and Hardt & Negri) to be non-animal,

¹¹ Jameson, like Marx, Lacan, and Žižek, is working here within the parameters of a Nature to Culture narrative based on evolutionary theory, which is exclusively a product of modernity. For my discussion of the problems with such a mode of thinking, see pp. 94-97 as well as fn 16 and fn 17 of this chapter.

non-instinctual, he is inclined to see any conceptualization of the human being as immediate or reduced to a perpetual present as a form of reversion to a non-human state—again, to “the immediacy of the animal kingdom”—and therefore is left to understand the notion of the reduction to a perpetual present as a manifestation of a loss of stable biography and thus identity and not as a fundamentally new form of subjectivity (710). In the end, because Jameson refuses to believe that it is possible for the subject to be reduced to a perpetual present, he holds fast to the conviction that any theoretical project that attempts to do so can only serve to replicate and reproduce the tendencies of the late capitalist system.

Lash’s theoretical vision of subjectivity is not bound, as is Jameson’s, by Marxist and essentializing notions of human nature; his conceptualizations of social, epistemological and subjective change, however, are highly under-theorized and have led him to claim that the contemporary manifestation of capitalism has moved us into a truly post-modern state, both social and subjective. The greatest weakness in Lash’s work is its lack of a systematized and substantive theory of periodization that can account for the structural differences in subjectivity, culture, and sociality that distinguish one period from another. He is thus unable to recognize that capitalism is a structurally modern system, that it functions at its most fundamental level on the basis of rationalization and control (including modern scientific and technological principles and structures) and can only operate with a rational, reflexive, and transcendental subject—a subject, in other words, that experiences itself as separate from the things of the world—and, most importantly, with a desiring subject, at its helm. Without such theories of periodization and social, subjective, and epistemological change, Lash mistakes the radicalization of

the modern social system and of modern subjectivity for complete rupture from modernity and reads the contemporary subject's disorientation in time brought about by the speeding up (or, again, the radicalization) of modern time as a post-modern rather than a radicalized modern state.

In the end, then, for all their efforts to address modernity's ills, Jameson's essentializing of modern subjectivity and Lash's mistaking of its radicalization for a move beyond modernity serve to demonstrate that these theorists have found it extremely difficult to think their way out of modernity and beyond modern subjectivity—that they have at their disposal, in other words, few theoretical tools to conceptualize a path beyond modernity as a social formation and to create a new non-modern ontological structure. Again, I believe their theoretical difficulties, not only Lash's but Jameson's as well, stem from the fact that neither has developed accurate theories of periodization or of social, subjective or cultural/epistemological change.¹² This is clearly not the case with Foucault, particularly in *The Order of Things*, where, through his concept of the mode of being of language, he lays out a theory of periodization and epistemological and subjective change founded on his notion that the structural operations of language and more precisely of “signification,” serve as the conditions of possibility, the limits, that is, of a period's temporal reach and of course its forms of subjectivity and ways of knowing. Most important is the conception of the possibility for change that is deeply embedded in Foucault's understanding of the operations of language—specifically in his conviction

¹² Though Jameson was one of the first thinkers to produce a highly systematized theory of the transition from modernity to postmodernity and thus a theory of the postmodern, because he ties the cultural conditions he deems postmodern to the workings of late Capital, Jameson's model, like that of Lash, confuses a radicalized modernity with a postmodernity. See “Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.”

that the mode of being of language does not possess a fixed and unchanging structure, but rather shifts over time, and with these shifts allows for radical changes in subjectivity and ways of knowing. Once again, it is this theory of radical subjective change that allows us to theorize the possibility of bringing into being a truly non- or post-modern subject, the possibility, that is, of taking collective hold of the being of language directly and altering it so as to bring about a new form of subjectivity¹³—one in which the human being is brought to a perpetual present much like the subject theorized by Lash, but one that is not founded on a radicalization of modern subjectivity but rather on a shift in the mode of being of language that takes us beyond modern subjectivity.

Foucault's theorization of the operations of language also offers us the possibility of negotiating the crucial challenges noted in this dissertation's introduction, particularly the challenges of desire and its de-essentialization. As I argued in the introduction, the psychoanalytic model of desire fashioned by Žižek through his reading of the theories of desire of Freud and Lacan serves as a remarkably accurate model of desire as it has been experienced in the era of modernity, including the contemporary moment. This model has been able to make sense, quite convincingly, of the psychic instability of the modern (including contemporary) social subject, particularly its tendency towards dissatisfaction, its experience of a psychic scarcity, and its thorough susceptibility to the commodity and the visual spectacles that accompany it. But though it provides an excellent map of the

¹³ Once again, Foucault's model opens up the possibility for further subjective shifts, but does not include concrete theorizations of how such shifts occurred in the past or might occur again. See Chapters Three and Four for my analyses of the ways in which the more compelling elements of Žižek and Hardt & Negri's interventionary projects—which place the agency for subjective and social change in the hands of the individual modern subject (in the case of Žižek) or the collective (the "multitude," in Hardt & Negri's terms)—offer flawed but promising visions of how such shifts might transpire. See also, importantly, Chapter Five, where I explain the potential role of the aesthetic in both envisioning and enacting the shifts in the mode of being of language that might bring us beyond modern subjectivity and modernity itself.

operations and the instability of desire, Žižek's Lacan-informed model nevertheless prefers to ignore desire's problematic social and psychic effects. As argued in the introduction, Žižek does indeed understand desire as a force of radical negativity; however, he perceives desire to function not as an inherently dangerous and damaging entity, but rather as a catalyst for radical political and social change. I believe, in contrast, that desire, as a force of radical negativity, "infinite striving," and dissatisfaction serves as the primary foundation or the cause of modernity's subjective and, importantly, social instability, as it has created, as I suggest in the introduction, a culture of subjects who, ruled by their desire and Capital's subsequent cultivation of it, are structurally incapable of confronting Capital's destruction of modern moral systems or of placing the needs of the totality above their own—of taking any uncoerced ethical stance. It is for this reason that I argue we must rid ourselves of the psychic structure of desire, and I believe Foucault's general theorization of the mode of being of language as well as his specific models of the mode of being of language and subjectivity for the Classical period can help us accomplish this task, precisely because they offer us the tools to de-essentialize desire as it has been understood by Žižek via Lacan. These models offer us, once again, an understanding of language and subjectivity that suggests quite convincingly that language may hold many modes of being and operating, not solely the modern mode of being and operating that Žižek and Lacan theorize, and may produce forms of subjectivity radically different from the modern form of subjectivity and desire that Žižek and Lacan essentialize. Perhaps the most important and promising aspect of Foucault's work is its convincing demonstration that it is indeed possible to shift the mode of being

of language, which, when applied to the present moment, suggests that it is also possible to rid ourselves of desire.

The mode of being of language that Žižek following Lacan essentializes and universalizes in his theoretical framework is at its core the same as the mode of being of language that Foucault theorizes for the modern period, in that language in both models exists as an autonomous, self-determining, and self-regulating entity whose ability to make meaning or to “signify” is made possible by its own internal structure or rules. In the Lacanian psychoanalytic model of signification upon which Žižek’s work ultimately relies, language is understood, following Saussure, as a closed system in which meaning is produced as a result of the play of differences. In this scheme, each signifier attains its meaning not from its connection to any isolated unit of the real, but in relation to what it is not—i.e. a word gains its meaning because it is not every other word, and in this context every signified functions as a signifier, so that no meaning ever solidifies; meaning is always provisional and exchangeable. Because meaning is not connected to the real but comes into being as a result of the play of differences within a closed system, in order for meaning to be produced it has to be created in a syntagmatic or oppositional relationship—a single word alone in this system cannot generate meaning. In this model, the subject will enter into language when it creates its first syntagmatic or oppositional chain and understands that the meaning of signifier A that it utters is “not signifier B”; in other words, when it understands that positivity comes about in a binary opposition of two distinct and separate entities. According to this model, before the subject’s entrance into language it does not yet distinguish between itself and the external realm. However, once the subject understands the concept of “opposition,” it can no longer sustain the

illusion of its unity with the external. The understanding of "opposition" immediately thrusts the subject into the field of the Other and forces it to conceptualize itself as separate from what gives it its distinct meaning: the Other.¹⁴ This understanding also splits the subject off from its own drives and thus from its experience of a "fullness of being"; in other words, it alienates the subject from the experience of ontological unity, creates a profound sense of lack, and, most importantly, produces desire.¹⁵ The entrance into signification, in alienating the subject from its ontological unity, also produces a transcendental subject, one who now transcends meaning and its being, but who, because it is defined by the endless commutability of the sign, of the process of signification, can never ultimately master meaning; like the signifier itself, it can only slip along the chain of the signifiers.

¹⁴ For Žižek, following Lacan, "the symbolic universe in which we dwell" is inextricably tied to "sexual difference as the impossible/real which structures our lives" (*Ticklish Subject* 293), as sexual difference makes the symbolic possible and ultimately gives it the binary mode of being that is discussed above. In an attempt perhaps to soften the male-centered and heterosexist focus of Lacan's account of sexual difference as the condition of possibility of the symbolic, particularly its reliance on the phallus as the privileged signifier in the binary of sexual difference (See Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 178–193 for a critique of Lacan's phallogentrism), but to retain still the binary nature of the symbolic as an explanation for "the gap of the primordial disattachment" or the manner in which the human child is pulled out of its fullness of being, sending it into the field of the Other, Žižek uses the Freudian notion of the original *Hilflosigkeit* (helplessness/distress). According to Žižek, the child is helpless in two overlapping ways: 1) in that the child is unable to survive or satisfy its needs without the help of the parent-figure and 2) in that the child is left helpless without 'cognitive mapping' when s/he is "thrown into the position of a helpless witness to sexual interplay between his/her parents or other adults, or between adult(s) and himself [sic]" and in the process is "confronted by the enigma of the Other's *jouissance*" and "is unable to symbolize the mysterious sexual gestures and innuendos he is witnessing" (288). I wonder if we might understand this traumatic experience of the child's with the "impenetrable 'dark spot' of the Other's *jouissance* which disturbs the calm of his psychic homeostasis" (288)—this enigma designated, as Žižek suggests, by Lacan's question *Che vuoi?* ("What does the Other want from me? What [as an object] [author's brackets] am I for the Other, for his desire?"), in its perplexing nature, in its inability to be symbolized—to be, in Žižek's scheme, that which ultimately provides the child with an awareness of the Other, of difference, of sexual difference? Žižek does claim that "[i]n the last resort, this negative tendency to disruption is none other than *libido* itself: what throws a (future) subject 'out of joint' is none other than the traumatic encounter with *jouissance*" (289), but I wonder if he might be suggesting that it may be the perplexity of this enigma that creates the understanding of (sexual) difference that will abstract the "(future) subject" from its fullness of being.

¹⁵ See Silverman, 162–178 for an excellent discussion of the operations of signification in the Lacanian model.

In Žižek's psychoanalytic understanding of the mode of being of language, language is at odds with the human infant's original being or nature. It is an intruder that disturbs the "psychic homeostasis" of the human infant (*Ticklish Subject* 288), sending it into a radical negativity and alienation from self. This account of the process of language acquisition in the human infant thus functions as a Nature to Culture narrative, one in which "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny,"¹⁶ as it is modeled directly on the Nature to Culture narrative of modern evolutionary theory in which the pre-human "animal" becomes human when it is abstracted and distanced from nature or more precisely from its own "animal nature" (36-7) by the intrusion of language, which forces the new human being to interface with the empirical world through symbols and narratives rather than through pure instinct. Fundamental to this notion of the human being's abstraction from its "animal nature" is the assumption that the human being is essentially an animal, like all others in the "animal kingdom," but a higher-level animal, one that over time has evolved away from its original instinctual state—from its direct immersion in the world, from its direct contact with reality and nature—and thus from the original and essential nature it shares with the planet's other animals.¹⁷

¹⁶ This notion, originating in the late 18th century, asserts a direct parallel between the stages of development from embryo to adult and the stages of evolution of the human species. See Gould 155-64 for a discussion of Freud's embrace of this notion.

¹⁷ A primary focus of Žižek's overall theoretical and philosophical project is, in fact, centered around his attempt to account for the move of the human being from Nature to Culture, on both the phylogenetic and the ontogenic levels, and for what he calls the "vanishing mediator" that makes this move possible. According to Žižek, this vanishing mediator on both levels is the human being's "withdrawal into self," into what following Hegel he calls the "night of the world" and following Freud the death drive (*Ticklish Subject* 35-37)—a withdrawal that is brought about, once again, by the "(future) subject's" traumatic encounter with *jouissance* (289). For Žižek, in fact, it is this notion of "withdrawal into self" that completes or more precisely corrects the standard evolutionary narrative of the human being's move from Nature to Culture, a narrative which he ultimately finds lacking, because he believes it neglects to theorize properly the transition from Nature to Culture, so that it appears as if Culture or the Symbolic is "magically conferred" on the human being by some twist of fate, or literally a twist of nature that has not and cannot adequately be accounted for (36-37). Žižek ultimately believes that evolutionary theory finds itself at an interpretive

The correlation of Žižek's psychoanalytic model of the operations of language to the Nature to Culture narrative of evolutionary theory—combined with the fact that it serves, as argued above, as an accurate map of the way in which language, subjectivity, and desire operate in the modern period, including contemporary modernity—is ultimately what has granted Žižek the latitude to essentialize and universalize this model and to offer it up as the truth of the operations of language and truth of human subjectivity. Foucault's theorization of language and subjectivity in *The Order of Things*, however, throws the universalization of this model into question, since it demonstrates that throughout its history, language may have had modes of operating radically different from the modern mode—such as in the Classical period—and that these different modes

impassé when attempting to account for the human being's transition from Nature to Culture because, for Žižek, this transition, as the “a priori transcendental[] of communication” manifesting itself as the withdrawal into self, “cannot be deduced from natural being” (*The Monstrosity of Christ* 26)—it is an event that takes place outside the natural context.

In its inability, then, to theorize the transition from Nature to Culture, in its willingness to assume that the transition “magically” occurs, evolutionary theory, according to Žižek, manifests a form of idealism in its conceptual program generally understood as materialist. A true materialist framework for Žižek is one which can account for what makes human thought or subjectivity possible; the defining feature of idealism is its assumption of thought without origin. Because Žižek believes he has accounted for the transition from Nature to Culture with his notion of the human being's “withdrawal into self” which he attributes to the human infant's encounter with *jouissance*, and because he believes this withdrawal produces an antagonism (the catalyst of political change, for Žižek) within the subject between its transcendental consciousness and the remainder of its fullness of being (the “stain” the subject cannot get rid of and that follows it around for the rest of its life (291)) as well as between the subject and the socio-symbolic order, Žižek deems his Lacanian-inspired theories and the theories of Lacan himself “materialist” (see *The Parallax View*, “Introduction: Dialectical Materialism at the Gates” 3-13).

But while Žižek appears to denounce evolutionary theory and separate himself from its conceptual impasse and its biologism with his notion of the human being's “withdrawal into self,” he is not willing to let go of his belief that the human being finds its origins in the transition from Nature to Culture, that what makes the human being “human” is the fact that it is abstracted from its animal nature by language. Indeed, in remaining within a model that understands the emergence of the human being and its intelligence as products of the move from Nature to Culture and in applying this model to the movement of the human infant into the symbolic (the human infant makes a move from Nature to Culture in its early development via its withdrawal into self after its first encounter with sexual difference and the Other's *jouissance*, with libido) – a model in which “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny”—Žižek is not only embracing a very dangerous theory, a “primitivizing” theory in which any form of consciousness that does not look like the transcendental and desiring form of consciousness of the modern period may be understood as ultimately “animal” or non-human, he is also shutting down the possibility for thinking another form of subjectivity into being and thus for radical subjective and social change. See Žižek's discussion of *Totem and Taboo* in Chapter 6 of *The Ticklish Subject*, “Whither Oedipus.”

of being of language may have produced forms of consciousness radically different from that of modernity, forms where the human being was not abstracted from itself and thus not subject to desire. In the Classical period, according to Foucault's reading, the human being's entry into language was not traumatic, did not pose a disruption to its fundamental nature. As argued above, the function of the sign in the period's linguistic system was radically different from that of modernity—indeed in this period, as Foucault suggests, language did not as much signify as represent. Within the Classical linguistic system, the sign represented its meaning, similar to the way a picture might represent what it depicts, so that the sign was experienced as transparent to its meaning and thus never as arbitrarily connected to it. Here, where the sign or signifier did not gain its meaning from its position in a closed system of meaning and thus from a syntagmatic or oppositional relationship it shared with another signifier, but rather from the process of bringing it into being, the sign and its meaning were not experienced as two distinct entities. Instead, they were experienced as a single, mutually constituted and dependent process. As a result, when the sign was acquired by the human being in the process of language acquisition, what the human being assimilated was not an understanding of difference that thrust it into the field of the Other and into a position of transcendence that would allow it to define itself and the things around it as circumscribed objects with unchanging meanings. Rather, it assimilated a process, one that propelled the human being into an existence of continuous meaning production and positivization, and one that, unlike the modern mode of being of language theorized by psychoanalysis, never allowed the human being on the conscious level to transcend or objectify itself or the things around it as autonomous entities. Within this framework then, desire could not

come into being, precisely because the relation of signifier to signified or sign to its referent did not abstract the human being from meaning or from itself.

At this juncture we may want to ask why Foucault's compelling theories of language and subjectivity from *The Order of Things*, when they have been in circulation for over 40 years, have been ignored, while the psychoanalytic model of language and subjectivity has maintained a place of cultural prominence. I believe there are two answers to this question: the first, as I argued at the beginning of this chapter, is that scholars, for political reasons, have been afraid to embrace Foucault's work in *The Order of Things* due to what they have perceived as its structuralist tendencies and its linguistic idealism as well as its engagement with ontology and thus its willingness to risk the metaphysical in its attempt to find the Truth in Being-in-the-World. The second reason is the fact that, as also argued above, not only does the psychoanalytic model of language and subjectivity parallel the hegemonic narrative of evolutionary theory, it accurately maps the modern mode of being of language and the modern experience of language and subjectivity, just those experiences that evolutionary theory has essentialized as truly human and just those experiences that evolutionary theory was developed to explain—and that were the very conditions of possibility for the emergence of evolutionary theory, as well as its rise to hegemony.¹⁸ From its inception and through to today, modern scientific discourse, including evolutionary theory (which has assumed an even more hegemonic position today than it did at its beginnings in the 19th century), because it is not a self-reflexive practice, because the questioning of its own assumptions

¹⁸ Foucault suggests in *The Order of Things* that though historians of science have attempted to trace the intellectual history of evolutionary theory to the Classical period, its defining epistemological assumptions could not be thought at that time. See, for example, 127-8.

is not built into its epistemological framework, has approached the form of consciousness prevalent in the modern period as the universal form of human consciousness. That a sophisticated thinker such as Žižek has not only left unquestioned but has embraced the highly problematic narrative of Nature to Culture and with it the evolutionary theory that makes it possible, despite his suspicions of its inadequacy as an explanatory model of the origins of the human being and its consciousness, demonstrates, I believe, if not a lack of imagination, then an unyielding commitment to the epistemological and ontological frameworks of modernity and to the experience of ontological freedom they make possible. We must not forget that, despite his international influence (and, indeed, celebrity), Žižek is a scholar from Eastern Europe; just as scholars from the American academy are products of American history and culture, Žižek is himself, no doubt, a product of his experiences as a subject of Socialism as it was experienced in the Soviet Bloc, origins that may have left him—understandably—willing to conceptualize freedom in only one manner, as self-determination, and unwilling to risk a move away from this form of freedom that modern ontology presupposes. Žižek's cautions, no matter what their cause, make him a uniquely politicized and, indeed, daring thinker, and surely of inestimable value to the scholarship of the West in which he is now an active participant. But his unwillingness to think outside the modern ontological and epistemological frameworks, I believe, significantly (if not incurably) limits the scope and impact of his theorizing.

This is why Foucault's willingness to think beyond the modern in *The Order of Things* is so very important, especially in the contemporary moment. In this text, Foucault is willing to think language and subjectivity against evolutionary theory and the

Nature to Culture narrative, and especially against the tendency of psychoanalytic theory to assume that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny when it comes to the development of the human infant. Indeed, Foucault's model of non-modern subjectivity ultimately brings into focus the idea that language does not have to produce desire, as it does not have to separate us or abstract us from a fullness of being or even from our nature—and, in suggesting this, it also conceives of a human nature that, because it is not at odds with language, might itself be linguistic. Foucault's theory, read over the course of the historical periods he studies, allows us to envision a human being that at no time in its “development” (either ontogenic or phylogenic) runs on “animal” instinct. In this line of thinking, the human species and importantly the human infant never make a transition from Nature to Culture; instead the human being is, again, in its “human” being a “being of language,” a *parletre*—its fundamental nature is to speak, is to interface with the world and to construct its reality through language. In this case, the human being is never abstracted from an animal nature because it never shared a nature with animals in the first place—its “instinct” has never been their instinct, its base nature has never been their base nature, because the human being's base nature, its instinct, is to speak. Language, then, if the human being's fundamental nature is to speak, cannot abstract the human being from its nature, since language *is* its nature. Under these conditions, to assimilate and to speak language is to live by “instinct.”

If, then, despite the fact that today we do indeed experience radical ontological alienation and desire, we recognize our human nature not as fundamentally alienated but as fundamentally linguistic, and we understand the mode of being of language as capable of taking on any number of possible shapes, we may begin to conceptualize language as a

far more finely tuned instrument (more finely tuned, that is, than language in the psychoanalytic model) in the carving out of the contours of the human being's mind, of its consciousness. This approach, in fact, may allow us to account, without the reliance on the notion of coding that we see in the work of both Žižek and Deleuze & Guattari,¹⁹ for the radically different ontologies and epistemologies that have arisen throughout human history, and for the fact that desire and transcendence are at times nowhere to be found. This approach may offer up a better understanding of the connection between language and its mode of being and the general symbolic order, the symbolic narratives that fashion our understanding of reality. And it may free us, in the end, from the inability to account for the myriad forms of subjectivity—over time periods and cultures—that do not conform to the psychoanalytical model of language's construction of our subjectivity. These insights, opened up to us by Foucault's work in *The Order of Things*, ultimately provide us with more than the very important hope that human beings are not eternally—essentially—subject to desire and the death drive and thus to social and psychic instability. What they ultimately offer us, I believe, is possibility: the possibility of creating radically new and radically free forms of subjectivity and being.

It is this possibility of creating radically new forms of subjectivity and knowledge that sits at the foundation of Foucault's aesthetic program in *The Order of Things*. While this text's few commentators have in most instances accused Foucault's work in its pages of a Nietzschean aestheticism and a preoccupation with a radically aestheticized being

¹⁹ See *The Ticklish Subject*, 313-22 and *Anti-Oedipus* for an explanation of "coding."

into nothingness or death,²⁰ Foucault's work in *The Order of Things*, especially as it is developed at the book's end, is concerned with neither nothingness nor death. Foucault does advocate the "death of man" as the object and, importantly, subject of modern knowledge, but his work in *The Order of Things* is most forcefully centered around his anticipation of the emergence of a new mode of being of language in what appears to him to be, in his contemporary moment, the beginnings of a reunification of the fragmented modern mode of being of language, which results, he believes, from the linguistic formalization of thought that was becoming a possibility as a result of the rise to prominence of the discipline of structural linguistics in the academy and as a result of the "formalist" turn of 20th-century European literature, especially in the work of writers such as Artaud, Roussel, and Blanchot, to a concern with the purely linguistic nature or "being" of language and literature. Here, where language moves to cultural prominence, where language, at least in the linguistic formalization of thought that the emergence of structural linguistics portended for Foucault, Foucault detects a movement of language back to its mode of being in the Classical period, back to its unity and its position as the center and condition of possibility of all knowledge. This movement serves, importantly, in Foucault's thought, as the *sign* of the dawn of a new epistemological and ontological era.²¹

But, for Foucault, this movement was *only* a sign, especially as it manifested itself in the concerns of the literature of Artaud, Roussel and Blanchot. While Foucault gives a

²⁰ See, for instance, Megill, Wolin, and especially Rajan, "The Mask of Death: Foucault, Derrida, the Human Sciences and Literature" and "The Phenomenological Allegory: From Death and the Labyrinth to The Order of Things."

²¹ See *The Order of Things*, 381-387.

place of prominence to the work of these writers, who did indeed engage with madness, nothingness, and death in their work (as well as in their own lives), he evokes these writers to demonstrate that their preoccupation with radical negativity and with a language concerned solely with itself served only as a revelation of the conditions of possibility of man and as such only as evidence of his impending death—in this way, they were, for Foucault, fully a product of the modern episteme (*Order* 383-4). This literature of being into nothingness or death, then, did not serve for Foucault as an aesthetic path to another mode of being of language or another form of subjectivity. In fact, in *The Order of Things*, Foucault does not offer up even a loosely systematized aesthetic model for a way beyond modernity—as I’ve noted above, he only points to the cultural manifestations of his day that served as possible indications that in the new concern with language, the fragmented modern mode of being was possibly re-unifying. His aesthetic program, I would argue, one which is directed specifically at bringing about the end of man as both the object and “sovereign” subject of knowledge, at bringing about a new form of subjectivity, is found and expressed in the actual writing of *The Order of Things* itself. As Tilottama Rajan rightly suggests, in this text Foucault writes “theory as literature” (“Mask of Death” 214), but the “literature” he produces is not the same as that of the 20th-century “writers who wear the mask of death” (216), as she argues—once again, despite Rajan’s claims, Foucault was not preoccupied with nothingness and death, with a “writing fascinated by the being of its nothingness” (215). Rather Foucault’s writing of theory as literature in *The Order of Things*, in its attempt to reveal the linguistic, epistemological and ontological limits of “man” and thus the limits of modern subjectivity, took the form of a wildly creative and fanciful—even

fantastic—envisioning and importantly writing into being of a new “post-modern” mythology and with it a new reality, a new experience of the world, both epistemological and ontological.

This dissertation attempts to consider how the aesthetic project envisioned in Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, along with the possibilities it invokes, might be carried out in the aesthetic theory and practice of our own moment. In seeking a continuation of Foucault’s project, then, the dissertation does not aim to trace the literary tendencies he pointed to as evidence that a shift in the modern mode of being of language might have been underway in his own time. Instead, by investigating particularly poignant contemporary cultural critiques of modernity (specifically, the interventionary projects of Žižek and Hardt & Negri) as well as the work of a group of theorists and art historians considering the aesthetic “re-enchantment” of the world, it attempts to contribute to the ongoing scholarly and artistic project concerned with the notion of world-generation through the creation of new narratives, new myths that might usher in a new mode of being different from the modern one. The dissertation’s final chapter will revisit the aesthetic projects Foucault describes, as well as those he himself enacts, in *The Order of Things*, but with an eye toward the potential of visual art, in particular, to discover and perhaps evoke alternative experiences of language and the world—and thus, as suggested by Foucault’s theoretical scheme, to create new worlds themselves.

CHAPTER THREE

Slavoj Žižek's Post-Modern Visions

In his recent works *The Ticklish Subject*, *The Parallax View*, and *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Slavoj Žižek has concerned himself with crafting explicitly interventionary strategies that allow for a move beyond the present system of capitalism and for the fashioning of new forms of subjectivity and sociality. In these texts Žižek offers compelling maps of the ways in which he understands capitalism to operate as a specifically “postmodern” system in the contemporary context and, most significantly, develops theoretical programs that lay the foundation for a move beyond this system’s present form. Over the last decade, however, the works of Žižek have served as more than forums for theorizing socio-political change; they have also served as important correctives to what Žižek has pointed out as the tendency of scholars working with postmodern, multiculturalist, Third Way, and Risk Society theory to avoid a substantive analysis of the system of capitalism in their attempts both to map and to intervene into the operations of contemporary forms of power. In his own work, Žižek has refused to ignore the structuring power of Capital in the contemporary moment, and has thus resisted, as he rightly acknowledges, “performing the ultimate service for the unrestrained development of capitalism by actively participating in the ideological effort to render its massive presence invisible...” (*The Ticklish Subject* 218). Instead, Žižek has attempted in his texts to call attention to and, most importantly, to theorize and to problematize the position of

Capital, within the contemporary (and now global) social structure, as one of social and political dominance; he has worked to *repoliticize* the economy—to theorize the economy as a site of political struggle—and he has labored diligently to produce inventive strategies for a move beyond capitalism.

Zizek's most powerful recent works are by far *The Ticklish Subject* and *The Parallax View*. In these theoretical texts Zizek, armed with Lacanian theory, has targeted the socio-symbolic order as the most important site of contemporary political struggle, and, in turn, has been willing to envision new configurations of subjectivity and the symbolic order that, at least at first glance, appear to be quite different from those found under capitalism and even communism. Interestingly, in *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, a text written after *The Ticklish Subject* and *The Parallax View*, Zizek turns away from a substantive engagement with Lacanian theory and, as a result, from a serious consideration of subjectivity and the symbolic order. In this work Zizek takes a more pragmatic and less creative and imaginative stance towards the problems of the contemporary moment. While he still situates political struggle at the site of the symbolic in this text, the symbolic now becomes for Zizek “capitalist ideology” instead of the Lacanian symbolic order. Zizek's turn away from the Lacanian notion of the symbolic order and his move to the more Marxist, and what may seem more pragmatic and immediate, notion of ideology—a notion of ideology that is admittedly more complex than the standard Marxist notion—may have been brought about by his growing desperation over the rapidly deteriorating contemporary social situation engendered by the contemporary form of capitalism. A return to standard Marxist categories such as ideology may appear to Zizek to be a more immediate solution to the contemporary

crisis, because such a return ties the symbolic to a particular agent (the “ruling class” (*First as Tragedy* 33), or the capital-holding class) and provides a ready-made and concrete adversary with whom to do battle. But while the category of ideology allows Žizek a “real” or embodied opponent and thus the means to revive notions of class struggle and hopes of communist insurrection, Žizek’s recent shift prevents *First as Tragedy* from taking any new strides for the crucial reason that Marxist notions of ideology—which understand the symbolic as a superstructural form, one that insures the reproduction of the means of production or the capitalist system as a whole—are not designed to account for the ways in which the symbolic interfaces with the psychic interiority of the subject. Indeed, when Žizek abandons the Lacanian symbolic order, he abandons not only a powerful instrument for accounting for the ways in which the discourses of today’s globalized, informationalized capitalism (including, importantly, Capital’s visual discourses) cultivate and pathologize the subject’s desire, but he also abandons a tool with which to understand the symbolic as part of the “base,” as a means of production, particularly the production of consumption. In order to move beyond the present form of capitalism, we must continue to designate culture, the symbolic order and, importantly, subjectivity as the primary sites of political struggle, and we must do so in a highly imaginative and complexly theorized manner, in a manner that moves beyond the framework of the traditional Marxist theory of ideology, and, as I argue throughout the dissertation, that incorporates artistic practice. This chapter then will focus specifically on *The Ticklish Subject* and *The Parallax View*, as these two texts provide substantive theorizations of both the contemporary symbolic order and subjectivity under capitalism in highly creative ways.

It is Žižek's willingness, in fact, in *The Ticklish Subject* and *The Parallax View* to focus his theoretical attention on conceptualizing new configurations of subjectivity and with them the socio-symbolic order that has ultimately set his work apart from that of most of his peers working with political theory (except perhaps that of Hardt & Negri). Although Žižek operates as a theorist of culture and society and is thus deeply concerned with the operations and importantly the pathologies of the social, including the pathology that is capitalism, he is first and foremost a Lacanian theoretician, and as such, he is specifically concerned with what may be considered the social and psychic freedom of the subject. Since in the Lacanian model of subjectivity, it is the symbolic order and the subject's relationship to it that will determine the psychic makeup and thus the wellbeing of the subject, Žižek focuses his theoretical and political attention on a multi-faceted analysis of the symbolic order, including its manner of operating and its pathologies. He suggests, in *The Ticklish Subject* and *The Parallax View*, that lasting transformation of the social—including a move beyond capitalism—and a permanent refashioning of the contemporary form of subjectivity require the transformation of the contemporary symbolic order. The theoretical program he crafts sets out, therefore, to dismantle the contemporary symbolic order in an attempt to free the workings of this order and, in turn, the contemporary subject from what he calls the “superego parallax” of symbolic Law and desire, Prohibition and transgression,¹ as well as the colonizing discourses of Capital

¹ Žižek theorizes the notion of the parallax as “the confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible” or “yet another name for a fundamental *antinomy* which can never be dialectically ‘mediated/sublated’ into a higher synthesis, since there is no common language, no shared ground, between the two levels...” (*The Parallax View* 4). While Žižek borrows the concept of the parallax from Kojin Karatani's *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), he rewrites the notion of non-synthesizable opposites through the theories of the emergence of the subject which he takes from Hegel and Lacan, theories which conceptualize the birth of the subject as a withdrawal from the fullness of being (or pure *jouissance*) and an entrance into a realm of abstract negativity—into the “night of the world” of Hegel or the Void of the “death drive” of Lacan: “the pre-ontological domain of

that have become in the contemporary moment the motor of the subject's transgressive impulses. In the modern manifestation of the superego parallax, as Žižek theorizes it, the symbolic order, in the form of a fiercely prohibitory form of symbolic paternal Law, generates the desire for its own transgression through its superego supplement which commands the subject to "Enjoy!" and thus transforms the subject's desire into a foreign and transgressive force that persists in following its path independently of the subject's conscious intentions, prompting the subject to transgress the Law and indulge in "illicit jouissance" (*The Ticklish Subject* 151). In the contemporary or "postmodern" manifestation of the superego parallax, capitalism's discourses of consumption destroy and replace paternal prohibition and give free reign to the superego injunction to Enjoy, functioning themselves as a powerful embodiment of this injunction as they cultivate the subject's desire through their depiction of imaginary ideals or simulacra of success or bodily perfection—indeed, for Žižek, it is the subject's desire as a transgressive force that capitalism harnesses to reproduce itself: as he argues in the *Ticklish Subject*, "the ruthless and boundless capitalist economy puts this excess/remainder to use, manipulating it in order to keep its productive machinery in perpetual motion..." (156). Freeing the subject from traditional constraints and paving the way for unrestrained consumption and thus the continued reproduction of the capitalist system, capitalism's discourses of

monstrous spectral apparitions, the domain that is 'immortal'...in the sense of what Lacan calls lamella, of the monstrous 'undead' object-libido" (*The Ticklish Subject* 154). In Žižek's narrative, this withdrawal into negativity sets the subject, which was originally One with itself, apart from itself, positioning it as an entity divided between its transcendent consciousness (produced by the subject's position as the "gap or void in the order of being") and the remainder of its fullness of being or its jouissance (the "stain" the subject cannot get rid of and that follows it around for the rest of its life (291))—two radically opposed parts of the subject that can never be rejoined or synthesized. Again, for Žižek, the parallax signifies the "inherent 'tension,' gap, non-coincidence of the One itself" (*The Parallax View* 7)—or in other words, as "two sides of the same phenomenon which, precisely as two sides, can never meet" (4). In Žižek's model of the superego parallax, the two non-synthesizable opposites that make up the parallax are paternal prohibition and what he calls the superego injunction to Enjoy.

consumption as the embodiment of the superego injunction to Enjoy are responsible, in Žizek's model, for the entirely compromised state of the contemporary symbolic order. For Žizek, then, if we are to move beyond capitalism and, most importantly, if we are to create a truly liberated socio-political formation as well as a "free" form of subjectivity, where the subject's desire is no longer compelled by the need to transgress or to indulge, we must shift the form of the contemporary symbolic order and most crucially rid it of the colonizing discourses of Capital and, importantly, the superego injunction to Enjoy.

It may be tempting here at this juncture to position Žizek as a neo-idealist thinker, since he does indeed devote a large measure of his theoretical endeavors to devising ways to transform the symbolic order and thus subjectivity. But we should resist this impulse and instead understand Žizek as a materialist thinker who envisions the dismantling of the symbolic order as a means to attack and dismantle the current social system or, in other words, the contemporary form of capitalism. Žizek should, in fact, be considered a materialist thinker even though his theoretical and political concerns in *The Ticklish Subject* and *The Parallax View* are focused sharply on the transformation of the symbolic order, since he theorizes the relationship between the symbolic order and the social, in these texts, as a co-constituting one (where the symbolic order gives shape to the social and the social in turn gives shape to the symbolic order) and as such creates a model of socio-symbolic space in which the symbolic order is linked directly to the material workings of the social. This inclination to conceptualize the relationship between the symbolic and the social as co-constituting stems directly from Žizek's belief that the symbolic order forms "the horizon, the condition of possibility" of the material practices of the socio-cultural system in which it is found (*The Ticklish Subject* 277), but is at the

same time “enframed” by one particular and “exceptional” material element of this system (“the ‘indivisible remainder’ of some ‘pathological’ contingent materiality”), an element, he argues, which itself forms the condition of possibility of the symbolic order (277-8). According to Žižek, this exceptional element in both the modern and contemporary or “postmodern” period is the practice of commodity exchange (276, 278).

For a materialist political program then—especially a political program that wishes to see the overthrow of capitalism—the theoretical and political importance of the materialism of Žižek lies in the logical conclusion which may be drawn from his general assumption that the contemporary symbolic order is “enframed” or given its shape by the system of commodity exchange and has thus become an integral part of capitalist production (a means of production). What this conclusion most crucially suggests is that the harnessing of the symbolic order to reproduce the capitalist system and thus our collective means of social existence has transformed the contemporary symbolic order into a decisively material entity, and for this reason, the collective social body has direct interventionary access to the symbolic order, again because the circulation of commodities and thus the reproduction of the capitalist system depend almost entirely now on the collective’s participation in the symbolic production of consumption and in the system of consumption itself. If we take Žižek’s theoretical assumptions to their logical conclusion then, the collective social body, as producers and importantly as consumers of commodities, is positioned, by virtue of its centrality to the system of consumption, to disrupt and thus to refashion the symbolic order which gives meaning to its social context and its forms of subjectivity and, as such, holds the power to restructure its social context so as to bring an end to the capitalist system.

In his theoretical programs Zizek has indeed returned a form of socio-political agency to the contemporary social subject and the collective social body, a form of agency that takes the shape of “acts,” carried out in the social by social subjects, that are designed to disrupt the operations of the contemporary symbolic order colonized by Capital and to dismantle the capitalist system as a whole. The social acts that Zizek envisions, however, at least in *The Ticklish Subject* and *The Parallax View*, are not designed around traditionally Marxist or “modern” anti-capitalist strategies, as he clearly understands the contemporary system of capitalism to work on principles very different from those of modern capitalism. For Zizek, capitalism in the contemporary period, through its colonizing of all aspects of life, not only the symbolic order but social institutions, the body, and the unconscious as well, has “revolutionized” every stable social and symbolic institution, including the State (*The Parallax View* 318). Because Zizek believes that Capital has colonized and, importantly, continues to revolutionize all aspects of life, including the political and the symbolic—such that traditional leftists and modern anti-capitalist political strategies that relied for their effectiveness precisely on their ability to revolutionize, destabilize or radicalize monolithic and stable social and symbolic institutions no longer hold the power to effect socio-political change, since the contemporary form of capitalism has usurped their revolutionizing tactics and made them its own—he does not advocate the seizure and reshaping of the symbolic order as a political strategy (as do Hardt & Negri), since he believes this strategy would only serve as another revolutionizing process and would thus follow the “self-perpetuating logic of Capital” (263). Instead he devises political strategies of withdrawal and refusal, strategies that assault contemporary capitalism and the symbolic order that maintains it

immanently, or from within capitalism itself, by directly and radically disengaging the subject from participation in the capitalist system, including, importantly, its system of consumption. These strategies of withdrawal and refusal require the subject to say an absolute “no” to Capital’s practices and discourses of consumption driven by the superego injunction to Enjoy, while at the same time refusing to specify the exact nature of the refusal. Žižek believes that without the subject’s willing compliance with the discourses that give voice to the superego injunction to Enjoy and that infiltrate and now structure the subject’s daily social life, the capitalist system and the symbolic order which co-constitutes it will eventually break down.²

It is important to note here that Žižek’s envisioned attack on the symbolic order through strategies of withdrawal and refusal is directed specifically at the form or the structure of the symbolic order, as he believes the symbolic order’s structure to be the most important factor in its effective operating, or, to be more exact, in the symbolic order’s power to shape reality or to serve as a guiding foundation for regulating a culture’s social interactions and social structure as a whole (*The Ticklish Subject* 340) and, of course, in its power to produce a collective form of subjectivity. Žižek views the structure of the symbolic order as repressive, juridical, and ultimately pacifying—it is “Law”; more specifically, it is Lacan’s “Law of the Father,” and it serves in Žižek’s model as “the agency of pacification-normalization which ... ‘stabilizes the impossible’, bringing about the minimal condition for the tolerable coexistence of subjects” (289)—the “impossible” here signifying the void of subjectivity, the death drive and desire. In Žižek’s model the juridical or “Law” serves as the structure of every historical

² Žižek models these strategies on the character of Bartleby from Herman Melville’s fiction; see the latter part of this chapter for more on Žižek’s use of this model.

manifestation of the symbolic order (it is a definitive universal structure, one that occurs across time and culture), including, importantly, its contemporary manifestation where the colonization of the symbolic order by Capital's discourses of consumption has led to the demise of paternal prohibition and the rise of the unconstrained superego injunction in its stead—an injunction that, once again, *commands* the subject to Enjoy and thus to transgress and indulge.³ Functioning as a juridical structure, even in its superego manifestation, the symbolic order, as Žizek conceptualizes it, requires the subject to submit to and, most importantly, to obey its rules and dictates. But while the structure of the symbolic order functions as a universal and juridical form, in all its manifestations forcing the subject to obey its dictates, the shape that this juridical structure assumes, in Žizek's scheme, is not necessarily universal. Indeed, as Žizek's work makes clear, the structure of the symbolic order or paternal authority, while still remaining juridical, may take different shapes in different cultural and historical contexts—it may code over desire and the death drive, it may repress them or it may command desire to transgress—leading to different forms of subjectivity at different historical and cultural moments.

But no matter what shape the symbolic order as juridical structure takes, the symbolic order, in Žizek's model, is always at odds with the human being's nature (whether its “animal nature” or its pre-symbolic and no-longer-animal, “In-between” nature of wild, unconstrained unruliness and freedom (35-7)) and as such always functions a normalizing, pacifying, or pathologizing and, thus, external and foreign force.

³ Žizek's theorization of the symbolic order is, in fact, much more complex than that of many of his peers, including that of Hardt & Negri, who understand the symbolic order as an empty vessel whose shape can be filled by a range of contents, contents which, depending on their particular species of narrative, can produce various forms of subjectivity—indeed, for these scholars, the symbolic order does not possess a fixed or definitive form or structure. See Chapter Four for a complete discussion of Hardt & Negri's theorization of the symbolic order.

As discussed in Chapter Two, this notion of the symbolic order as a foreign force which disrupts the human being's pre-symbolic nature is central to Žižek's political philosophy and theorization of new social formations as well as his theorization of freedom. Before returning to a discussion of Žižek's interventionary strategies of withdrawal and refusal then, it is crucial here to analyze the ways in which Žižek theorizes the different shapes the symbolic order takes, as a specifically juridical and foreign force, across the history of the West. Such an analysis will not only help us to understand the way in which Žižek conceptualizes the historical emergence of the contemporary form of symbolic paternal authority along with the form of subjectivity it brings into being, but most importantly, it will help us to understand the way in which this conceptualization affects the design and potential efficacy of his interventionary political program directed at the contemporary symbolic order and the contemporary form of subjectivity. As I will argue later in the chapter, it is Žižek's understanding of the symbolic order as juridical and foreign that keeps his interventionary programs specifically modern and unfortunately anemic.

In his attempt to account for the historically changing shape of the structure of the symbolic order or symbolic paternal authority, Žižek concentrates on three historical periods: the premodern, modern and postmodern. In the premodern period, symbolic paternal authority, Žižek argues (following the allegory offered by Freud in *Moses and Monotheism*), takes the shape of God the Father, or, more specifically, of God as the "all-inclusive One of *logos*, the rational substantial structure of the universe, the 'writing' accessible to those who know how to read the 'Great Book of Nature...' (319). This premodern God, according to Žižek (here pursuing the ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle), is a God whose essence coincides directly with His existence and, for this

reason, His essence—His nature, what He “is”—is existence itself (318). Since God’s essence is bound to His existence, His essence, His nature, can be nothing other than the fact of his existence, and because He can have no other essence or nature, bound as He is specifically to the dictates of (His) existence, if we follow the logic of this argument, God’s nature is immutable, and He is both predictable and rational. As existence itself, the premodern God “is” the rational structure of the universe; therefore, the universe, as the existence of God, is also immutable—as Žizek suggests, it is cosubstantial with Divine Nature and is thus eternally true and unchanging; its shape and operations are the natural/logical “Order of Things” (319).

In Žizek’s premodern context, then, it is the idea, or the “fiction,” of God as the logical, immutable, and predictable structure of the universe which grants the symbolic order its “efficiency”—its power to structure reality—and which thus grants to the real positivity and social performativity (the ability to register, or to see, an event, an object, or phenomenon and, through such registration, grant the event, object, or phenomenon social recognizability).⁴ It is important to note here that in the premodern context, the fiction of the logical structure of the universe includes the social order and the traditions that give this order its shape, and therefore the social order, like the order of the universe, is experienced as an immutable structure, as existence itself. Because the social order “is” existence, the premodern human being’s place within the social order predetermines what will be possible for the human being, in other words, the course of its life—a body sexed male in the premodern socio-symbolic formation will, for instance, have its social functions and possibilities, its role, strictly limited by the symbolic mandates (or by “the

⁴ See *The Ticklish Subject*, 322-334 for Žizek’s discussion of the notion of symbolic efficiency.

substantial form of customs”—i.e. Tradition—made possible by the symbolic order) that predetermine the life of a “man” (339). But perhaps most importantly, the human being’s place within the social order, as dictated and maintained by the logical structure of the universe, will govern its “innermost identity” (314)—like God Himself, the human being, in other words, will have its internal identity determined by its existence. Finally, because the human being’s internal identity is tied to its social position or to its existence, this identity will be readable, categorizable and most importantly experienced as fixed and fully determining—it cannot be abstracted or escaped (314).

This premodern form of fixed internal identity results, according to Žižek, from the specific way in which the human being is integrated into the premodern symbolic order, or to be more exact, from the way in which the human being moves through the premodern version of the Oedipus complex. As Žižek understands it, the premodern Oedipus complex is significantly different from the standard version of the complex attributed to Lacan, due mainly to the fact that, in the premodern complex, the form of symbolic paternal authority into which the human being is integrated in early childhood is *not* embodied in the person of the “real,” biological father and, importantly, does not take the shape of prohibition, as it does in the standard complex, but is instead housed in the *symbolic* function of “father”—the function, set by the dictates of the logical structure of the universe, to which the “real” father is tied by virtue of the fact that he is male and has produced children—and thus takes on an immutable and incontestable form, a form that does not require the assumption of a prohibitory stance (313).⁵ In the premodern

⁵ In attributing the premodern form of internal identity to a specifically premodern Oedipus complex, Žižek is following what he understands as Lacan’s own historicization of Oedipus (in Lacan’s early and his late work). See *The Ticklish Subject*, 313-14 and 392, notes 1 and 3.

Oedipus complex, then, symbolic paternal authority, as Žižek imagines it, manifests itself as one side *only* of the two sides of paternal authority that compose the standard Lacanian complex—it manifests itself, in other words, only as “the pacifying Ego Ideal, the point of ideal identification” and not as “the ferocious superego, the agent of cruel prohibition” (313-14).

Following the logic of Žižek’s argument here, it becomes clear that in the context of the premodern symbolic order, symbolic paternal authority can function *solely* as an Ego Ideal and not as a prohibitive superego precisely because symbolic paternal authority is linked in this context to the natural order of things, to the immutable logic of the universe, and cannot be contested: it, therefore, never has to say “No.” And because symbolic paternal authority never takes a prohibitory stance but is instead always a pacifying point of identification, it normalizes or pacifies the radical negativity that is the subject as void, the subject as death drive, and its desire by coding this negativity into the natural Order of Things. Indeed in the absence of prohibition and thus in the absence of the conflict and rivalry with symbolic authority that prohibition generates, no space, no gap, exists from which radical negativity can erupt in rebellion and in an exercise of its freedom; once again, this negativity is coded over by the seamless identification of the subject with the Ego Ideal. For Žižek, in fact, in the pre-modern symbolic order, “there is still a semblance of ultimately harmony between the big Other (the symbolic order) and *jouissance*...” (318), but we must remember that this “harmony” is produced by the coding of the subject’s radical negativity, by the fact that the symbolic Law does not prohibit it, and not by any kind of natural affinity between this radical negativity and the symbolic order. The singular function of paternal authority, in Žižek’s model, the fact

that it operates solely as the Ego Ideal and not as a prohibitory force, does not, however, only code over radical negativity and maintain harmony between the symbolic order and *jouissance*; it also ensures that the subject will never be forced to take a reflexive position in relation to the symbolic order or to its own empirical environment. For this reason, the premodern human being, in Žižek's scheme, will always experience the world around it and, importantly, its place within the social order, as the natural state of things, as pure existence, and, as such, will be unable to question, challenge, or more importantly objectify itself or the world around it; it will lack the reflexivity, in other words, that will only come about with the rise of the modern subject (319).

Indeed for Žižek, modern subjectivity becomes possible only with a mutation in the shape and functioning of premodern symbolic paternal authority and thus the premodern Oedipus complex. While Žižek ultimately attributes this mutation to capitalist modernization,⁶ in his discussion of the transition from premodernity to modernity he nonetheless narrates this shift by turning once again to the allegorical scenario offered in *Moses and Monotheism* wherein God as the rational order of the universe (*logos*) is killed by his followers and returns in “the guise of the jealous and unforgiving superego figure of God full of murderous rage” (317). For Žižek in fact modern subjectivity and modernity itself come into being when the God of *logos*, or symbolic paternal authority, is subjectivized—when God becomes “the God of pure Will” (318), the angry, irrational, capricious God “who imposes His unconditional Will on His creation” (319). This God (and here Žižek applies Sartre's definition of man to the God who issues in modernity), is a God whose existence, unlike that of the God of *logos*, does not coincide with His

⁶ See *The Ticklish Subject* 277-78 for Žižek's discussion of Capital's role in the emergence of modern subjectivity.

essence; rather His existence precedes his essence. Indeed, because His essence does not coincide with His existence, this God is not bound to the parameters or the mandates of His existence—His decisions and injunctions are bound neither by the logic nor the rationality of the structure of the universe, nor by existence itself. Instead, as Žižek argues, this is a God who does exactly what He wants, and “a God who does not have to *account* for anything He does” (318).

Here, Žižek employs the allegory of the premodern God’s subjectivization culled from Freud in order to account for the fact that with the transition to modernity, symbolic paternal authority is no longer experienced by the West as a rational, uncontested and divine structure but begins instead to be experienced as emanating from the person of the “real” father or from the structure of bourgeois patriarchy manifested in the bourgeois nuclear family and, as such, is felt to be an unpredictable and ultimately contestable force (313). The importance of this new, modern experience of symbolic paternal authority, based on the “fiction” of the supremacy of the “real” (rather than divine) father, is, for Žižek, its movement of the Oedipus complex into a new mode of functioning, a mode of functioning which, in Žižek’s narrative, integrates the human being into the symbolic order in a manner very different from that of the premodern Oedipus complex. In the modern form of the complex, the symbolic function of “father” and the Ego Ideal are now no longer separated from the prohibitive superego and, importantly, from the person of the “real” father as they were in its premodern manifestation; instead, they are understood, with the superego, to be embodied in the “real” father and, as a result, lose their connection to the immutability and incontestability of divine authority and thus become contingent rather than absolute forces (313). For Žižek, the new contingency of

symbolic paternal authority, which brings about the decoding of the natural Order of Things, allows for the emergence, as the subject moves through the modern Oedipus complex, of a new and “ambiguous rivalry with the father”—a rivalry which opens a space of questioning and reflexivity to the modern subject and, importantly, a space or gap from which the radical negativity and freedom of the subject as death drive may emerge. Here the modern Oedipus complex creates, Zizek argues, the “psychic conditions for modern Western dynamic creative individualism” (313), conditions that free the subject from non-reflected compliance with the premodern form of symbolic paternal authority, releasing the subject from the dictates of the “logical structure of the universe,” including the subject’s fixed social positions,⁷ and making possible the full experience of desire.

We must keep in mind here, however, that for Zizek, even though the subject is released during modernity from non-reflected compliance with the premodern form of symbolic paternal authority and the traditional social structures it upholds, so that it may experience radical subjective freedom and desire, and even though the “real” father in modernity, as Zizek claims, “always turns out to be an imposter, unable actually to live up to his symbolic mandate” (334, 348), *symbolic* paternal authority, or the symbolic function of “father,” in its modern manifestation as the structure of bourgeois patriarchy, is still able to ensure the modern subject’s compliance with its dictates. It is able to do so because it continues to be experienced by the modern subject as an *ideal* entity (even

⁷ Zizek explains, “...in modern societies, subjects are no longer fully immersed in (and identified with) the particular social place into which they were born, but can—in principle, at least—move freely between different ‘roles’. The emergence of the modern ‘abstract’ individual who relates to his particular ‘way of life’ as to something with which he is not directly identified—which, that is, depends on a set of contingent circumstances; this fundamental experience that the particularities of my birth and social statue (sex, religion, wealth, etc.) do not determine me fully, do not concern my innermost identity—relies on mutation in the function of the Oedipus complex...” (*The Ticklish Subject* 314).

though it is no longer equated with the God of *logos*), one that now maintains its authority and thus the shape and stability of modernity's social structures, including gender and the family, through the power of prohibition (318-19)—paternal prohibition, to be exact, keeps the subject's new-found freedom, reflexivity, and desire in check. This new prohibiting entity is none other than the superego, a juridical structure, as discussed above, which generates the desire for its own transgression through its supplement which commands the subject to Enjoy. But while the superego supplement, through its injunction to Enjoy, transforms the subject's desire into a foreign and transgressive force (151), the superego parallax of Law and transgression does not, once again, give free reign, in Žižek's narrative of modernity, to the radical negativity of the subject. Rather the Law as Ego Ideal creates in the subject, through the subject's internalization of paternal authority itself, a central core of values that allows the subject to resist transgression. This core set of values, however, not only makes possible the subject's negotiation of the superego parallax but grants the subject a form of autonomy—allowing the subject to move past its initial dependency and rivalry with the father—and thus permits the subject to function as a “critical” subject, one who is both able to decide on or select a set of norms for itself (342) and “to confront the predominant social order on account of his/her ethical convictions...” (344).

In Žižek's narrative of modernity, paternal prohibition clearly makes it possible for symbolic paternal authority or the symbolic order to retain its “symbolic efficiency.” For Žižek, symbolic paternal authority or a symbolic order (in any period) is “efficient,” first and foremost, if it both grants positivity to the real and provides for a culture a universal point of reference that can serve as “a safe and unproblematic moral anchor”

(332)—a moral anchor that “decides on meaning” (332) and, as such, serves as a guiding foundation or a global mechanism or strategy for regulating the culture’s social interactions and social structure as a whole (340). A symbolic order, however, is only able to provide this moral anchor if it has secured a culture’s symbolic trust. What this means precisely is that a symbolic order, since it operates on a level different from that of direct material causality (322), can function efficiently and maintain a culture’s social coherence only if a culture displays an “active will to disavow the actual state of things” (323)—a will to accept the fictions of the symbolic order over what it can see empirically, to trust that the symbolic order and its fictions hold the power to affect directly and to structure and guide its social operations and/or reality (323). A symbolic order functions efficiently, in other words, if a culture accepts the fictions of the symbolic order in a non-reflected or non-contesting manner (342). If we look back to our discussion of Žižek’s premodern period, we will recall that the structuring fiction of the premodern symbolic order (the notion that the natural and social orders are divinely ordained by God) is accepted without question by premodern culture as a result of the universality and, most importantly, infallibility of the culture’s belief in the existence and power of God. In Žižek’s modern period, however, where the West no longer unconditionally accepts the existence of God, paternal prohibition makes it possible for the symbolic order to retain its symbolic efficiency, as it prevents the culture from challenging paternal authority, specifically by repressing the culture’s (collective) subjective negativity and rebellious urges; paternal prohibition, in other words, through repression, ensures that the structuring fiction of the modern symbolic order—the notion, that is, of the supremacy of the “real” father or of the system of bourgeois patriarchy—is

accepted unconditionally by modern Western culture and can thus provide a universal point of reference for its social interactions.

It is only with the transition from modernity to “postmodernity” or the contemporary postmodern “risk society” that the symbolic order, in Žižek’s narrative, becomes open to contestation, and Western culture is no longer able to trust in a non-reflected manner the primary fiction of the modern symbolic order: the supremacy of the father. Without the culture’s non-reflected trust, the modern symbolic order loses its “efficiency” and with it its ability to provide a universal point of reference for Western culture and, importantly, for the modern subject. This loss of symbolic efficiency in the contemporary period is brought about, according to Žižek, as a result of the universalization of reflexivity (342), a situation that comes into being in the mid to late 20th century as a result of the changes to the social structure that arise from Capital’s reorganization of its systems of production and consumption in its continued and more far reaching attempts at self-reproduction (358). Here Žižek follows the tenets of the theory of “risk society” developed by Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens which suggest that the new needs of Capital which arise from its reorganization require both the producing and the consuming subject to be mobile, flexible, self-fashioning, so that Capital can no longer tolerate the subject’s non-reflected compliance with symbolic paternal authority or with the social structures that make up bourgeois patriarchy and that hold the subject in stable gender and family positions. Indeed, in the contemporary “risk society,” Capital, as it reproduces itself, forces the subject, whether through its participation in the workforce or through its patterns of consumption, to manage its own biography (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 4), and to think and make decisions for itself

outside the fixed expectations of bourgeois patriarchal norms—if, that is, it wants to function successfully as part of the new social order brought about by Capital’s reorganization.

Under these new conditions then—where the subject is forced to break with the fictions of the modern symbolic order that had previously structured its identity, so that it may take on the more fluid identities and the social mobility that Capital now requires, and where the subject thus no longer possesses a guiding point of reference (or, as Žižek argues, a global mechanism or strategy to dominate and regulate its interactions (*The Ticklish Subject* 340), such as the notion of the supremacy of the father)—the contemporary subject (and with it Western culture as a whole) is left in a constant and, importantly, structural state of uncertainty and “undecidability”(332). The subject becomes deeply uncertain about the consequences of its actions and thus when making decisions of any significance is “thrown into a process of radically open and unending symbolic (re)negotiation and (re)invention ...” (333). In fact, for Žižek—in line here once again with the tenets of risk society theory—with the loss of a universal point of reference, all aspects of life in the contemporary risk society, even the subject’s “innermost impetuses (sexual orientation, etc.) are more and more experienced as something to be chosen” (336). This freedom to choose, however, is not experienced as liberating by the “postmodern” subject but rather as “an anxiety-provoking obscene gamble” where, as Žižek suggests, the subject is held accountable for decisions it was forced to make without proper knowledge or a proper system of guidance (338).

For Žižek, however, the consequences of the loss of the stable and incontestable system of guidance of modernity—the loss, in other words, of the determining power or

the “efficiency” of the modern symbolic function of the “father”—are much more disastrous for the subject (and for Western culture as a whole) than the already problematic states of uncertainty and anxiety outlined by the theory of risk society. Indeed, for Žižek, the demise of symbolic paternal authority signals the end of the Oedipus complex and with it the end of the autonomous and critical modern subject “able to reason and reflect freely” (342). We will recall that in Žižek’s narrative of subjectivity, the Oedipus complex, in its premodern and modern manifestations, functions as the system of identifications that the subject must pass through in order to be integrated into the symbolic and thus social orders. This system in its structuring capacity operates through the fictions of the supremacy and the Law/authority of the father, and, as discussed above, the subject’s internalization of these fictions (of paternal authority or the Ego Ideal) allows it to resolve its initial rivalry with the father and to take up its position as an autonomous and critical member of the social order. In the contemporary or “postmodern” period, however, where the reign of symbolic paternal authority and prohibition has met its end and, as such, can no longer provide an Ego Ideal for the contemporary subject, the Oedipus complex, according to Žižek, ceases to function, since its structuring fiction has been dismantled. For Žižek, in fact, the demise of symbolic paternal authority and the Oedipus complex makes even more prominent what he calls (following the work of Max Horkheimer on authority and the family from the 1930s⁸) the “conformist ‘other oriented’ personality,” a personality that, due to the loss of symbolic paternal authority, is no longer able to internalize the father’s authoritative stance and thus is no longer able to build a core set of values for itself. Unlike the personality

⁸ Žižek cites, in *The Ticklish Subject*, Max Horkheimer, “Authority and the Family” in *Critical Theory*, New York: Continuum, 1995.

generated by the modern nuclear family, the contemporary “other oriented personality” is no longer capable of functioning in an autonomous and critical manner—it can no longer develop its own set of ethical convictions by which to live and with which possibly to confront the social order (344). Perhaps even more troubling for Žižek is his suspicion that the contemporary subject is no longer able to trust its own direct experience, but rather expects the Other to tell it how it “really feels.” What this means in Žižek’s narrative is that the subject’s experience and, most importantly, its feelings are directly externalized, and the subject is completely dependent on others for its identity and sense of self: as Žižek cynically suggests, “I am what I am only through my relations with others...” (373).

It is, however, not only the loss of autonomy and the rise of the other-oriented personality that signals the end of the modern subject for Žižek. The modern subject’s demise is also indicated by the rise of the narcissistic personality and, importantly, by the emergence of the subject who harbors an “obscene need” for domination and subjection and for bodily violence (369). These new forms of subjectivity come into being, according to Žižek, when, in the process of Capital’s reflexive commodification of intimate spheres (in its further attempts to reproduce itself), the symbolic prohibitive norms of bourgeois patriarchy are replaced by “imaginary ideals (of social success, of bodily fitness...),” which the subject internalizes instead of paternal prohibition. With this internalization of the “imaginary ideal” instead of the Ego Ideal or the symbolic authority and prohibition of the father, the subject is no longer compelled by responsibility or a call to duty but is instead driven by the superego injunction to Enjoy. Here, what Žižek calls the “direct superegoization of the imaginary Ideal” produces an

extremely narcissistic subject, one “who perceives everything as a potential threat to his precarious imaginary balance” (368). Yet more importantly, it produces a subject who, despite its release from traditional constraints or prohibitions and despite its freedom to dedicate its life to seeking pleasure or self-gratification, is unable to reap what seem to be the obvious benefits of its liberation. Indeed, for Žižek, even though the subject is free to pursue any pleasure it wishes, it is rendered impotent and frigid and thus unable to *enjoy*—especially sexual *jouissance* or intense sexual pleasure—since, as he argues, “the direct injunction ‘Enjoy!’ is a much more effective way to hinder the subject’s access to enjoyment than the explicit Prohibition which sustains the space for its transgression.” In Žižek’s narrative then, the subject, compelled by the superego injunction to Enjoy, does not experience intense pleasure but rather disinterested boredom, and, Žižek argues, it is only the direct intervention of pain that can offer the subject the experience of true pleasure (367). The subject in this scenario, therefore, turns to sado-masochism, to sexualized rituals of domination and subordination and to the infliction of violence on the body (374), not only to experience pleasure but, more importantly, to gain access to “the ‘pain of existence’, the minimum of the bodily Real in the universe of symbolic simulacra” (372). In Žižek’s estimation, “the price of the global reign of simulacra is extreme violence to the bodily real” (374)—but the price is also, as he argues, a radical shift in subjectivity:

...today we are witnessing a shift no less radical than the shift from the premodern patriarchal order directly legitimized by the sexualized cosmology (Masculine and Feminine as the two cosmic principles) to the modern patriarchal order that introduced the abstract-universal notion of man... (360)⁹

⁹ It is Žižek’s essentializing of the Lacanian model of subjectivity that allows him to claim that the contemporary form of subjectivity (“other oriented” and narcissistic) is no longer modern. Indeed, because

For Žižek then, the superego injunction to Enjoy, as a primary facilitator of Capital and as an impediment to a free form of subjectivity, serves as the most destructive aspect of the “postmodern” (contemporary) symbolic order. But as it is the superego parallax—which emerged as a structuring force in the modern period—that has become central to the functioning of the contemporary system of capitalism and to the superego injunction’s obliteration of the critical, autonomous modern subject in the contemporary period, it is the parallax structure itself that Žižek targets when building his interventionary strategies. For Žižek, it is only a radical “act” of violence, an act of revolutionary undermining and destabilization, that can shatter the superego parallax as well as the capitalist order and bring about a radically new form of subjectivity and with it a new socio-political constellation, one that bears no resemblance to the system of capitalism. Once again, the structure of the superego parallax is produced, in Žižek’s model, when the subject’s interpellation by the symbolic Law or symbolic paternal authority (an interpellation that in most “normal” instances allows the subject to take up a place within the socio-symbolic order) traps the subject and its desire in a cycle of Prohibition and transgression, where the very act of Prohibition gives rise to the desire for its transgression—in Žižek’s scheme, the prohibitory Law is a “Law that generates its

for Žižek the Lacanian form of desire is a universally occurring state, one that is not specific to modernity, Žižek establishes his understanding of period shifts not on whether the existence of desire is possible during a particular period based specifically on the shape of that period’s symbolic order (as does this dissertation), but rather on the manner in which a period’s symbolic order manages or controls desire—the manner, that is, in which this order either codes desire, represses it, or cultivates it. For Žižek then, because desire in the contemporary “postmodern” period is no longer managed by the symbolic order as it was in the modern period, because desire, in other words, is no longer repressed, but rather openly cultivated and harnessed—resulting in an “other oriented personality” and a narcissistic subject rather than in an autonomous and critical subject “able to reason and reflect freely”—Žižek argues that in the contemporary period we have entered into a form of subjectivity radically different from that of modernity.

own transgression, since it needs it in order to assert itself as Law” (148), and, as Žižek contends, it is the Law’s obscene superego supplement, and this supplement’s injunction to Enjoy, that ultimately generates the desire for transgression which allows the Law to assert itself as Law and thus to sustain itself. In this narrative, the Law absolutely requires its obscene superego supplement since, without the superego’s injunction to Enjoy, to transgress, there is nothing to prohibit—before the Law, in Žižek’s scheme, there is desire, but it is not a desire for transgression or for the illicit; rather, it is a life-impulse, a living energy, and a living passion. Yet once this living passion gets caught in the symbolic Law’s cycle of Prohibition and transgression, this life-impulse is transformed into a force that the subject does not recognize, a foreign force that persists in following its path independently of the subject’s conscious intentions and that thus prompts the subject to do things that it “hates” (149)—to transgress the Law and indulge in “illicit jouissance” (151). Here, the subject no longer takes “innocent pleasure in earthly delights,” in the enjoyment of life, but instead finds pleasure in self-torture and in a “self-mortifying morbid denial of Life” (150).

For Žižek, the only way to break this cycle of Law and desire, Prohibition and transgression—or, of the superego parallax—that perverts the subject’s desire is to suspend the symbolic order or symbolic Law that dominates and regulates our lives—or, in other words, to undergo what Žižek calls following Lacan “a second symbolic death” (151). This symbolic death, as Žižek theorizes it, is entered into through an “act” of withdrawal in which the subject severs its links with “reality” (154)—a withdrawal which itself is modeled again on the initial withdrawal of the subject from its fullness of being,

or on Žižek's notion of the parallax.¹⁰ In this second "absolute contraction of subjectivity," Žižek argues, the subject withdraws back into what Lacan calls the domain "between the two deaths," the symbolic death and the real death—into the pre-symbolic space of negativity, into Hegel's "night of the world" and the Void of Lacan's "death drive" (154). For Žižek, we should recall, the death drive is not a desire for death; rather it "is a name for the 'undead' eternal life itself, for the horrible fate of being caught in the endless repetitive cycle of wandering around in guilt and pain" (292); it is, in other words, the immortal life of "eternal suffering" that results from the subject's removal from the fullness of being. The subject's withdrawal into the Void of the death drive, then, while a form of radical "subjective destitution" which, according to Žižek, reduces the subject to an "excremental remainder" (161), is thus not a form of physical self-annihilation, but rather an "act" that, in Žižek's Lacanian narrative, "involves the choice of 'the Worst [*le pue*]' " (307, n. 25). For Žižek, the subject performs the act of withdrawal, moves into the realm "between the two deaths" and suspends the symbolic order "when [its] choice of (what, within the situation, appears as) the Worst changes the very standard of what is good or bad" (307, n. 25)—when, in other words, the subject defies the structuring power of the symbolic Law and refuses to abide by its rules (263).

But while Žižek's theoretical framework is built on this act of withdrawal into the domain "between the two deaths," Žižek in no way advocates the subject's permanent retreat into this self-enclosed, pre-symbolic domain of pure negativity. Instead he devises a theoretical/political program of withdrawal, an act, that does not leave the subject stranded in the cycle of pain and suffering "between the two deaths." For Žižek, the act

¹⁰ See footnote n. 1 of this chapter.

that holds the potential to dismantle both the superego injunction to Enjoy and the superego parallax—without leaving the subject “between the two deaths”—as well as the capitalist system itself, is an act of radical withdrawal, of “passive aggression,” that Žižek models after the absolute refusal to participate, the “I would prefer not to,” of the character of Bartleby the Scrivener from Herman Melville’s short story of the same name. In Žižek’s reading of Melville’s story, Bartleby’s gesture of withdrawal functions as a *violent* act of refusal to participate in the social system, including, of course, the system of consumption and the symbolic order that maintains it—it functions, in other words, as a choice of the Worst. Indeed, for Žižek, Bartleby’s gesture of withdrawal functions as a “proper radical political gesture”—a political gesture that, when translated into the contemporary socio-political context, stands “in contrast to aggressive passivity, the standard ‘interpassive’ mode of our participation in socio-ideological life in which we are active all the time in order to make sure that nothing will happen, that nothing will really change” (*The Parallax View* 342). This refusal to participate modeled after Bartleby amounts to what Žižek calls a “politics of subtraction,” a politics which, if unleashed in the context of contemporary capitalism, would take the shape of a refusal to engage in those practices that contribute to the reproduction of Capital; it would take the shape then of saying an absolute “No!” to the simulacra of our current symbolic system that entreat us to Enjoy and thus a “No!” to the practices of consumption. But since in the contemporary context, as Žižek contends, the capitalist system has colonized every aspect of life as a means to cultivate consumption and thus to reproduce itself—harnessing the symbolic order as the primary vehicle to facilitate this process—such that *all* activities of life now contribute to the reproduction of this system, the subject, if it is truly to disrupt

the smooth operations of Capital following Bartleby, must participate in *nothing* at all, must say “No!” to *every* social and symbolic practice and institution. Only a full withdrawal from the social and the symbolic, according to Žižek, will serve to dismantle the system of capitalism.

But while the act of refusal modeled after Bartleby holds the potential, in Žižek’s scheme, to bring down the system of capitalism, in order for this act of refusal to bring an end to the current form of the symbolic order—including the superego injunction and thus the superego parallax which Capital harnesses to reproduce itself—something more is needed; it is for this reason that Žižek builds a second interventionary method into his act, a method linked directly to Bartleby’s initial act of withdrawal. This second form of intervention takes the shape of the absolute refusal to make sense of the initial act of withdrawal; it is, like Bartleby’s uttering of “I would prefer not to,” a refusal to specify what one refuses to do. Indeed, as he reads Bartleby’s act of withdrawal, Žižek calls attention to the fact that Bartleby states, “I would prefer not to” *not* “I would prefer not to *do it*,” and suggests that, with his refusal to give meaning to what he refuses to do, Bartleby transforms his initial social act of withdrawal into an act of self-sacrifice for *nothing*, precisely because its content is empty, as it has no particular meaning. For Žižek, then, Bartleby’s initial act becomes an act that is carried out for its own sake—it is self-sacrifice for the sake of self-sacrifice, which becomes literally “nonsensical”—and, for this reason, it cannot be inscribed into or recuperated by “the existing ideologico-symbolic order” (82-83). In fact, in its refusal to give a particular content to his social act of refusal and withdrawal, Bartleby’s utterance of “I would prefer not to” transforms, Žižek suggests, both his social act of withdrawal and importantly this phrase itself into a

“formal gesture of refusal as such.” Indeed, for Žižek, Bartleby’s phrase becomes a “signifier-turned-object” (385)—it becomes, in other words, refusal itself, so that uttering this phrase *is* an act of refusal; it does not signify refusal. And because it refuses to signify (again, because it is the act of pure refusal itself), because it refuses to continue the chain of signification, Bartleby’s “I would prefer not to,” Žižek contends, creates a new configuration of the symbolic order, a new parallax, so that the symbolic order is no longer split between the Law and its transgression, but between the ability of the symbolic order to make meaning and the void of the symbolic order’s nonexistence, the void created by Bartleby’s act of refusal to signify.

Bartleby’s act then, according to Žižek, creates a new structural foundation for the symbolic order, where, once again, the symbolic order, or the symbolic Law, now no longer finds as its supplement the “superego injunction to Enjoy,” the injunction that corrupts the subject’s desire by making the subject continually transgress the Law; instead the symbolic order finds as its supplement the void of its own non-existence or non-signification. In Žižek’s scheme then, when the subject enters into this new structural configuration of the symbolic order, which Žižek bases once again on the notion of the parallax, the subject enters into a symbolic system that, through its supplement, offers the subject the potential to withdraw from the positivity of the Law, of meaning or even signification. In essence then, this new Law is a Law that allows or even enables escape from the Law, so that when the subject enters into this Law, the subject and its desire are ultimately free, as they are harnessed by nothing (certainly not the superego injunction to Enjoy) for nothing. What this Law appears to be in the end, for Žižek, is a positivity or a *system* of withdrawal and refusal, a system that makes the entrance into the symbolic

order—or, as Žižek would argue, the process of subjectivization—a process of negativity and contingency and, as such, freedom.

This new configuration of the Law based on the parallax also serves for Žižek as the foundation of his theorization of a post-revolutionary social system. In his model of the social, Žižek conceptualizes this new social system, like the new configuration of the Law, as a system or a positivity of negativity, where the act of withdrawal serves as the underlying principle and the permanent foundation of the new social order (382). In envisioning his new social order as a structure of withdrawal and negativity, Žižek is attempting to preserve, within the order's fundamental framework, the revolutionary impulses and forces of withdrawal and negativity that led to its emergence. As Žižek explains of this process:

... the very frantic and engaged activity of constructing a new order is sustained by an underlying “I would prefer not to” which forever reverberates in it—or, as Hegel might have put it, the postrevolutionary order does not negate its founding gesture, the explosion of the destructive fury that wipes away the Old; it merely gives body to this negativity. The difficulty of imagining the New is the difficulty of imagining Bartleby in power. (382)

Indeed, by preserving or “giving body” to its revolutionary impulses and forces of withdrawal and negativity, Žižek wants to prevent the new social order from ossifying and reverting to the non-revolutionary state from which it withdrew and emerged. But in his attempt to preserve the revolutionary and negative forces that have led to the formation of the new social order, and in his theorization of this order as a specifically social entity, he still grants the new social order a level of coherence and solidity: the

construction of the new postrevolutionary order as a social order is clearly a process which gives positivity to negativity, to the negative act of withdrawal, so that the new order becomes the embodiment of continuous negativity and negation and, as such, negativity and negation are no longer tied to subtraction and withdrawal where they are fleeting, unpredictable processes, but now have the solidity of a permanent state.

It may appear here that with his theorization of a new social formation modeled on the negativity of Bartleby's act of withdrawal and the paradox of a permanent state of instability and contingency that is, for Žižek, this act's logical conclusion, Žižek offers up a novel and truly post-modern vision of sociality. A closer look at Žižek's model, however, makes it clear that Žižek's theorization of a permanent-contingent form of sociality founded on the negativity of withdrawal is a particularly modern vision, and thus one that promises to carry with it modernity's attendant problems. Indeed, while Žižek's scheme labels the contemporary moment a "postmodern" one, his understanding of human freedom, an understanding premised on the philosophies of Hegel and Lacan, and, as I argued in Chapter Two, on the Nature to Culture narrative of evolutionary theory (a narrative that Žižek ultimately rewrites as his theory of the parallax)—and an understanding that serves as the normative force of all his theorizations—indicates his universalization of and preference for a conceptualization of freedom that is specifically a modern one, an understanding of freedom that leads to his theorization of models of specifically modern forms of sociality. This, in my view, is the pervasive and decisive blow to what is a penetrating critique of our present condition and an imaginative interventionary program. While the new form of sociality Žižek envisions is ultimately not one that promises to take us beyond the social and subjective ills of modernity, his

commitment to a critique of Capital, including its colonization of the symbolic order, and most importantly his insistence on political intervention through alteration of the symbolic—including his belief that it is within the human capacity to take hold of it and alter it of our own accord—makes him a contemporary theorist not to be ignored; any interventionary program aimed at moving us beyond modernity would benefit, I believe, from a careful examination of his programs, even if to allow them to serve as a productive foil. In many ways, in fact, Žižek’s theorizations as I have laid them out in this chapter are most valuable to this dissertation’s aim as a counterpoint, a counterpoint with which my own project shares certain political and theoretical goals. For this reason it is worthwhile to return, once more, to the problematic foundation on which all of Žižek’s work is built—the Nature to Culture narrative, or the parallax as he understands it—and consider why this arbitrary narrative, one that significantly impairs our ability to grasp and achieve genuine freedom, is not, as Žižek would appear to believe, the only option available to us.

Once again, the understanding of freedom that serves as the normative theoretical and political force in Žižek’s theorization of a new form of sociality is a specifically modern, emancipatory understanding, one which is centered around the elaborate narrative of the human being’s liberation from its “animal nature.” In this narrative of Nature to Culture the human being becomes “human,” as discussed in Chapter Two, when it is finally able to transcend its animal nature, its “animal soul” via the intrusion of language into its life of instinct and the subsequent obligation to interface with the world through symbols (*The Ticklish Subject* 34-37). In other words, what makes the human being human for Žižek, what makes it “free,” is that it is no longer bound to its living

being or its natural needs—that it has been released from its immersion in its natural surroundings and its nature and is free to follow what it randomly wills. In its essence then, the human being, in Žižek’s conceptual scheme, is completely free to make its own decisions and to control its own destiny—for the very reason that, as he emphasizes, it is not bound by nature (its own and that of the natural world) as a transcendent structure, but instead transcends the dictates of nature. True human freedom for Žižek then is the ability to self-determine and constantly change oneself and one’s surroundings.

It is this conceptualization of freedom as self-determination and change that once again prevents Žižek from moving beyond the social and epistemological formations of modernity when creating a theory of social change and a model of a future sociality. For Žižek, modern social and cultural formations, with their propensity to disrupt and disembed solidified or solidifying transcendentals (including the symbolic order) continuously mirror, he believes, the essential nature of the human being (which manifests these same propensities) and for this reason maintain the human being in a state of continuous freedom, allowing the human being to realize its essential nature which, again, is to be radically free. Indeed, for Žižek, it is absolutely crucial that post-capitalist social formations be modeled on what he sees as the essential nature of the human being—on, for instance, the propensity for constant change—since he believes that only such a model will allow the human being to live, and to realize, its essential nature, its species being (i.e. its freedom to determine itself and its surroundings and its freedom to change)—as such a model, in synch as it is with the human being’s nature, will *not* function as a foreign and transcendent structure that dominates, stifles and contains the human being’s natural proclivities, but instead will function as a structure that fosters

them because it fosters freedom. For Žižek, then, in a socio-subjective formation modeled on the essential nature of the human being, the social and subjective will function as one—they will never be at odds or in conflict, and thus once again, the subject will be completely free to follow its own will.

Žižek's conceptualization of freedom as the freedom to self-determine—a freedom that, once again, gains its meaning as a result of a narrative which essentializes and universalizes the human being as a creature who moves from Nature to Culture—keeps his theoretical and political frameworks tied not only to a modern form of sociality but to a modern form of subjectivity as well, a form of subjectivity that requires a high price for the freedom it enjoys: alienation from nature or from being, infinitely striving after nothingness or an elusive *jouissance*, and the pain and suffering that results from the inability to re-integrate with being. Žižek acknowledges this price—the pain and suffering that alienation from being produces (291-93)—but he believes nonetheless that this suffering is well worth the freedom of self-determination as well as the subjective autonomy and transcendence that are produced along with it. In the end, Žižek refuses to move beyond a modern conceptualization of subjectivity and freedom despite the pain that these formations cause the subject because, once again, he believes unequivocally that the modern form of subjectivity, based on the Nature to Culture narrative, is the universal human condition—the universal form of subjectivity—and thus cannot be escaped. To be human then for Žižek is to be a modern subject; to be human then is to self-determine and unfortunately to suffer.

There is no doubt that Žižek's models of subjectivity and freedom convincingly mirror our own subjective experiences in the contemporary moment: the freedom of self-

determination and change, the pain of self-alienation. But though these experiences are highly familiar, their difficult nature, I believe, still compels us to ask the question I have posed in various forms since the outset of this dissertation: are Žižek's models of subjectivity and freedom the only models available to us? Indeed, if we are to be free subjects, will we have to pay the price of subjective and social contingency, and most troublingly of subjective pain and suffering, as Žižek's theory suggests? Žižek's model of freedom, which places the human being in a situation where it must choose between two unpleasant fates, confinement to its "animal nature" or pain of alienation from being, is certainly not the only model available to us and can be without doubt supplanted if we are willing, as suggested in Chapter Two, to forego the Nature to Culture narrative of modern evolutionary theory upon which Žižek's psychoanalytic framework is built. There is clearly nothing keeping us tied to the arbitrary narrative of Nature to Culture—as Žižek himself argues, evolutionary theory is able to account neither scientifically nor definitively for the conditions of possibility of the "human animal's" transition from nature to the symbolic (*The Monstrosity of Christ* 26); it cannot account for the emergence of the human being's ability to speak or for the "breathtaking explosion of human intelligence" (*The Parallax View* 246). And while Žižek believes he has made some headway in tracing the conditions of possibility of the human being—its move from Nature to Culture—with his theory of the human being's "withdrawal into self," he, like evolutionary theory, cannot in the end determine the condition of possibility of this withdrawal. Thus in prioritizing the Nature to Culture narrative of evolutionary theory as a means to account for the appearance of the human being, we are left with an explanatory framework that ultimately can explain nothing at all—we are left with an

explanatory framework, in fact, that especially by scientific and positivistic standards is exceedingly weak. More troublingly we are left with a framework that requires us to endure a tremendous amount of pain in order to be free and to realize the essence of our humanity.

While we may want to dispense here with the modern understanding of freedom as self-determination and change that Žižek offers, since it asks the subject to pay a high price, the price of self-alienation, for this freedom, we might still want to be cautious, as I suggest in the dissertation's introduction, before we take full leave of modernity. This caution, however, should not hinder us from conceptualizing new forms of freedom radically different from the modern notion of self-determination that Žižek offers. Once again, it is Foucault, with his model of non-modern or "Classical" subjectivity from *The Order of Things*, who offers us a viable framework with which to conceptualize a form of freedom that is not accompanied by the pain and suffering of self-alienation found in Žižek's modern theorization of subjectivity and freedom. The importance of Foucault's model for a new theorization of freedom ultimately lies, I believe, in this model's refusal to accept unconditionally universalizations such as Žižek's of a mode of being of language that functions on a binary—developed, in the case of Žižek, from his embrace of the Nature to Culture narrative—and thus in this model's refusal to adopt an understanding of the symbolic which assumes that language in all instances functions as a foreign and intruding force which separates the human being from a fullness of being or its "animal nature." These refusals—which stem again from Foucault's theorization of the modes of being of language for the Renaissance and Classical periods of the West, where he convincingly demonstrates that language does not possess the same mode of being across

time and culture—suggest that the human being’s nature may not be at odds with language in the way in which the psychoanalytic narrative assumes it is, but that instead the human being’s nature may be in itself linguistic and not “animal”—the fundamental nature of the human being, in other words, may be to speak, to interface with the world and to construct its reality through language. Here, the understanding of the human being as linguistic by nature frees the human being from a model of its nature where it has to pay a price for freedom, where it has to be removed from its being or its nature in order to speak and to be free. It offers us a blueprint, then, for freeing ourselves from a mode of being of language, our present binary mode of being of language, that does indeed abstract us from our being, throwing us into a state of painful self-alienation. The understanding of the human being as linguistic and not “animal” also frees us from a singular and static, because essentialized and universalized, understanding of our subjective possibilities and from a narrative that ties us to a nature, an animal nature, that is possibly not ours and that thus limits our possibilities not only for change but for thinking possibility itself.

But perhaps most importantly, this understanding of the human being as linguistic by nature made possible by Foucault’s work allows for true freedom of self-determination, freedom that does not come at the price of self-alienation and freedom that in the end is premised on our collective ability to produce our own forms of subjectivity. Foucault’s model, like the model of collective symbolic self-production offered by Hardt & Negri which I will discuss in Chapter Four, opens up the possibility that we may take control of our linguistic systems and design them in ways which produce myriad forms of subjectivity—it opens the possibility that we are ultimately the agents of our own

linguistic and subjective destinies. Foucault's work, however, with its notion of the mode of being of language, allows us to go beyond the simple harnessing of the symbolic order that Hardt & Negri propose with their model of collective symbolic self-production; armed with the notion of the mode of being of language—a notion that allows us to theorize the ways in which the intricacies of signification, in their various forms, carve out the deep structural foundations of our minds, of our collective consciousness—we can design our symbolic order in more complex and directed ways, ways that will ensure that we do not experience ourselves as abstracted from our being and that we do not therefore suffer. Indeed, Foucault's model of a non-modern and non-binary mode of being of language gives us the ability to produce what I believe is an experience of true subjective freedom, freedom from psychic pain and suffering—an experience, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, that manifests itself as an integrated state of presentness and constant self-generation, a state in which the subject is no longer burdened by the structures of transcendence, self-consciousness and desire but is instead free to exist and, importantly, to create itself continually anew in the stream of thought and time. True freedom for the human being is, I believe, freedom from the pain of alienation from self or separation from the fullness of being and freedom from the experience of the passage of an abstract external time.

Foucault's work, with its theorization of modes of being of language radically different from that of the modern mode of being of language that Žižek sets forth, not only provides a model of freedom that avoids the self-alienation and suffering of the modern model of freedom Žižek offers up; it also holds the potential to correct Žižek's political and interventionary theories of symbolic and social change, particularly those

directed at the superego parallax. The focus of Žižek's political philosophy, like Foucault's in *The Order of Things*, is as Žižek articulates it, "the old leftist one: how is it possible not only actually to resist, but also to undermine and/or displace the existing socio-symbolic network (the Lacanian 'big Other') which predetermines the space within which the subject can only exist?" (*The Ticklish Subject* 260). For Žižek, as discussed above, the "socio-symbolic network" takes a very particular universal shape, a juridical shape that normalizes, pacifies, and in the case of the contemporary moment cultivates and pathologizes the radical negativity that is the subject and its desire. Žižek is willing to concede, however, that the premodern symbolic order, while juridical in shape, is not necessarily prohibitory and for this reason does not take the shape of the superego parallax. But he is not willing to offer up the premodern symbolic order as a model for a new, "postmodern" symbolic system, because, while it avoids the pathologizing nature of the superego parallax, it does not allow for the production of a reflexive, autonomous and thus "free" subject. For Žižek, freedom is made possible only as a result of symbolic prohibition, or to be more precise, "symbolic castration," functions that remove the subject from *jouissance*, pacifying desire and the radical negativity that is the subject (322). But while symbolic paternal prohibition produces a reflexive and free subject, it is also joined by an "obscene" supplement, the superego injunction to Enjoy, which, again, pathologizes the subject and its desire and limits its wellbeing and freedom. The whole of Žižek's political edifice, his desire to "undermine and/or displace the existing socio-symbolic network," including his strategies of socio-symbolic change, are centered then around an almost impossible task: he must imagine a symbolic order that can prohibit, via the symbolic Law, the subject's direct contact with its *jouissance* or its radical negativity

so that it may be reflexive and autonomous, while at the same time he must theorize a way to liberate the juridical and ultimately prohibiting symbolic Law from the superego parallax, so that the subject may be free to experience its desire untainted by the superego injunction to Enjoy and so that it may live the freedom of self-determination and change that he believes are the essence of its being (153, 296). It is for this reason that Žižek turns to a radical act of withdrawal from the socio-symbolic order, a withdrawal into negativity and radical and unending contingency modeled on Bartleby's act. Žižek believes, once again, that the radical negativity of Bartleby's removal of himself from the social, with its destruction of the power of the signifier to signify—as the signifier becomes object in this scheme—breaks apart and restructures the symbolic order while at the same time exploding the superego parallax, and, as such, allows for the creation of radically free forms of subjectivity and sociality and for the human being to experience the true essence of its humanity. This model, however, when placed at the foundation of a future social formation beyond capitalism, looks very much like the alienation-from-self of the modern subjectivity Žižek theorizes and which we experience today in the contemporary moment. A new social formation founded on this model of withdrawal into radical negativity and contingency then, while possibly preventing the new social order from reverting to a “non-revolutionary” state, is, in the end, no social formation at all; it offers no form of relationality or permanence on which to build such relationality and it does nothing to further the collective good. Its primary concern, in other words, lies not with the harmony of the collectivity but with the ability to self-determine and thus the freedom of the individual subject, freedom as defined by Žižek and by modern philosophical and social theory.

Foucault's political philosophy as articulated in *The Order of Things*, his "old leftist" concern with undermining or displacing "the existing socio-symbolic network," clearly recognizes, like the political thought of Žižek, that the modern symbolic order is without doubt a site of the oppression and pathologization of the human subject—indeed, this is exactly what his theory of the "end of man" addresses. While Foucault does not offer a systematic theory for the dismantling of the modern symbolic order, his work in this text, particularly his theorization of the notion of the mode of being of language, clearly allows us to imagine non-judicial and non-prohibiting symbolic orders different than that of the modern as well as forms of subjectivity and freedom that do not rely on reflexivity and individual autonomy. As we know, Foucault does not limit his understanding of the conditions of possibility of subjective freedom to the symbolic prohibition of the subject's radical negativity or, in other words, to "symbolic castration." Indeed his notion of the mode of being of language—which allows his readers to conclude that the symbolic order must not always take a judicial form, since it does not always have to code or repress desire or the radical negativity of the subject, as desire and the radically negative kernel of modern subjectivity, as Žižek theorizes them, cannot exist, in Foucault's model, outside modernity—permits Foucault to think freedom otherwise and provides his readers with the tools to construct symbolic orders, and with them forms of subjectivity and freedom, radically different from those of modernity. Foucault's theorization of the notion of the mode of being of language as a structure that changes with time and culture in fact makes it possible to devise—if we are willing to think of the mode of being of language as existing in a co-constituting relationship with the symbolic order—symbolic orders that find their structural shapes in relation to the

shape of the mode of being of language with which they co-exist in any given historical and socio-cultural formation. Indeed, by refusing to think freedom through symbolic prohibition, Foucault's model avoids the trap in which Žižek finds himself where freedom comes only with a price—not just the price of self-alienation, but the price of the superego injunction to Enjoy that serves as the supplement to symbolic paternal prohibition and that with this prohibition makes up the superego parallax that operates in Žižek's model as the symbolic order's most destructive and pathologizing force. Perhaps most importantly, because Foucault's model refuses to theorize freedom through symbolic prohibition and castration, an interventionary project which takes Foucault's work as its guiding framework will not have to spend its theoretical and importantly political energy devising elaborate schemes, such as Bartleby's act of withdrawal, to foil the superego parallax, to re-structure the symbolic order, and to ensure the subject's continuing reflexivity, autonomy and freedom. There is no trade-off of any sort in Foucault's model of the symbolic. Instead this model promises to allow us to avoid the negativity inherent in Žižek's scheme and to devote our theoretical and importantly political energy to imagining new modes of being of language and theorizing symbolic orders or narratives that would allow for forms of subjectivity and freedom without negativity or self-alienation, and thus for forms of relational sociality. In the hands of Foucault, the political "act" becomes a world-generating rather than world-destroying move.

While Bartleby's act, with its withdrawal into negativity and radical contingency, does indeed appear to be a world-destroying move, a particularly aesthetic move that looks very much like the being unto death of the literature of Artaud and Roussel that

Foucault discusses in *The Order of Things*, it nonetheless features a world-generating component. Firstly, Žižek's Bartleby, while inspired by Melville's fictional character, is not the Bartleby whose negative impulses lead him, in Melville's narrative, to withdraw into literal death. Žižek's Bartleby is instead a negative force of change, and thus Žižek's Bartleby does not die—rather he makes possible the emergence of a radically new symbolic order as well as new forms of subjectivity and sociality. And while it is true that these new structures are embodiments of a radical negativity and ultimately a radical individuality, making no room for social relationality or intersubjectivity, the Bartleby-inspired attack on the symbolic order, more precisely the making of the signifier into an “object,” functions nonetheless as a world-generating act. Indeed when the signifier becomes object, the whole mode of being of language that sits at the foundation of the modern symbolic order must shift; as an object, language now takes on a mode of being very similar to that of the language of Foucault's Renaissance period, a mode of being that when assimilated allows for a truly non-modern form of subjectivity, a form of subjectivity where, because a word literally *is* the thing which it denotes, the subject has direct access to the things of which it speaks. Language in this context then is not a “medium” which separates the human being from the things of the world but a channel through which the subject can access these things directly in their beings—it is a vehicle for sense-making that keeps the subject integrated not only with the things of the world, but with itself as well. Here is where the true potential of Žižek's political philosophy and interventionary programs lies, not in its theorization of a negative force of change such as the Bartleby act, but in its ability to theorize, even inadvertently, a mode of being of language radically different from that of modernity. These programs offer us a way to

create a new mode of being of language and thus a new symbolic order that are not based in negativity, as well as a way to fashion a non-modern form of subjectivity that avoids the pain and suffering of the modern subject. It is this potential that the dissertation will attempt to harness, through aesthetic theory and practice, in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hardt & Negri and our “Common Wealth”

With the publication of *Commonwealth*, the third book in their Empire trilogy,¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have offered us a political manifesto which does not shy away from an attempt at theorizing the “Truth of Being-in-the-World,” or from an attempt to construct a universalizing theoretical framework or model for praxis designed to bring us to a Truth in which the human being and the collective social totality have reached a state that they simply call “happiness.” Hardt & Negri’s work seeks to attain happiness not just as a state of collective or common “pleasure that lasts and repeats,” but as a collective or common “process of developing our capacities of democratic decision making and training ourselves in self-rule” (*Commonwealth* 377). In their collaborations, Hardt & Negri have always risked the metaphysical, the attempt to find the Truth of the *Collective* Being-in-the World; however, with the publication of *Commonwealth*, their work now risks not just the metaphysical but a daring naiveté, presenting us with a form of optimism that is perhaps more powerful, I believe, than any of their theories for new forms of subjectivity and social relationality. Such a claim in no way suggests that Hardt & Negri’s theories of subjectivity and sociality are weak. They are in fact substantive meditations on the nature of the human being and its infinite potential to realize itself as a

¹ *Empire*, 2000; *Multitude*, 2004; *Commonwealth*, 2009.

creature of both community and variation and most importantly to realize itself in community, through community, by a process where, as they suggest, quoting Marx via Foucault, “l’homme produit l’homme” (136), by taking hold of the “common wealth” of symbols, codes, and knowledges—in other words, of the symbolic order. Indeed, among contemporary social and political theorists, Hardt & Negri offer what I believe is the most viable means for a way beyond capitalism, if not modernity itself. Even so, it is Hardt & Negri’s willingness to risk a naiveté and their optimism that I find to be the most valuable expression of their work. Like the early writings of Foucault, Hardt & Negri’s work seems to drift onto the plane of another genre, the genre of mythology, or more precisely in the case of Hardt & Negri, the genre of speculative fiction. And like this genre, which has become so prevalent and popular today, in and outside of the academy, in what once again many have called the time of apocalypse, Hardt & Negri’s work gives its readers hope and encourages them to act—it is, in fact, a beacon of light in these very dark days of capitalist nihilism. In their willingness specifically to risk a genre shift, Hardt & Negri are redefining the role of the intellectual and with it, I believe, the role of the artist, in contemporary society. As they argue in *Commonwealth*, “the intellectual is charged with the task not only to denounce error and unmask illusions, and not only to incarnate the mechanisms of new practices of knowledge, but also, together with others in a new process of co-research, to produce a new truth” (118). For those who do not want to follow the path of theology in the search for a new Truth of Being-in-the-World and a new relationality—or in an attempt to bring the academy back to its roots—Hardt & Negri offer a powerful if not sometimes flawed alternative, beginning with the path they charted with their first major work, *Empire*, a brilliant mapping of the shape and

operations of contemporary capitalist society, and a mapping that will be explored and critiqued, along with its later developments and implications, in the pages of this chapter.

According to Hardt & Negri, we are in the midst of a paradigm shift—a shift that moves global systems of governance from imperialism to a new formation, and it is this formation that they call Empire. This shift is detected by Hardt & Negri in what they see as the rise of a new world order and with it a new logic of rule or inscription of authority (*Empire* xi, 9), and most importantly in what they perceive as the changing shape of the capitalist mode of production (xiii). This new mode of production, or biopolitical production as they have termed it, has emerged with the globalization of both capitalist production and capitalist markets, and importantly has created changes in “the material constitution of world power and order” (9-10), changes that are leading specifically to the emergence of the “constitutionalization” of a new, singular supranational figure of power (9), a new form of sovereignty, or in other words, to the emergence of Empire. The move to Empire, according to Hardt & Negri, has been ongoing since the end of the Cold War; however, it was interrupted in the first decade of the 21st century, they argue, by a “coup d’état,” by the attempts of “dominant forces on the global scene,” particularly the U.S. government, to recapture global leadership—to engage in old forms of imperialism and to institute unilateral rule (*Commonwealth* 203). Hardt & Negri argue that these “fantasies” of world domination came to an end, however, with the financial and economic crises of 2008, dashing the U.S.’s “dreams of a unipolar world” and forcing the global scene to “confront head-on the formation of Empire” (204).

In their definition of Empire, Hardt & Negri are careful to distinguish their concept from traditional understandings of imperialism. For Hardt & Negri imperialism is

a political manifestation of modernity, one that they believe can no longer structure the contemporary global terrain, a fact they feel is confirmed by the failure of the attempt of the U.S. and other dominant powers to resurrect modern forms of imperialist conquest in the first decade of this century (*Commonwealth* 219). In Hardt & Negri's narrative of imperialist modernity, during the last two centuries, several strong, sovereign European nation states parceled out the globe and competed for territory and the spoils conquered territories would yield. The modern nation states strictly defined their own territorial boundaries, and these boundaries, according to Hardt & Negri, "delimited the center of power from which rule was exerted over external foreign territories through a system of channels and barriers that alternately facilitated and obstructed the flows of production and circulation" (*Empire* xii). With their imperialist projects, European nation-states were able to extend their sovereignty beyond their own boundaries and impose hierarchies both to police the purity of their own identities and to exclude all that was other (xii). Though the European nation states remained for much of the modern period in conflict and competition, Hardt & Negri point to a coalescence of an international juridical order especially after WWI, with the development of the League of Nations, and then again after WWII, with the rise of the United Nations (4). This international order, especially in its U.N. form, was predicated on the recognition and legitimation of the sovereignty of individual states, and for this reason, international right, or the inscription of international authority, in this context was defined by pacts and treaties (4-5). Despite the presence, then, of a supranational body, right or authority remained with each individual state—authority had not been turned over to a supranational center.

But though the framework of the U.N. developed its juridical system around the individual sovereignty of its member nation-states—and as such was only able to regulate world order through a system of pacts and treaties that allowed these states to negotiate their competing agendas—Hardt & Negri believe nonetheless that the U.N. functioned as an important transitional element in the move from international to global juridical structures—in other words, from imperialism to Empire (*Empire* 4). For Hardt & Negri, in fact, it is the notion of right defined by the development of the U.N. Charter that pointed “toward a new positive source of juridical production, effective on a global scale—a new center of normative production that [could] play a sovereign juridical role” (4). This notion of right, which came into being as a result of the Charter, served, Hardt & Negri argue, as an important transitional element in the move to the new global order, precisely because sovereign nation states, in order to charter the U.N. as a legitimate international entity and to be recognized and legitimated by this new entity—to become, that is, a member of its general council—had to transfer a portion of their sovereignty to the U.N. as a “real *supranational* center” (5). But though serving as a supranational entity, the U.N., for Hardt & Negri, was never Empire—it was not, in other words, a singular supranational figure of power. Instead they understand the U.N. as a *project* of international order, as “a real historical lever that pushed forward the transition toward a properly global system” (5). However, in the period after the failed coup d’état of the U.S., in, that is, the contemporary period, the “letter and the spirit of the United Nations Charter are now undone” according to Hardt & Negri, and the charter is no longer “capable of orchestrating international agreement and collaboration ... in large part because the institutional order on which it would rest—from the United Nations to the

Bretton Woods institutions—is no longer effective” (*Commonwealth* 222). And it is no longer effective, Hardt & Negri suggest, since the international system, of which the U.N. is a major part, could not survive the attempted coup d’état of the U.S, not only because, as Hardt & Negri implicitly acknowledge, the international system lost what political and moral authority it held by throwing in its lot with the U.S., but because these institutions were already quite weak before the U.S.’s form of unilateralism and imperialism was brought to an end during the latter part of the first decade of this century (222).

The end of the U.N. Charter signals for Hardt & Negri, then, the end of many political theorists’ and many nations’ dreams of an international, multilateral order of governance composed of sovereign nation states. But it does not indicate a vacuum of power on the global level, nor does it signal the full emergence of Empire (*Commonwealth* 223). In 2000, when Hardt & Negri published *Empire*, they claimed that though the world political order was transitioning to a fully global order, it was not yet possible to see Empire in its entirety. Instead, it was only possible to perceive the “contours” of this new supranational figure of power. Despite the inability to see Empire as a whole, however, Hardt & Negri believed that contemporary juridical formations, or the new forms of right or law being constituted on the global terrain (the new “norms and legal instruments of coercion that guarantee contracts and resolve conflicts” (*Empire* 9)), provided an important index of the processes of the material constitution of Empire (9-10). For Hardt & Negri, these new juridical forms were very different from those of the modern imperialist past; they did not operate on the basis of traditional international law, which was built around the sovereign rights of a group of independent nation-states and which was, once again, defined on the basis of contracts and treaties (9-10). In fact,

contemporary juridical figures, according to Hardt & Negri in *Empire*, harked back specifically to those juridical forms that trace their foundation to the Christian origins of European civilization, particularly to the Empire of ancient Rome. In the Roman tradition, as Hardt & Negri stated, “the concept of Empire united juridical categories and universal ethical values, making them work together as an organic whole.” While Hardt & Negri conceded that “ethics is part of the materiality of every juridical tradition”—not just the European or the Roman—they nonetheless believed that the Roman imperial tradition was “peculiar” in its joining of the ethical and the juridical—it was peculiar, Hardt & Negri argued, because “it pushes the coincidence and universality of the ethical and the juridical to the extreme: in Empire there is peace, in Empire there is the guarantee of justice for all peoples” (10). Contemporary juridical formations then, as they manifested themselves in the global arena, functioned in Hardt & Negri’s argument not to negotiate the competing needs of independent sovereign entities as was the case in modernity, but rather, like the juridical formations of the Roman imperial past, to integrate global actors into a systemic whole and importantly to ensure that peace, equilibrium, and the cessation of conflict prevail in the global arena (14). Contemporary juridical formations, in fact, came into being, for Hardt & Negri, on what they called the “terrain of crisis”—they emerged in other words from an unstable and even volatile global context, a global context that experienced frequent episodes of conflict and war (16). As in the Roman imperial model, these juridical formations were brought into being in the service of universal ethical values (peace and justice)—they were brought into being, in other words, to address global crisis—and, justified specifically by the appeal to

these universal values (18), granted to dominant national and supranational bodies the right of intervention.

As Hardt & Negri argued in *Empire*, the contemporary right of intervention—which traced its genealogy back once again to the ancient imperial orders, back, that is, to the ancient concept of “just war” (*bellum justum*) (12)—was structured by and around the notion of exceptionality (16). Indeed, in the contemporary imperial paradigm, as Hardt & Negri understood it at the time of the writing of *Empire*, if the global state of crisis was to be managed and equilibrium maintained, dominant national and supranational bodies had to be granted the authority to take exception to standing law—including those forms of international law, put into place specifically to avoid both the “banalization of war” and the celebration of it as an ethical instrument, that came with the traditional (or non-modern) concept of just war (12). In the new imperial paradigm, Hardt & Negri argued, “to take control of and dominate a completely fluid situation, it is necessary to grant the intervening authority (1) the capacity to define, every time in an exceptional way, the demands of intervention; and (2) the capacity to set in motion the forces and instruments that in various ways can be applied to the diversity and plurality of the arrangements in crisis” (16-17). For Hardt & Negri this exceptionality of intervention gave rise to a new form of right: the right of the police. This form of right operated on the basis of prevention, repression, and rhetorical force—all aimed at those “new barbarians” and “rebellious slaves” who threatened the order of Empire (20), and all placed in the service of reconstituting and maintaining social equilibrium (17). According to Hardt & Negri, however, the right of the police not only operated as a dominant form of repression and control, but it also led to the banalization and

absolutizing of the “Enemy”—the Enemy in the contemporary imperial space was, as they argued, “reduced to an object of routine police repression” and conceptualized as “an absolute threat to the ethical order” (13). For Hardt & Negri, then, the two initial coordinates that defined the contemporary imperial form of right or authority were the “juridical power to rule over the exception” and “the capacity to deploy police force” (17).

What the new imperial form of authority or right indicated to Hardt & Negri at the close of the 20th century about the material constitution of the new world order, or Empire, was that this new order was not a modern sovereign formation. Indeed, unlike the modern supranational bodies that arose during the course of the 20th century, Empire, Hardt & Negri argued, did not come into being gradually through a deliberate and planned international discussion or through a series of negotiations or mediations entered into by the body of nation-states that functioned as the dominant actors in the modern international arena—it was not, in other words, a natural outgrowth of the juridical processes or the consensus-producing mechanisms of the U.N. But this did not mean that Empire, for Hardt & Negri, was self-generating—or that it functioned on the basis of “the juridical arts of dictatorship or totalitarianism” (26) that were practiced across so many national spaces during the past two centuries. Instead, Empire was formed when it was called into being by the global community on the basis of its capacity to resolve conflicts on the global scene and thus to reestablish and maintain social equilibrium and peace (14); as Hardt & Negri argued, “Empire is formed and its intervention becomes juridically legitimate only when it is already inserted into the chain of international consensus aimed at resolving existing conflicts” (15). In this particular juridical paradigm

then, Empire, Hardt & Negri explained, found its legitimation specifically in its military effectiveness—in its ability to police the globe when called to do so and in its ability to keep crisis flare-ups under control (and to maintain order) (17). For Hardt & Negri, Empire existed only if there was something for it to police, only if crises existed to which it could attend—as Hardt & Negri suggested of Empire in their first book, “[t]he conceptual inseparability of the title and exercise of power is affirmed from the outset, as the effective a priori of the system” (14).

Nine years after the publication of *Empire* and in the wake of the failed U.S. attempt to assume unilateral global control, the Hardt & Negri of *Commonwealth* still do not believe that Empire has fully manifested itself—they still contend, in fact, that it is possible to see only the “contours” of this new supranational figure of power. But the contours which Hardt & Negri trace in *Commonwealth* at the close of the first decade of the 21st century, if not more defined than they were at the time of the writing of *Empire*, are more clearly “governmental” than juridical or military. In shifting their focus from the juridical and military to the notion of governance, Hardt & Negri are not only attempting to challenge those who claim that a vacuum of power has emerged on the contemporary, “post-coup,” global scene (*Commonwealth* 227), or that a new multilateral, global system of governance is coming into being. They are also working to lay the theoretical groundwork for a new form of global governance that they hope will not only endure the fall of capitalism they predict but will serve as a condition of possibility of this fall as well (this will be further discussed later in the chapter) (223). According to Hardt & Negri, the post-coup global terrain of governance should be understood as an assemblage or a network composed of a mixture of supranational, national and non-national actors

(224), including “dominant nation-states, major corporations, supranational economic and political institutions, various NGOs, media conglomerates, and a series of other powers” (205). In this assemblage, where, as Hardt & Negri suggest, nation states still serve as an important player, none of its members are able to exercise unilateral power and no “multilateral interstate institutional structure” has the ability to rise to hegemony (223-24).

Hardt & Negri build their theorizations of global governance in the contemporary moment around two specific understandings of the term “governance.” The first derives from corporate discourse and explains “the structures of authority and accountability typical of capitalist corporations in contrast to state structures” (*Commonwealth* 224), and the second, which derives from the philosophical discourses of Michel Foucault and Niklas Luhmann, provides an understanding of governance that conceptualizes sovereignty as a flexible structure of decision making and an open process of negotiation. Here governance functions as a creative structure, where a bottom-up process is substituted for a top-down process and where decision-making thus happens at multiple levels, not just at the level of the nation-state (224). For Hardt & Negri then, contemporary global governance clearly cannot be understood as emanating from a single center of power. Rather it must be conceptualized as a “process of continual negotiation, an arrangement of instruments for consensual planning and coordination in which a multiplicity of state and non-state actors with vastly unequal powers work together” and where “only the collaboration among these actors can determine the processes of policymaking on the global terrain” (225). But while this new process of global governance is plural, open, flexible, and formed from below, Hardt & Negri are careful

not to confuse it with democracy. Indeed only the most powerful state and non-state actors make up its ruling body, and, as Hardt & Negri suggest, “[i]ts plurality and openness ... might be best understood in relation to the structures and practices of market exchanges” (227). For Hardt & Negri, in fact, it is “collective capital” that in the contemporary period has taken the lead in managing the post-coup economic, social, political, and military crisis, and in this context, they claim the annual World Economic Forum at Davos has become more important than the machinations of Washington (227). Indeed, in Hardt & Negri’s model, the nascent structures of Empire are born of Capital; they take the shape of the economic and cultural structures of Capital as it builds consensus and produces its own legitimation, and they work to maintain the conditions of peace and equilibrium that make possible Capital’s complete penetration of the globe. Clearly then in Hardt & Negri’s model no vacuum of power exists within the contemporary global system of governance—instead the growing networked system of state and non-state global authorities, orchestrated by Capital, is “constituting the infrastructure of the new Empire in formation” (228).

While Hardt & Negri concentrate much of their three texts on the juridical and governmental manifestations of the “new Empire in formation,” they are perhaps most fascinated with what they call the “biopolitical” nature of Empire—the power of Empire to produce bodies, subjectivities, and social relations, or in other words, life itself. The notion of the biopolitical, as they have deployed it in their trilogy, allows Hardt & Negri to gauge the ways in which Empire produces not only its own legitimation and its own continuation through the production of bodies, subjectivities and social relations, but the social as well. It thus allows them to trace the *material constitution* of Empire—the social

and cultural structures that make sovereign formation of Empire possible. Most importantly, however, the concept of the biopolitical allows Hardt & Negri to theorize a form of resistance to Empire and Capital that is immanent to Capital but exceeds the bounds of its relations, making possible liberation from Capital as well as a new social formation based on the continuous production of bodies, subjectivities, and social relations (*Commonwealth* 136-37).

Hardt & Negri's theorization of the biopolitical nature of Empire, and thus of Empire itself, appears on first encounter to be guided by Foucault's concept of biopower developed in his genealogies, a concept that is understood by Hardt & Negri as "the power to administer and produce life" (*Commonwealth* 57).² While Hardt & Negri point to Foucault's work in particular as the most instrumental factor in laying the groundwork for their investigation of the material functioning of imperial rule (*Empire* 22; *Commonwealth* 58-61), a careful reading of their theory of Empire makes it clear that it is not Foucault's work alone that informs their investigations; it is Foucault's work as interpreted specifically by the materialist critics Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari that has made possible Hardt & Negri's conceptualization of biopower and thus their theory of Empire.³ Indeed, Hardt & Negri's encounter with Deleuze & Guattari's materialist reading of Foucault has allowed Hardt & Negri not only to develop their theorization of biopower or the biopolitical realm but, importantly, to posit the notion that an "historical, epochal passage in social forms" (in other words a paradigm shift) has occurred—a shift that moves the contemporary social body from what Foucault labels "disciplinary

² See Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*.

³ See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

society” to what Hardt & Negri label the “society of control,” a notion developed, once again, with the help of Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of Foucault through a materialist lens (*Empire* 22-27). For Hardt & Negri in fact, the biopolitical realm cannot come into being without the development of the society of control, a society characterized by an intensification and generalization of the normalizing apparatuses of disciplinary society (23). For Hardt & Negri, Foucault’s disciplinary society is a social order that puts its subjects to work and ensures their obedience through the construction of a diffuse network of disciplinary apparatuses which produce and regulate customs, habits, and productive practices. These apparatuses—which take the form of institutions (prisons, factories, asylums, hospitals, schools)—and the specific disciplinary practices through which they operate ensure that the form of subjectivity needed to reproduce the social system is itself (re)produced and maintained. Disciplinary apparatuses set the parameters, then, of normal behavior and, in the process, not only normalize subjects but structure the social limits of thought and practice (23). In disciplinary society however, the effects of disciplinary apparatuses are only partial, according to Hardt & Negri, “in that disciplining develop[s] according to relatively closed, geometric, and quantitative logics” (24). Disciplining takes place, in other words, in clearly demarcated, institutionally sanctioned and quantifiable spaces; it does not spill over to the whole of society or completely consume subjects and their consciousnesses in its rhythms (24).

In the society of control, on the other hand (characterized, again, as the intensification of disciplinary society), the mechanisms of social command are distributed, in Hardt & Negri’s reading, “well outside the structured sites of social institutions”—social command or power, as they argue, is now exercised through what

they call, following Deleuze & Guattari, productive “machines,” machines that directly organize “the brains (in communications systems, information networks, etc.) and bodies (in welfare systems, monitored activities, etc.)” of social subjects (*Empire* 23). Because the mechanisms of command become more pervasive or “immanent” to the social field in the society of control—they are activated, that is, in daily practices, not just in formal social institutions, such that all social practices come under their control—subjects begin to interiorize the behaviors necessary for the maintenance of the social system; thus, Hardt & Negri suggest, no part of their consciousnesses is free from the reach of power as was the case in Foucault’s disciplinary society. In Hardt & Negri’s reading of the society of control, it is when power is distributed across the entirety of social relations and social practices, so that subjects are completely consumed in “the rhythm of productive practices and productive socialization”; when all aspects of society become apparatuses of control, so that spaces no longer exist outside these apparatuses from which to resist such control; and perhaps most importantly, when power operates as “an integral, vital function that every individual embraces and reactivates of his or her own accord,” that power becomes truly *biopolitical* and thus begins to administer *life* itself, producing and reproducing bodies, subjectivities, and social relations (24).

In their attempts to account for the operations of biopower and in turn to map the structural foundations of *Empire* in the contemporary global context, Hardt & Negri shift their focus from Foucault’s notion of disciplinary society to Deleuze & Guattari’s notion of the society of control, not only because they believe that Deleuze & Guattari’s theorization of the society of control offers a more accurate and powerful model of the biopolitical realm and thus biopolitical production, but because they believe that

Foucault's model is informed by a structuralist methodology, and therefore cannot account for the material and ontological forces that put the productivity of biopower into play—for, that is (in words Foucault himself avoided), the material and ontological agent(s) of biopower. Hardt & Negri argue that for Foucault, the agent of biopower is the epistemological frame itself—it is, in other words, “discourse” or knowledge (*Empire* 28). Hardt & Negri turn to Deleuze & Guattari, then, because they believe Deleuze & Guattari's materialist optic has allowed Deleuze & Guattari to see the outlines, if not the full shape, of the material and ontological forces that put the productivity of biopower into play—indeed for Deleuze & Guattari, ontologically grounded, productive social machines serve as the agent of biopolitical production (28). But though Deleuze & Guattari's theorization of the society of control proposes a material/ontological agent for biopower and thus provides Hardt & Negri with a materialist blueprint for their theory of *Empire*, this agent is not sufficiently concrete for Hardt & Negri, nor is Deleuze & Guattari's brand of materialism. While Deleuze & Guattari's agent is indeed material and radically productive, it is, for Hardt & Negri, too abstract, too undefined, too “impotent” (“a chaotic, indeterminate horizon”) and therefore can only serve as a preliminary model for the historically situated and socially embodied agent of biopolitical and social production that Hardt & Negri envision (28). This historically embedded agent, as Hardt & Negri conceptualize it, is indeed, like Deleuze & Guattari's agent, ontological rather than epistemological, material rather than ideal, dynamic and creative rather than fixed and static. However it is also takes a definitive, socially and historically quantifiable form: the agent of biopower for Hardt & Negri is the “social bios” or what they call the “multitude”—the network of productive social subjects whose countless (but again

visible and quantifiable) assemblages and relations make up the productive fabric of the contemporary social structure (28, 30).⁴ But while the multitude serves as the agent of biopower and thus as the social force of production in Hardt & Negri's scheme, the multitude, in the contemporary social context, is not yet, for these thinkers, fully free to produce of its own accord—Capital still harnesses its productive powers and expropriates the wealth it produces (*Multitude* 101, 189; *Commonwealth* 139-42).

Yet while Hardt & Negri claim that Capital “lives...off the vitality of the multitude” (*Empire* 62), the model that they build of the relationship between Capital and the multitude as they attempt to chart the rise of biopower in the contemporary global context illustrates that this relationship is not the traditional relationship of dominance and submission that held sway during earlier periods of capitalism. Instead their model demonstrates that the relationship of Capital to the multitude is one of mutual determination (*Commonwealth* 144). This is brought home most clearly in Hardt & Negri's provocative claim that it is the multitude that called the contemporary form of globalized, multi-national, and biopolitical capitalism into being (*Empire* 43), in their claim, in other words, that the multitude and its cycle of international struggles served as “the real motor that drove the development of the institutions of Capital and that drove it in a process of reform and restructuring” (51). For Hardt & Negri, the globalization of capitalism became a possibility first and foremost with the multitude's growing desire for liberation and with its eventual revolt against modern nationalist, colonialist, and

⁴ Hardt & Negri's *Multitude* (especially Part 2) offers their most detailed discussion of the composition and potential of the “multitude.” Chapter 1.3 of *Commonwealth*, “The Multitude of the Poor,” supplements this discussion by contrasting the “poverty” of the multitude to private property, or in other words, “a radically plural and open body politic” to “the individualism and the exclusive, unified social body of property” or, for Hardt & Negri, the dominant form of “republic” (39-40).

imperialist power structures (43)—a process which began initially after the Second World War and continued to play out, as Hardt & Negri suggest, “precipitously” after the barriers to the world market maintained by the Soviets were eradicated (xi, 31).

According to Hardt & Negri, the multitude’s revolt against modern power structures took an internationalist, or rather an anti-nationalist form. Indeed, the multitude, in the shape of an international proletariat, had no interest, Hardt & Negri suggest, in maintaining national identities as it began to revolt (it did not want, for example, to preserve its national differences but at the same time negotiate limited agreements); rather it wanted all subjects to unite directly through common needs and desires without regard to borders and boundaries (49). The organized revolt of the multitude was thus, Hardt & Negri claim, supranational and global, rather than internationalist in the modern sense of the term, and it served, they suggest, as a liberating and, importantly, “deterritorializing” force as it struggled against modern structures of power (52). For Hardt & Negri in fact, it was the global, deterritorializing impulses of the multitude—as this body took flight from “localized misery and exploitation” (47)—that began to break open the rigid boundaries of modern nation-states and to forge the global channels that would serve as the first connective global pathways in the building of the trans-national network that would eventually become the new form of global, multinational capitalism. But according to Hardt & Negri, it was not only the multitude’s opening up of global space that laid the foundations for bringing the new form of capitalism into being. The new form of capitalism also arose as Capital responded to the needs and desires of the newly liberated multitude and, most importantly, as it responded to the explosions and thus the social and

political crises produced by both the resistances and the unleashed creative productivity of this body (51-52).

It is here then, where this new form of capitalism responds directly to the “deterritorializing” impulses and forces of the multitude, that it becomes, in Hardt & Negri’s model, fully biopolitical. Capitalism becomes biopolitical, in other words, as it begins to structure and articulate territories and populations directly in its quest to address the needs and desires of the newly liberated multitude and, perhaps most importantly, in its attempts to reorganize the very foundations of their lives. It also becomes biopolitical when it begins to structure the movements, the daily practices and most significantly the subjectivities of the multitude; when, in other words, it generates profit and ensures its reproduction not solely through unequal exchange but rather through the practices of social production and reproduction and through extraction of the common—“those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth” (*Commonwealth* viii)⁵—rather than through exploitation of the worker (*Empire* 31; *Commonwealth* 139-142). In its new biopolitical form, then, capitalism requires new forms of labor, forms of labor very different from those of the industrial capitalist past. In the contemporary capitalist context, as Hardt & Negri observe, dominant productive practices no longer take the form of mass factory work; instead, labor power becomes immaterial—that is, intellectual, communicative and affective (*Empire* 29-30; *Multitude* 108-9; *Commonwealth* 132-33). For Hardt & Negri in fact, there are three primary aspects of

⁵ Hardt & Negri also understand the common as “the common wealth of the material world—the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature’s bounty—which in classic European political texts is often claimed to be the inheritance of humanity as a whole, to be shared together” (*Commonwealth* viii).

immaterial labor in the contemporary economy: “the communicative labor of industrial production that has newly become linked in informational networks, the interactive labor of symbolic analysis and problem solving, and the labor of the production and manipulation of affects” (*E* 289-294; *M* 108-9; *C* 132-33). The work of symbolic analysis and problem-solving functions, Hardt & Negri argue, to “reinforce the strength of existing industrial production” (*M* 108; *E* 286), but perhaps most importantly, it serves as the foundation of the new economy of speculation, investment and finance capital and thus operates as an important facilitator of Capital’s spread across the globe and its structuring of territories and populations. Like symbolic labor, affective labor, with its focus on the productivity of the corporeal and the somatic, serves a vital function in the contemporary social context, in that it facilitates both social reproduction (the reproduction of laborers, social relations, etc.) and the creation of social networks and forms of community (*M* 108; *E* 30, 293). Affective labor then, Hardt & Negri argue, enriches the level of communication and thus the level of complexity of both human interaction and economic production (*Empire* 293). But for Hardt & Negri, the most powerful form of labor in the contemporary context is communicative labor (33). Communication, according to these theorists, has been instrumental in making possible the globalization of capitalism: what Hardt & Negri call “the immaterial nexuses of the production of language, communication, and the symbolic” facilitated by communications industries has served, they argue, to organize the movement of the globalization of the economy, specifically by “multiplying and structuring interconnections through networks” (32; 294-97). Communication, however, does not only organize “production on a new scale and impose a new structure adequate to global

space” (33); like affective labor, it also produces and structures subjectivities. As a biopolitical mechanism of the society of control, communicative labor and its products structure thought and behavior, and, importantly for Hardt & Negri as they follow this line of thinking, communication practices produce Empire’s legitimation or the “realm of consensuses” that Empire needs to maintain its authority without the direct use of legal instruments or force (33).

As Hardt & Negri’s discussion of the dominant forms of labor in the contemporary socio-economic space demonstrates, the new manifestations of biopolitical production make possible not only the production of new subjectivities but, importantly, the production of social life itself (*E* xiii, xv; *M* 109, 146-48; *C* 131, 366). Biopolitical production serves, in short, as the vehicle for both social production and social reproduction (*Commonwealth* 133)—and it is here in the production and reproduction of the social by the dominant forms of immaterial or biopolitical labor that the mutually determining relationship between Capital and the multitude becomes truly visible. In earlier forms of capitalism, social reproduction (the reproduction, for instance, of the labor force through the construction of values, social relations, affects, becomings (*Empire* 28)) was performed, as Hardt & Negri argue, outside dominant productive practices, outside, that is, of the economic base. Indeed it was the traditional superstructure—composed of legal, political, familial and religious systems—that was understood to be instrumental in the reproduction of the social (41). In the new biopolitical context, however, social reproduction, as Hardt & Negri attest, now takes place at the base—it is carried out by Capital itself, by its dominant, immaterial productive practices (*E* 385; *C* 23-24, 366). Values, social relations, affects and

becomings in this context are now reproduced by communicative, symbolic and affective labor; by, in other words, the multitude as social labor. It is the multitude, then, that now produces values, social relations or ideologies; it is the multitude that produces social meaning and social reality;⁶ and it is the multitude that thus produces the ideological apparatuses and the subjectivities that allow Capital to continue to reproduce itself (*Multitude* 113-14). Here then, engaged in a cyclical dance of mutual determination, the multitude reproduces Capital as the multitude reproduces itself (*Empire* 32).

But the multitude as the productive force of Capital does not only serve to *reproduce* social reality; it also *produces* new social formations (not merely the reproduction of existing formations) (*E* xiii, xv; *M* 109, 146-48; *C* 131, 366). The multitude's production of new social formations manifests itself most powerfully, for Hardt & Negri, in the contexts of communicative and affective labor. Indeed, in the new biopolitical space of capitalism, the system of production is organized around the creation of networks of communication and cooperation—it is the building of networks of communication and cooperation, Hardt & Negri suggest, that makes production possible at all in this context. Because for Hardt & Negri, social subjects and social practices have been consumed completely in the rhythm of productive practices—because, in short, all of life has become productive—these productive networks of communication and

⁶Like social reproduction itself, ideology is also produced at the base. In earlier manifestations and understandings of capitalism, ideology was thought to sit outside of productive and social relations—it was considered to transcend the productive system. In the contemporary context, on the contrary, ideology is immanent to productive and social relations—in other words, ideology is produced by the productive/capitalist system itself (*Empire* 33). Through the communications industries, Hardt & Negri contend, the productive practices of Capital structure both the symbolic and the imaginary (ideology) of the social system, and as such produce and naturalize dominant social meaning. Indeed, as Hardt & Negri argue, “[t]he political synthesis of social space is fixed in the space of communication” (33). Communication and/or communicative labor in the contemporary context, then, is biopolitical for Hardt & Negri because it plays a foundational role in structuring the social fabric.

cooperation have become the dominant network of relationships between people (*Commonwealth* 134). In other words, the new productive and communicative networks of contemporary capitalism have become the new social structure—society, Hardt & Negri argue, is now constructed by the relations of capitalist production. For Hardt & Negri, then, living labor takes on an immediately social and communicative dimension in contemporary capitalist society (*Empire* 29)—as living labor structures itself, it structures social relations. As such, society is now structured on the most fundamental level by the mass of productive relationships—it *is* this mass. The new mode of biopolitical production therefore has created, Hardt & Negri contend, a new social structure and new form of society, a form of society that is eminently communicative and cooperative. Hardt & Negri argue that in this new form of society, “life is made to work for production and production is made to work for life. It is a great hive in which the queen bee continuously oversees production and reproduction. The deeper the analysis goes, the more it finds at increasing levels of intensity the interlinking assemblages of interactive relationships” (*Empire* 32).

But while the multitude and capitalism share a relationship of mutual determination, this relationship is of course vastly unequal. In the contemporary biopolitical context, Capital must still generate surplus value if it is to reproduce itself, and, as such, it must still function as a mechanism of exploitation and, more relevantly for the contemporary moment as Hardt & Negri argue, as a mechanism of capture and expropriation of wealth (*Commonwealth* 54-55, 137). What Capital expropriates in the contemporary biopolitical context, where immaterial labor has become the dominant form of production and the multitude, as we have seen above, produces social relations or

life itself (142), is, in effect, the common: knowledges, languages, codes, information and affects. In earlier forms of capitalism, Capital ensured its reproduction by generating profit through the exploitation of workers who produced physical commodities, through, in other words, unequal exchange. The generation of surplus value through unequal exchange was embedded specifically in a quantitative framework—a framework in which, Hardt & Negri argue, Capital brought “workers together in the factory, [gave] them the tools to work together, furnishe[d] a plan to cooperate, and enforce[d] their cooperation” (140), all in a highly rationalized effort to extract maximum value from the worker while providing him or her with minimal wages in return. In the specifically qualitative framework of contemporary biopolitical production, which in most instances takes place outside the factory context, Capital does not rely on quantitative methods of abstraction to produce surplus value, nor does it, according to Hardt & Negri, coordinate production or “determine the cooperative arrangement” as it did in the factory (140). Instead, “[c]ognitive and affective labor produce cooperation autonomously from Capital’s command”—and this form of cooperation is generally created through productive encounters of laborers, encounters that cannot be orchestrated from outside the meeting itself (140). Surplus value is produced in the biopolitical context, in other words, as a result of the effectiveness of workers’ cooperation in their attempts, for example, to provide service or affects. For Hardt & Negri then Capital does not provide the means of cooperation in the labor process, but rather expropriates this cooperation as the primary element of exploiting biopolitical labor, and, as they argue, “[t]his expropriation takes place not so much from the individual worker (because cooperation already implies collectivity) but more clearly from the field of social labor,” or in other

words, from the common (140). For this reason, Hardt & Negri understand the exploitation of labor and the accumulation of surplus value from the perspective of “capitalist rent” instead of from the perspective of profit. They argue that “[w]hereas profit is generated primarily through internal engagement in the production process, rent is generally conceived as external to the mode of extraction” (141)—for Hardt & Negri then, Capital, as it captures value external to the production process in its biopolitical functioning, as it appropriates the common, is both predatory and parasitical (141-2).

But while Capital functions as a predatory and parasitical entity in Hardt & Negri’s model of contemporary biopolitical production, its general distance or externality from the process of production, they believe, has provided biopolitical labor-power or the multitude with a form of autonomy it did not experience in earlier eras of capitalism, a form of autonomy that is allowing the multitude not only to begin to break the mutual dependency it shares with Capital but to sow the seeds of revolution (*Commonwealth* 142). This new autonomy, however, while it has opened the possibility of the multitude’s revolt against Capital, has not yet been able to be fully realized. It is hampered primarily, according to Hardt & Negri, by the intensive strategies of command that Capital institutes on the biopolitical terrain, strategies quite different than those of the factory era, and by its extensive strategies of capture and expropriation of the common, strategies which fetter the productivity of the multitude as well as its power of revolt, since the multitude’s liberation for Hardt & Negri ultimately lies in its powers to produce. Indeed, Hardt & Negri argue, through techniques of discipline, surveillance, and monitoring Capital divides and segments the common field of productive cooperation, limiting its productivity. The productivity of the multitude is also hampered, they suggest, by the

dismantling of institutions of public education through privatization of primary and secondary education as well as by the generalization of labor precarity throughout the labor forces—a structuring of time that destroys the “division between work time and nonwork time,” such that none of the worker’s time is his or her own, making it almost impossible to be creatively productive under these circumstances (144-47). Capital, for Hardt & Negri, also hinders the multitude’s productivity by blocking the migrations of peoples, preventing the cultural and social encounters and mixtures needed for creative biopolitical production (147-48). Along with Capital’s expropriation of the common, of knowledge in particular, through its privatization, these intensive strategies of control and command, Hardt & Negri contend, not only fetter the productivity of biopolitical labor but hinder the “virtuous cycle of accumulation, which would lead from the existing common through biopolitical production to a new expanded common that serves in turn as the basis of a new productive process” (149).

While this fettering of the multitude’s productivity has kept the multitude from realizing its true productive potential and thus its freedom, the inability of Capital to generate uninterruptedly the “virtuous cycle of accumulation,” as a result of this fettering, has created nonetheless a crisis, Hardt & Negri argue, within the capitalist system, a crisis that along with the multitude’s growing autonomy present what they call a “political opening,” a possibility of liberation for the multitude (*Commonwealth* 151, 165). In Hardt & Negri’s scheme, the possibility of the multitude’s liberation from Capital takes the form of “exodus,” a movement they define as “a process of *subtraction* from the relationship with capital by means of actualizing the potential autonomy of labor-power” (152). For Hardt & Negri, unlike Žižek, this process of subtraction is not the refusal of

productivity, but rather the “refusal of the increasingly restrictive fetters placed on [the multitude’s] productive capacities by capital” (152). Exodus, Hardt & Negri explain, is an expression of the productive powers of the multitude that exceed the relationship with capital—the affective and intellectual talents, such as communication skills and the ability to create “cooperation and organizational networks” (152). Exodus, they state, is a form of class struggle where the multitude, “subtracting from its relation to capital must discover and construct new social relationships, new forms of life that allow it to actualize its productive powers” and must do so without “going elsewhere,” but rather by “staying right here” and transforming the relations of production and the mode of social organization under which it lives (152-53).

Though Hardt & Negri propose exodus as a means of escape from Capital, they realize that exodus is a daunting task. It is a task, they argue, that is only possible on the “basis of the common,” on the basis, that is, of “access to the common and the ability to make use of it” (*Commonwealth* 153). The making use of the common, in fact, is the foundation of their entire political program, and it starts with seizing control of the means of production and reproduction, with, in other words, the reappropriation of the common—“the results of our past labors and means of autonomous production and reproduction of our future” (164). For Hardt & Negri, however, the multitude both seizes control of the means of production and reproduction and subtracts itself from Capital by transforming the common through its productive practices, by transforming, that is, nature, culture, and social relationships (171). But most importantly for these thinkers, the multitude takes leave of Capital and reappropriates what is rightfully its own by transforming subjectivity. Here Hardt & Negri lean heavily on the theories of subjectivity

of Foucault, who, as they suggest, “regard[s] the production of subjectivity ... as the primary terrain on which political struggle takes place” (172). Hardt & Negri, in fact, re-read Foucault’s theory of resistance in his genealogies “as an alternative production of subjectivity, which not only resists power but also seeks autonomy from it” (56). For these theorists then, Foucault’s conceptualization of power contains within itself not just a disciplinary ethos, but the potential for the production of alternative subjectivities and thus forms of life (58-59). What Hardt & Negri ultimately take from Foucault’s understanding of subjectivity, then, is the notion that human nature is not invariant, that it can constantly be transformed. And, importantly, they design their entire theoretical program around the question of “what human nature can become” (191). For Hardt & Negri, human nature or subjectivity can become anything the human collectivity wants it to become; it can be constantly produced and constantly transformed.

As the biopolitical labor-power of Capital, the multitude, in Hardt & Negri’s scheme, is already engaged in the process of transforming subjectivity as a specifically economic practice—in fact, it is subjectivity, for Hardt & Negri, that in the contemporary period serves as the object or “nature” commonly understood to be transformed through the economic process of labor (*Commonwealth* 172). The multitude in the new biopolitical context of contemporary capitalism, as we have seen, is directly involved in the process of the production of subjectivity specifically through its production of the common in the form of ideas, codes, images, affects, and social relationships (172). Indeed, for Hardt & Negri, the multitude’s control over the production of the common in its symbolic form allows the multitude not only to shift the mode of operation of the symbolic and communicative discourses and practices (the symbolic order) that it

produces, generating new symbolic forms, but ultimately to produce and transform itself—or, to be more exact, its own forms of subjectivity, again, precisely because it has control over the production of the symbolic order, which in Hardt & Negri's model serves as the condition of possibility of subjectivity—and thus to create possibilities for subtracting itself from Capital, possibilities for exodus. Here, where according to Hardt & Negri, “[b]iopolitical events ... reside in the creative acts of the production of the common” (176), where in other words, labor produces itself as it produces (173), the multitude's productive practices can become specifically “political act[s] of self-making” (175), political acts where the multitude, engaging in a continuous process of “the self-production of the subject” (*Empire* 63), organizes its productive and social capacities around the creation of “new positions of being” (64), positions of being that ultimately make Capital impossible and that lead to new forms of social relation that are not exploitative, expropriative or fettering of productivity.

It is important to point out here, however, that what Hardt & Negri advocate with their notion of the self-production of the subject is *not* the creation of a new social formation through the production of new forms of subjectivity that will take us once and for all beyond what is socially, politically, and subjectively possible in the present capitalist social system and leave us there in a static state—this in their view, while a program of immanence, is still a utopian scheme because it “distances the project from the subject” (*Empire* 65). Rather they advocate the creation of a social formation that places the self-production of subjectivity and the new social formation in a relationship of *radical* immanence, in a relationship, that is, where the new social formation becomes the continuous process of self-production. Here the social formation does not sit outside the

process of self-production after it has been created by this process, but rather exists as self-production itself. As Hardt & Negri argue in *Commonwealth*, “Multitude should be understood ... as not a being but a making—or rather a being that is not fixed or static but constantly transformed, enriched, constituted by a process of making. This is a peculiar kind of making, though, insofar as there is no maker that stands behind the process. Through the production of subjectivity, the multitude is itself author of its perpetual becoming other, an uninterrupted process of collective self-transformation” (173). In Hardt & Negri’s scheme of radical immanence, then, the self-production of the subject is not a means to an end but an end in itself, a radically contingent end. But while this process of self-production, as an end in itself, is indeed radically contingent, it does not, for Hardt & Negri, lead to social chaos or anarchy. Instead, these thinkers argue, “the self-transformation of the multitude in production, grounded in the expansion of the common” points to the form of self-rule the multitude will take up in the political realm (177); it leads, in other words, to a form of radical and absolute democracy, a thoroughly communicative and cooperative form of democracy (and sociality) where the process of representation can be bypassed and where “the rule of everyone by everyone” can prevail (*Multitude* 237).

Hardt & Negri are not unaware of the fact that the political orchestration of the multitude will be an exceedingly difficult endeavor—that it will not happen spontaneously. In *Commonwealth*, in fact, they directly address their critics’ doubts about the multitude’s ability to “take coherent political action” and their concerns over the character of the multitude’s acts—their critics ask, can the multitude act in a progressive

or liberatory way? ⁷ While Hardt & Negri dispense with both concerns thoughtfully but swiftly, I will devote a good portion of this chapter to considering both points of criticism, as I believe a careful examination of each might both bring to light what is problematic in Hardt & Negri's readings of our contemporary condition and emphasize what is salvageable, and should be salvaged, in Hardt & Negri's optimistic scheme. Hardt & Negri address their critics' first concern—can the multitude, understood as a massive grouping of individualized singularities, be organized without an overarching form of command or hegemony—by returning to the cooperative, networked structure of biopolitical production. For Hardt & Negri, the model of biopolitical economic production serves as a model for political action. Indeed, these theorists believe that the same capacities that are “set in play” for biopolitical production are also sufficient for political organization: “The ability of producers autonomously to organize cooperation and produce collectively in a planned way ... has immediate implications for the political realm, providing the tools and habits for collective decision making” (174). In fact for Hardt & Negri, because biopolitical production operates on the basis of communication and cooperation, because it is made possible via the common—through both the sharing and the production of the common, the sharing and production, that is, of not only knowledges, codes and affects, but subjectivities and social relations as well—the multitude's “economic capacities and acts are themselves immediately political” (174). In what might be called a burst of optimism or perhaps, more realistically, a burst of naïveté, Hardt & Negri claim: “If one can realistically establish the capacities for self-

⁷ Among those who express these two doubts about the potential of the multitude, Hardt & Negri respond to the work of Pierre Macherey, Ernesto Laclau, Paolo Virno, and Étienne Balibar in particular. See *Commonwealth*, 166-68.

organization and cooperation in people's daily lives in their work, or more generally in social production, then the political capacity of the multitude ceases to be a question" (176).

Hardt & Negri's attempt here to account for the political organization of the multitude, which, like their body of work, is thoroughly material and utterly optimistic, grossly overestimates the multitude's autonomy from Capital. Empirical encounters with the singularities that make up the multitude—particularly the mass of educated communications and affective workers—as well as the observations of theorists such as Slavoj Žižek and Ulrich Beck, should make us hesitant to accept Hardt & Negri's claim that the multitude's ability in the economic realm to organize cooperation autonomously and to produce collectively will seamlessly translate into political action. It may be true, as Hardt & Negri suggest, that the economic expectations structuring the new biopolitical work environment in which the multitude finds itself do indeed make possible the multitude's ability to organize cooperation autonomously and to produce collectively; however, what Hardt & Negri do not take into account when claiming that the multitude has been trained and armed for political action as a result of the new biopolitical nature of the economic sphere is the fact that the only impetus for the multitude's cooperation and community building in the workplace is Capital itself, and the rewards—monetary, social, and psychic—that Capital makes possible. In the contemporary context of “universalized reflexivity” (*Ticklish Subject* 342), where, as both Žižek and Beck argue, the subject no longer has symbolic paternal authority or the modern social structures (of gender and class) that make up bourgeois patriarchy to guide it and more importantly to provide meaning and community in its life (*Ticklish Subject*; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim),

the subject, as Žižek in particular suggests, has lost the ability to take a critical stance—specifically, to see Capital clearly, or even to see it at all—and has thus, in its disorientation brought about by the loss of the norms of modernity and their replacement by Capital’s discourses of consumption, succumbed to the power of Capital to provide its existence with meaning and indeed to provide it with community, as Hardt & Negri argue. But the meaning that Capital supplies for the subject, with its imaginary ideals of success and the good life, as well as the community that Capital makes possible in the workplace are transitory at best, and, once again, are structured specifically by the needs of capitalist reproduction. Thus while Capital, as Hardt & Negri suggest, may provide the multitude more autonomy in the actual production process, allowing the multitude to orchestrate more freely its exchanges with others in the economic context, Capital has nonetheless colonized and taken full command of the multitude’s subjectivity, its wants, its desires and its actions and has produced a paralyzed subject, one who, as Žižek argues, is highly narcissistic (*Ticklish Subject* 368) and, as I suggest, able only to act for reasons of money and status. This multitude possesses no real altruism and creates no organic community, as do the global “poor” of which Hardt & Negri speak in *Commonwealth* (see below), and unlike this poor as the multitude, the multitude of communications and affective workers have no reason to come together, to produce the common, to further their survival—this multitude has been convinced by Capital that it has a “good life” and all it needs, if not all it desires. Perhaps most troublingly, this multitude has no inclination to delve into the political or even to create lines of solidarity outside the workplace and outside those with whom they share the Same. As Hardt & Negri themselves argue, the singularities of the multitude in the metropolis most often “close themselves off to

encounters with others, walk silently past without seeing one another, erecting invisible walls in common space, hardened to contact....” (*Commonwealth* 255). What Hardt & Negri refuse to see then, because they are so preoccupied with production, are the devastating effects on the subject and thus on the multitude of consumption—the way in which Capital’s colonization of the symbolic order, its production of imaginary ideals and fantasies of success and the good life, as well as its production of isolated social and cultural “identities” through market segmentation and differentiation, have created a form of collective subjectivity that hates difference and shuns anything that does not share its market aesthetic or its “lifestyle,” a form of collective subjectivity that is completely polarized and sadly depoliticized, and a form of collective subjectivity that without the command of Capital in the context of production, or more significantly in the context of its daily life, would care nothing about cooperation or community.

Due to their characteristic optimism regarding the power of the creative productivity of the multitude, and also perhaps to a failure to see clearly the very people their theorizations depict, Hardt & Negri feel they can easily dismiss the concerns of their critics surrounding the ability of the multitude to organize in the absence of command; they have somewhat more (self-acknowledged) difficulty, however, addressing the suspicions of their critics surrounding the question of the political orientation or the content of the multitude’s actions. How, their critics ask, can we be assured that the multitude’s actions will be progressive and liberatory when there is every reason to assume otherwise? Hardt & Negri answer this question by offering up a new philosophical and political theorization of “love,” a theorization of love that takes as its foundation “the innumerable forms of social solidarity and social production that one

recognizes everywhere among those who live in poverty. Solidarity, care for others, creating community, and cooperating in common projects is for them an essential survival mechanism” (*Commonwealth* 180). Here Hardt & Negri harness the production of the common and of subjectivity by the “poor” to explain the force that might hold the potential to guide the multitude’s political actions in a progressive and liberatory manner. What Hardt & Negri seem to be suggesting with this explanation, even if implicitly, is that the multitude under Capital *is* “the poor” (in that its forms of cooperation and its productivity are fettered) and that for this reason the multitude is compelled to “love,” to create community and to cooperate in common, not only to survive but to realize its full potential as a productive and inventive entity of multiple singularities.

Perhaps the most important model for Hardt & Negri’s politics of love is Spinoza’s theorization of the concept. In attempting to systemize Spinoza’s idea of love, Hardt & Negri ascribe to it a three-part geometrical sequence. According to the authors,

at the level of sensations [Spinoza] identifies a striving (*conatus*) of and for life; this striving is built upon and directed in desire (*cupiditas*), which functions through the affects; and desire in turn is strengthened and affirmed in love (*amor*), which operates in reason. The movement of this sequence involves not negation—striving is not negated by desire, or desire by love—but rather a progressive accumulation, such that desire and love are increasingly powerful strivings for life. And this process is immediately political since the object of all the terms of this sequence is the formation...of the common. (*Commonwealth* 192)

For Hardt & Negri, then, as they read Spinoza, striving toward freedom and the production of the common is a fundamental part of human life (193); it is, in other words, human nature itself, so that human nature ultimately exists as a political form. Love then becomes for these authors an “ontological motor,” a motor that drives the constitution of the common and the formations of society, that serves as the motivating force of exodus

and rebellion, of the fleeing of subordination and servitude, and finally that “makes” the multitude, that trains the multitude, forming its habits and practices through the collective organization of its desire, what Hardt & Negri call “a process of sentimental and political education” (195-6).

In attempting to account for their expectations for the political orientation of the multitude, Hardt & Negri are able to hold up Spinoza’s theory of love and desire as the guarantee of the progressive nature of the multitude’s political orientation, the content of their actions, both because Spinoza’s theory conceptualizes love and desire as universal and essential forces of human nature and because it posits love and desire as connection-seeking forces, as, in other words, the very motor of sociality and thus, for Hardt & Negri, the very motor of “good.” In their resurrection of Spinoza’s theory of love and desire, Hardt & Negri break in fact with the idealism and negativity that is the foundation of the Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalytic understanding of desire and theorize desire not as a product of the human being’s entrance into language, not as lack, and thus not as a product of the splitting of the subject by language or the territorialization of the body by the social, but rather, true to Spinoza’s theory, as a bodily force, a force that appears to operate prior to the culturalization of the body by sexual difference or the symbolic. Indeed, for Hardt & Negri, desire and love are tied directly to the creative and productive capacities of the human body as life force, and because love and desire in their model take as their object the formation of collective social life or the constitution of the common, these structures, Hardt & Negri assume, seek ever new and multiple connections. For Hardt & Negri, desire and love, then, are productive of social relations and the common itself and are thus in their model essentially progressive and liberatory

forces. And since love and desire, as fundamental elements of human nature, serve as the “ontological motor” of the multitude’s liberation, since they lead the multitude to produce community, they guarantee for Hardt & Negri that the multitude’s political orientation will be progressive and liberatory as well.

The central weakness of Hardt & Negri’s attempt to defend the progressive political orientation of the multitude is specifically, I believe, their easy acceptance of Spinoza’s conceptualization of desire and love as positive, affirmative, and productive forces. As a theoretical narrative of subjectivity, Hardt and Negri’s conceptualization of love and desire based on Spinoza—which does indeed provide an important counterpoint to those psychoanalytic discourses that privilege negativity—is once again certainly compelling and rousingly optimistic, but if the history of modernity over at least the last century is any indication, Hardt & Negri’s theorization of desire does not parallel the actual historical workings of desire in the modern period. Over the course of modernity, as the work, for example, of Slavoj Žižek has shown, the psychic economy of the modern subject has *not* served, to use Hardt & Negri’s term, as a “force” which compels this subject to seek affirmative connections and relations; it has served rather as a force of transgression, social destruction and disintegration, a force that has been harnessed by the system of capitalism and its discourses of consumption to reproduce itself, and a force that compels the subject to pursue its own singular course no matter the cost to the bonds of the social. But no matter how desire is theorized, desire has clearly operated within the context of modernity as a force of negativity and destruction. Hardt & Negri have clearly misconceptualized the nature of desire as it has manifested itself throughout modernity—they have built their theoretical program as well as their attempts to defend

the political orientation of the multitude on a universalization and essentializing of desire that does not even belong to the epistemological framework of the modern period (as does the psychoanalytic model), at least as its boundaries have been delimited by Foucault—and for this reason their quite certain claim that desire and love will keep the multitude’s political orientation and actions progressive and liberatory holds no weight; it appears at best as an undertheorized assertion and at worst as an optimistic fantasy. Desire then, whether it is conceptualized in an anachronistic and fantastical manner as a positive force of connection or in a manner closer to its actual operations in the modern period as a force of negativity, appears unable to serve as the foundation of a political project with the continuous creation of the common and thus a smoothly-functioning democratic society of becoming as its goal.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of Hardt & Negri’s work is that it serves the function, like Marx’s theoretical texts, of Jean Baudrillard’s “mirror of production.” Baudrillard developed this concept in his text of the same name as a means of critiquing, historicizing, and thus de-essentializing modern discourses of productivity. From Baudrillard’s perspective, productivist discourses—which included the discourses of political economy and Marx at the time of the writing of *The Mirror of Production* and which now include the discourses of present-day scholars such as Hardt & Negri—are imaginary in the Lacanian sense, in that they serve as a mirror that reflects back to the subject a fictional “ideal of a productivist ego” through which the subject recognizes itself. This recognition, however, is actually a misrecognition, where the subject mistakes the ideal, fictional image of itself—as a producer of itself, of things, and of value—that is reflected back to it in the mirror of production as its identity, as the truth of itself. In

Baudrillard's scheme, productivist discourses, like those of Marx and Hardt & Negri, are imaginary, are fictional constructs, precisely because they are projections of capitalism; indeed, they are made possible only by the emergence of capitalism and are thus historically specific discourses that re-articulate or mirror the productivist and rationalist foundations of the system of capitalism, thus offering a model of human activity that obeys the productivist and rationalist "reality principle" of this system (*Mirror of Production* 18). Productivist discourses then, and the political programs that are designed and put into practice in their names, conform, if we follow Baudrillard's line of thinking, to the same logic as capitalism, a logic in which the human being finds its species-being, its essence, ultimately in the conquest and domination of nature.

What needs to be made clear here, before any further discussion of the productivist nature of Hardt & Negri's work, is that my objection to its productivist nature is not directed at these thinkers' desire for the multitude to produce us beyond capitalism, but rather at the fact that they offer up a radically productivist subject and form of sociality as their vision for a post-capitalist world, a subject and form of sociality that are, like Žižek's model of post-capitalist subjectivity and sociality, radically contingent, informed by a modern understanding of self-determination and freedom and thus by a nature to culture narrative—and, as such, will lead not only to the eventual domination of nature in all its guises including the human, as Baudrillard suggests, but to a state of human freedom that is no freedom at all because in its radical contingency, it leaves the subject disoriented without a stable base of meaning from which to construct a coherent picture of itself, its actions, its place in the world, and the world itself. It leaves the subject, in other words, in a state of constant uncertainty. But if we put the

productivist and thus problematic nature of Hardt & Negri's final vision of a post-capitalist world aside for a moment and concentrate on their conviction that the multitude can produce us beyond capitalism—what is in fact their theory of immanence and human agency—we will see, as I suggested in the dissertation's introduction, that their theory of immanence might serve as a remarkably valuable theoretical and political tool for us today in that it demonstrates to us directly that we, as the collective form of subjectivity, as the multitude, are ultimately the agent that dictates and controls the shape of the contemporary symbolic order and thus the agent that holds the power to produce a new symbolic order to take ourselves beyond Capital.

Hardt & Negri's theory of immanence is built around their assertion that the discovery of the "plane of immanence" and thus the birth of modernity took place at the dawn of the 14th century when European thinkers and artists discovered humanity's "power in the world"—its powers of creation which had been previously assigned to the "transcendent plane," that is to the Divine—"and integrated this dignity into a new consciousness of reason and potentiality" (*Empire* 71). According to Hardt & Negri, on the plane of immanence nothing stands above or transcends "the powers of *this* world." In fact, on this plane, the human being replaces God as the producer of knowledge and history and begins to understand and experience its own being "as an immanent terrain of knowledge and action" and no longer as an analogy/reflection of the Divine (71). The human being, in other words, is no longer "a being with one foot in this world and one in a transcendent realm" (71)—a being subject to a dualistic nature—but rather is a singular entity, one that produces its own being through its ways of knowing and acting and thus serves as "the master of its own life," its own knowledge and its own potential (70). In

Hardt & Negri's scheme, then, the human being must throw off any vestiges of the transcendental realm if it wants to be free, precisely because transcendent social, political, or religious forces and discourses remove the human being through a process of mediation from its true potential, or from its species-being, that is, from its autonomy and thus its "creative life force" (92)—its ability to produce *itself* along with a rich objective culture beyond its immediate material needs. A theory of immanence for Hardt & Negri, then, must renounce transcendental schema and must remind the multitude that it alone produces those cultural discourses and social relations, the common, that maintain its collective form of subjectivity.

Although in the contemporary moment we are clearly a long way from the birth of modernity that Hardt & Negri assign to the 14th century, according to these thinkers, we are returning in this moment to the plane of immanence. For Hardt & Negri, the revolutionary birth of modernity on the plane of immanence in the 14th century was met over the course of the next several centuries by the violent counterrevolutions of the church and the monarchy and later by the formation of the state and by philosophical discourse itself, all of which, in their view, rose up to neutralize the revolutionary forces of the multitude and to reestablish new forms of transcendent power (75). But while these counterrevolutionary forces were successful in reestablishing transcendental forms of power, the forces of revolutionary immanence, according to Hardt & Negri, managed to survive and maintain their revolutionary and liberatory programs despite such opposition—indeed, for Hardt & Negri, the desire for self-production always follows modernity even in its most counter-revolutionary and transcendent moments (76-8). In the contemporary period then, where, as Hardt & Negri suggest, the rise of Empire and its

liberation of the productive powers of the multitude have begun to break down the transcendent apparatus of the state, the plane of immanence is beginning to regain its power once again and the singular entities that make up the contemporary multitude are once more experiencing their own beings as “immanent terrains of knowledge” —they are capable more than ever in the context of contemporary capitalism, according to Hardt & Negri, of producing their own beings through their ways of knowing and acting (90).

Once again, Hardt & Negri provide here a compelling model of human agency and thus a powerful blueprint for a way to take hold of the symbolic order, the common, that structures our subjectivity and our lives in the contemporary moment, and to re-write it, so as to move us beyond capitalism. But though their theory of immanence and their model of human agency as productivity serve as useful tools for theorizing ways beyond Capital, these tools, as I argued above, should not be universalized and, most importantly, should not be used to envision post-capitalist social and subjective formations—they should, once again, only be used to bring us beyond capitalism and, as I have argued throughout the dissertation, modernity itself. The danger of the generalization of productivity as a form of subjectivity or sociality, as explained above, is that it is a specifically modern move, one that leads straight back to all of modernity’s most pressing problems—to a radically contingent world, a world in which the subject’s unchecked productivity and freedom to determine self and others including nature unceasingly serves, as Baudrillard suggests, as a force of domination of self, others, and nature. Hardt & Negri are not unaware of the fact that their theories of immanence and productivity are fundamentally modern and as such are potentially subject to all the dangers of modernity and modern forms of subjectivity and sociality, most particularly the danger of modern

forms of domination and control. They are especially careful in *Commonwealth* to address the dangers of modern domination and control, but in the end, they avoid subjecting their particularly modern theorizations of productivity and immanence to a substantive critique by choosing to define modernity in an a-historical fashion—not then “in terms of reason, Enlightenment, the break with tradition, secularism,” but instead “as a power relation” between “domination and resistance” and “sovereignty and struggles for liberation” (*Commonwealth* 67). In this context then, modern forms of domination and control, what they call “antimodernity,” are seen not as the projects of the rational control, objectification and domination of nature that come into being as a result of Capital’s abstraction of the human being from organic forms of labor and from its oneness with nature. Instead modern forms of domination and control are understood by Hardt & Negri as those projects which attempt “to break the relationship at the heart of modernity and free the dominator from dealing with the subordinated,” those relationships, they further suggest, that seek “to put an end to the struggle at [modernity’s] core by liberating the sovereign” (100). For Hardt & Negri, then, the most pernicious form of modern domination and control is found in those projects which attempt to put an end to class struggle and to difference, to put an end, in other words, to the struggles for liberation of those who are subordinated by the ruling elites (100), not those who attempt to dominate and subordinate nature and the self. In understanding domination and control in this way, Hardt & Negri are not only able to ignore the problematic nature of their reliance on productivity as a revolutionary force, but, once again, they are able to build both their theory for a way beyond capitalism and their

vision of a post-capitalist world on the notion of productivity. They are able, in fact, to stay squarely within modern theory and modernity itself.

To be fair, Hardt & Negri do offer up a second definition of “antimodernity,” one which understands this concept not as “an effort to preserve the premodern or unmodern from the expanding forces of modernity” (*Commonwealth* 101), but rather as “the monsters of liberation” that “challenge and subvert hierarchies by affirming the resistance and expanding the freedom of the subordinated” (97, 100). Antimodernity is monstrous, according to Hardt & Negri, in that it refuses to remain within the bounds of European Enlightenment reason, in that it is a force of the “excessive, savage powers of the imagination” (99), and it is this monstrous quality that serves, for Hardt & Negri, as the foundation of their theories of resistance and liberation as well as their way beyond Capital. But while Hardt & Negri build their interventionary program around the concept of the antimodern, they feel nonetheless that the concept is too bound up with modernity and the notion of resistance that works against it. They argue in fact that there is “a general limitation [to] the concept and practices of resistance: they risk getting stuck in an oppositional stance. We need to be able to move from resistance to alternative and recognize how liberation movements can achieve autonomy and break free of the power relation of modernity” (102). For this reason, they develop the term “altermodernity,” a term that, for Hardt & Negri, is meant to mark a conflict with modernity as does “antimodernity,” but one that, though it emerges from the traditions of antimodernity, indicates a decisive break with both modernity and antimodernity in that it “extends beyond oppositions and resistance,” functions on the basis of “rupture and transformation,” and is thus oriented “more clearly toward an autonomous terrain” (102-

4). For Hardt & Negri, altermodernity breaks definitively with the “relation of command of modernity” and within its parameters, resistance takes on a new meaning in that it now strives to create alternative social formations based on the common as well as new values, new knowledges, and new practices (115-16). Altermodernity, then, is the process of movement, self-transformation and social becoming (105-6), and it requires, Hardt & Negri suggest, “metamorphosis” and an “anthropological transformation,” so that “a new humanity” may be created (117-18).

The anthropological transformation that Hardt & Negri are ultimately looking for in altermodernity is the creation of what they call a “new rationality”—a rationality that they believe is other to modernity—and with it a new reality and a new truth (*Commonwealth* 119, 121). The construction of a new rationality will, of course, for Hardt & Negri, be produced as a result of the struggle over the common, over language in particular, and will be forged from below. As such, the new rationality and thus epistemology that subsequently arise will not take the shape of a particular truth, but rather will have its truth based in the common, in the sense, they suggest, of “common knowledge” and “common sense”—it will be a truth that is not fixed, passive, or already given in society, but rather open to constant change and production from below (120-21). It is here, when Hardt & Negri attempt to map a new rationality, reality, and truth, that they finally give serious consideration to a truly non-modern, or what they call “unmodern,” form of subjectivity or ontology and thus by implication to a truly non-modern form of sociality. In their search for models for a new rationality, Hardt & Negri turn to the work of the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. They are

particularly interested in his claim that the Amerindians of the Brazilian Amazon inhabit a radically different epistemology and ontology from the West, one in which

Amerindians conceive animals and other nonhumans as “persons,” as kinds of humans, such that human interactions with what would normally be called “nature” take a form something like “social relations.” As a result, whereas modern philosophy (from Kant to Heisenberg) posits that the point of view creates the object, here the point of view creates the subject; and whereas modern philosophy conceives one nature and many cultures, here there is one culture (all are in some sense human) but many natures (occupying different worlds). (123)

What is most important here is the idea which Hardt & Negri trace through Viveiros de Castro that “the point of view creates the subject”—it is an idea that, like my reading of Foucault’s understanding of subjectivity for the Classical period, not only dissolves fixed divisions between beings but understands subjectivity or consciousness as a true process of becoming. It is the subject’s relation to the things of the world, in other words, that gives the subject its particular meaning or “identity” at any particular moment. But while Hardt & Negri see Viveiros de Castro’s relational epistemology and ontology as a site from which to critique modern epistemology and to “push it toward an altermodern rationality” (124), they absolutely refuse to embrace it as a model for a post-capitalist and post-modern form of subjectivity. Indeed the only reason they are able to tolerate this non-modern alternative even as a critique of modern epistemology and as a catalyst for new ways of thinking is that they see becoming in this model as a process of “doing”—the becoming “other” of the subject is seen by Hardt & Negri, in other words, as a process of producing the common or as a “working-on” of nature and the self (124). Two factors here frighten Hardt & Negri away from the embrace of a relational epistemology, and both ultimately intersect on a singular plane: the fear of sameness and the fear of a lack of productivity and importantly creativity. These two factors result from

the inability of the subject in a relational epistemology to step out of nature and the common and to construct itself as what Hardt & Negri call a “singularity,” or, in other words, an individuality. And it is just this inability of the subject to define itself as a singularity—a self-producing, self-determining, and creative singularity—that Hardt & Negri are unable to tolerate. Hardt & Negri, in the end, are much too wed to Marx’s understanding of human nature, to his notion of “species-being”—the ability to produce a rich objective culture above and beyond our immediate material needs, above and beyond our means of subsistence—to consider seriously a non-modern ontology or epistemology. They thus mire themselves, like Lacan and Žižek, in a narrative of nature to culture that once again can only conceptualize the human being as an animal who has escaped itself as animal and has thus escaped nature along with it—the human being in this narrative can never be one with nature, but must always stand outside of it and ultimately above it as a subject that works on nature as an object. Hardt & Negri, in fact, are so committed to the Marxist understanding of human nature and the social systems that will allow this nature to fulfill its potential that they are unable to see, when it is right in front of them, for example in the form of Viveiros de Castro’s relational epistemology, an alternate nature to culture narrative, one that would allow them not only to critique modern epistemology but to envision a human nature and a form of human fulfillment that do not lead in the end to the structural and fundamental separation of the human being from nature, and thus to the human being’s domination of nature.

While Hardt & Negri turn away from the models of subjectivity and sociality and thus freedom that relational epistemologies similar to that of Viveiros de Castro provide us, theorists such as Foucault and Baudrillard are not afraid to embrace such alternatives.

They realize in fact that the potential for a different form of subjectivity, sociality and freedom is found not only in non-western epistemologies but western epistemologies as well, and they spend a great deal of theoretical effort attempting to map this potential. Baudrillard in particular uses his theorizations of non-modern or relational epistemologies and ontologies to critique the productivist imaginary, and it is worthwhile here, before we move into Chapter Five and discuss the use of art to produce new relational epistemologies and ontologies, to revisit in more detail Baudrillard's understanding of non-modern ontologies and epistemologies and his use of them to critique the mirror of production. For Baudrillard, in a non-modern or relational epistemology or ontology where the human being's social framework is experienced as part of nature itself, because nature is the manifestation of the laws or the structure of the universe or God's divine plan (as Baudrillard suggests, "Nature signified only the totality of laws founding the world's intelligibility" (*Mirror* 53)), the human being's being is not abstracted from its life or social position as it is in modernity, but instead its life or social position is integrated with its being, *is* its being, what it *is*. In this context then, the human being can only be one with nature if it *is* nature, and if it *is* nature, then it cannot conceptualize itself as free from nature and its dictates so as to act on nature from a position outside of it. Indeed, as Baudrillard argues of non-modern or pre-capitalist societies, where the human being and its traditional and organic forms of activity were embedded in a fixed, unchanging universe of reciprocal symbolic exchange with nature and with others and where these traditional activities were thus understood and experienced as the human being's *being* or as its existence, the notion of productivity could not exist, since the activity performed by the pre-capitalist human being did not

serve to facilitate the continuance of this being; the activity was this being itself (78-80). Activity, here, could not serve as a means to an end; in other words, activity as means could not be separate from the human being's being as end, as means and end in the pre-capitalist context were collapsed. In this context then, where the human being's activity could not be abstracted from its existence to facilitate its existence because this activity was the human being's existence, the notion of utility, like the concept of productivity, could once again not exist.

In fact, it is only when the human being can conceptualize itself as free from the dictates of the realm of nature, once, in other words, the human being can conceive of itself at essence as an autonomous being, free to produce and create of its own accord, that the human being abstracts itself from nature and becomes a transcendent entity. If the human being then experiences itself as free to create of its own accord rather than as creating in accord with its social position fixed by a transcendent entity such as nature or God, the human being cannot be one with nature—it can only transcend nature and act upon it as something outside of itself in an instrumental manner. Once again, for Baudrillard it is capitalism and its imaginary productivist discourses (including the fictional construct of an ideal productivist ego that they reflect back to the subject) that abstract the human being from the dictates of the transcendent realm and thus nature and allow the human being to conceive of itself as a free, autonomous, and transcendent subject—as a subject, in other words, that is a constituting rather than simply being. Because imaginary productivist discourses situate the subject within an identity where it can think of itself only as a producer, but perhaps more importantly, where it can think of itself, as Baudrillard argues, “only as something to produce, to transform, or bring about

as value” (20), the subject experiences itself, its essence, as its powers of production, specifically its powers to produce itself (“man becomes his own signified for himself” (20)). And because the subject experiences itself as the producer of itself, as the condition of its own possibility, the subject also experiences itself as an autonomous and transcendent being, a being that, because it is self-producing and thus autonomous, serves as “the content of all value and meaning” (20)—a being that serves, in other words, as the origin of its own representational powers. For Baudrillard then, the subject structured by the productivist imaginary is a being that experiences itself as productive of knowledge, meaning, and value, not as produced by these entities—this subject is a transcendent being which feels as if it represents the world in thought autonomously, without the mediations of cultural discourses or language. The productivist subjectivity then, abstracted from nature, culture, itself and even God, leads not only to the conquest and domination of nature, as Baudrillard suggests, but to the imposition of social hierarchy and forms of domination that Hardt & Negri are attempting to escape.

While throughout this chapter I have offered up a generally pessimistic reading of the political capacities of the multitude, before going on to a consideration of the aesthetic in Chapter Five, I want to be clear that I share the conviction, with Hardt & Negri, that the multitude is indeed a progressive force of social change. However, as I will argue in Chapter Five, I feel the progressive and liberatory nature of the multitude is found neither in its economic production, even if this production is seen as the stuff of everyday life, nor in an essentialized understanding of its capacity for desire or love, but rather in its capacity for aesthetic production and expression and therefore in its capacity to imagine new forms of subjectivity and thus new worlds beyond anything that is made

possible in the space of economic production especially under Capital. Though the aesthetic has been fully colonized by Capital both in the space of biopolitical economic production and in the art world, the multitude nonetheless experiences the aesthetic as a realm of freedom and importantly escape, especially when the aesthetic is engaged outside the structure of the exploitation of labor by Capital—or, simply put, outside the literal workplace. As I will argue in further detail in the dissertation’s next and final chapter, it is in this context of the imagined aesthetic freedom from Capital, where the multitude believes it produces for itself and feels it is free and its labor is its own, that anything becomes possible for the multitude, where it is willing to reach across the social and cultural division set in place by Capital, and where it can perhaps “love” in Hardt & Negri’s understanding of the term and create community and cooperate in common to produce a better world. Like Hardt & Negri, then, I believe the multitude has the capacity to take hold of the symbolic order and to produce itself and most of all to produce itself beyond capitalism, but because I do not share their Marxist view of human nature, I believe that the multitude must make only one final use of its modern productive subjectivity to produce itself *beyond* productivity, and thus beyond the mirror of production and any type of industrializing social formation built on a transcendental form of subjectivity abstracted from itself, nature and time. I believe our theorizations of the potential of the multitude need not and should not be deterred from confronting the challenge of reintroducing and writing a narrative of non-human transcendence—the very alternative Hardt & Negri refuse to consider, a narrative that in allowing the human being once again to turn mastery over to the non-human, will make possible a relational epistemology and thus a form of freedom and self-determination that allows radical

becomings, but not radical domination of nature and self. This is the possibility that I would like to keep in mind as we explore in Chapter Five the potential of the aesthetic to help us rewrite our symbolic order and take us beyond both capitalism and modernity, into a truly new realm.

CHAPTER FIVE

Aesthetic Potentials and New Worlds

As the textual analyses in Chapters Three and Four indicate, the theoretical work of both Žižek and the team of Hardt & Negri, despite its charted shortcomings, offers remarkably imaginative and compelling blueprints for a way beyond capitalism. Along with the early writings of Foucault discussed in Chapter Two, the efforts of Žižek and Hardt & Negri to theorize ways beyond capitalism place us in possession of powerful philosophical and potentially aesthetic tools, tools that hold the promise not only to bring us beyond capitalism but to help us address directly the diremptions of modernity that have been with us since modernity's inception and that continue today. Poised here with three formidable theoretical programs for social and subjective change—programs that offer us means both philosophical and aesthetic not only to rehabilitate modernity but, whether implicitly or explicitly, to find our way beyond modernity as well—we are now in a better position to return to the foundational and structuring question of the philosophical discourse of modernity with which the dissertation began: should we rehabilitate modernity or find ways to move beyond it? While Žižek and Hardt & Negri advocate a rehabilitation of modernity by means of its ultimate radicalization, throughout the dissertation, I have cautiously argued, in contrast, that we should begin to consider a move beyond modernity because, once again, I believe it is almost impossible to build a

just social system in the presence of the modern formations of desire and radical contingency, as they not only undermine reason's power to create inter-subjective bonds, but cause the subject to be unable to govern itself justly or with the collective good in mind. But what has become clear, I believe, through the analyses of the work of Foucault, Žižek, and Hardt & Negri carried out in the chapters of this dissertation, is that whichever path we choose—the rehabilitation of modernity or the move beyond it—it will be the aesthetic that will provide the most powerful resource for the political project of subjective and social change. Not only has the aesthetic become the dominant form of the common, of the symbolic order, in the contemporary context of biopolitical capitalism, but it is a medium that, because of its symbolic nature, has direct access to subjectivity,¹ and, as we will see below, it is a medium that, because its realization—its social and symbolic efficacy—is not directly reliant on the structures of productivity, efficiency, and rational control, seems to be able to engender new social relations in a way that economic production cannot. The power of art to produce new forms of subjectivity and sociality (though colonized more and more in the context of contemporary biopolitical capitalism as a means to generate profit) has been recognized as useful to, and importantly placed at the foundation of, projects for social and subjective change since modernity's beginnings. In tracing the various manifestations of the philosophical discourse of modernity, Jürgen Habermas reminds us that the aesthetic, specifically radical experiences opened up by avant-garde art have furnished throughout the 19th and 20th centuries the criteria for the philosophical critique of reason and the transcendental modern subject.² However, a close

¹ See pp. 26-31 of Chapter One of this dissertation.

² See Chapter IV of Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*: “The Entry into Postmodernity: Nietzsche as a Turning Point.”

reading of the philosophical discourse of modernity, in both its emancipatory and counter-enlightenment forms but especially in its contemporary forms, makes clear that while the aesthetic does indeed serve as an important means of critique for the discourse, its value lies specifically in its ability to serve as a foundation for political praxis, as, that is, the foundation for interventionary practices that can bring about entirely new social relations.

The belief in the power of art to effect social and subjective change, to serve as a form of political praxis, that emerged at the inception of modernity has certainly endured into the present moment. While the recent embrace of notions of “post-criticality” or post-ideology, in many instances as a reaction to the political and theoretical turn of art making, architecture, art/architectural criticism and history during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, might appear to challenge the intersection of art and politics, the new fashionableness of these terms in the world of art should not lead us to assume that the close relationship between art and politics has been severed.³ What has become of art during the last two decades, if we look carefully at artistic production from this period, is

³ The tendency in architecture, in the past two decades in particular, to forgo critique of and resistance to the social and cultural hegemony of Capital serves as a prime example of post-criticality in artistic practice. The tendency has been to shun theory and instead adopt corporate modeling (calculations and diagrams—flow-charts and spreadsheets—i.e. software) as a means to generate design (and profit). Architect and scholar Ole W. Fischer describes the split between criticality and post-criticality in architecture in these terms: “On one hand there is a concept of architecture being a ‘critical’ device, reflecting on power and gender discourse, economy and globalization, participation and resistance, law, politics and representation. On the other hand there is an arrangement with the driving forces of society (the architect as ‘surfer’ on the wave of capitalism)” (See Fischer, “Atmospheres—Architectural Spaces between Critical Reading and Immersive Practice,” *Field* 1:1 (Sept. 2007), 25; Fischer’s parenthetical comment paraphrases Rem Koolhaas). The turning away from theory and critique of those working in a post-critical mode and their inclination to ride the wave of Capital should not be confused with the work of artists, theorists and critics who argue that ideology critique or the critique of institutions is no longer a viable means of political and artistic practice. These latter thinkers turn away from such forms of critique not because they wish to surf the wave and thus facilitate Capital, but because they believe that in the present context of global, informational capitalism, these forms of critique serve as ineffective means of confronting the capitalist system. See my discussion of Žižek’s theory of ideology and its critique on p. 207, as well as fn. 8 of this chapter, which cites an analysis of the limitations of ideology critique from the editors of *Communities of Sense*.

not the end of art as a political manifestation but a rethinking of art's political potential. This rethinking, though in many instances acknowledging the general incompatibility of the theoretical-political manifestations of art and art theory/criticism of the 60s, 70s, and 80s with the goals of social and importantly aesthetic praxis today, should not be understood as a total supplanting of the political aesthetic concerns of earlier decades. Rather it should be seen as the next logical step in the attempts of artists and art historians/critics/theorists to fashion the aesthetic in such a way as to bring about the conditions of possibility of subjective and social change under the present circumstances of globalized and informationalized capitalism. The theoretical-political turn in the realms of art theory, criticism and practice that emerged in the 60s, 70s and 80s came into being, in fact, as a direct reaction to the social fragmentation and destabilization brought about during these decades by the growth of consumer culture and the perceived "loss of the real" that attended it, and, importantly, in express reaction to the legacy of "post-war or late modernism" and the art writing that surrounded it, particularly in the form of the work of Clement Greenberg and his circle.⁴ Artists and theorists/critics who were beginning to immerse themselves in the work of French structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers as well as the writings of the Frankfurt school reacted directly to the formalist and what they considered the a-political tendencies of late modernist art—its tendencies to purify itself of anything extraneous to the aesthetic and to function purely on the basis of its own internal aesthetic logic⁵—countering what they saw as its lack of political engagement with a direct and radical return to the political, to the political and aesthetic

⁴ See Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture*.

⁵ See Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," for an example of high modernism grappling with the rise of the postmodern.

concerns first manifested by the artistic avant-garde art of the 20s and 30s (particularly those of Dada and Surrealism), including the critique of representation. The mandate for these newly politicized artists and critics/theorists—as Hal Foster wrote in 1983 in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, perhaps the most important voice of the “postmodern” theoretical-political turn—was to “change the object” and thus the very nature of art as well as the social context in which the object was immersed (Foster xii). This was made possible in many instances by the collapsing of the barrier separating theory and artistic practice and the challenging of the aesthetic as a privileged realm closed off from everyday life or the non-aesthetic—moves that transformed art and art theory/criticism into a form of social and cultural critique, a cultural politics that, as Foster argued, deconstructed tradition, critiqued origins, questioned cultural codes and explored social and political affiliations (xiii).

Those participating in the theoretical and political turn of art and art criticism/theory in the 60s, 70s and 80s were well aware that the socio-political and cultural climate in which they operated was already radically different from that which the historical avant-garde faced. They were aware in fact that theirs was a world in which the aesthetic held little autonomy as it was being subsumed increasingly by Capital in its incessant drive to reproduce itself and, as such, they realized that artistic theory and practice could not serve as an outside from which to critique culture and the social. Nor could it serve as a means beyond representation or a space of pure presence—the “utopian dreams” Foster attributed to modernism (xvi). Instead “postmodernist” art was conceived of as “a new strategy of interference (associated with Gramsci)” (xvii), a strategy of critique, shock, or defamiliarization carried out from inside representation

which, Foster argued, “destructures the order of representations in order to reinscribe them” (xvi). As one commentator on Foster’s project points out, this act of deconstructing or problematizing the process of representation seemed to be understood by the new postmodernist theorists and artists as corresponding to interference with the entity being represented (Herman 169). But despite the new and ultimately immanent strategy of interference and the new strategy to “change the object,” the art practice and criticism/theory of the 60s, 70s and 80s, while of great critical and ultimately pedagogical value, did not succeed in “interfering” with or effecting substantive change within the social or capitalist system, nor did it succeed at inscribing new systems of representation—it instead stopped at deconstructing or problematizing representation and thus at negative critique or defamiliarization, and, as such, was unable to offer, as Ronald Jones, an advocate of post-criticality, argues of critical theory generally, “creative alternatives to the object of its critique” (Jones).⁶ And without the ability to propose alternatives, these projects, like the works of the historical avant-garde before them, were ultimately consumed by the market, installed in the canon, or in the case of art theory/criticism, neutralized as they were integrated into the standard art history curriculum.⁷

⁶ “Critical theory has, some believe, dug its own hole; while actively critical, it is usually without creative alternatives to the object of its critique, i.e. ‘writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric’” (Jones). I am invoking here only the letter of Jones’ critique of critical theory and not the spirit. Jones is an advocate of post-criticality and has, like the architect Koolhaas, thrown his lot in with Capital, particularly in his development of the Experience Design Group, which seeks to train design entrepreneurs or the creative workforce of Capital (see www.designingtime.se). Jones clearly does not want to interfere with Capital but to ride its wave and ultimately to facilitate it.

⁷ The works of Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman serve as unfortunate examples of the market co-optation of artistic strategies of representational “interference.” Their particular practices of deconstructing and reinscribing representation—while novel in their creation of forms of critical visibility that challenged and unmasked the visual discourses of patriarchy and their objectification of women as well as their demarcation of women’s roles—could not survive the critical and ironic incorporation/appropriation of popular media (advertising) strategies which Kruger and Sherman used to unmask these strategies’

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent spread of Capital across the globe in the 1990s, artists, in particular, especially those concerned with the political potential of art to generate new forms of social relationality, found themselves once again at a crossroads. It was already clear before the fall of the Wall that negative critique, while highly instructive, was not a particularly effective means of cultural and social change and that the artistic/political strategies Foster and his colleagues advocated in *The Anti-Aesthetic*—the destructuring, defamiliarizing or problematizing of representation in order to interfere with that being represented, though strategies of immanence—were not only unable to effect significant social, subjective or epistemological change, but were being co-opted by the media as well. With the rise of globalization after the fall of the Wall and the informationalization and commodification of all aspects of life, strategies of negative critique—particularly in the form of ideology critique or the exposing of contradictions and the uncovering of appearances in attempts to bring to light the “truth” of social relations—became even less effective, due to the new ways in which ideology was beginning to operate in the context of globalization. As Slavoj Žižek has argued, in the context of contemporary capitalism we are no longer dealing with a form of ideology that is tied to false-consciousness—the subject is no longer ignorant of the contradictions between appearance and reality; the subject already knows that the version of reality it is

ideological operations. The media-like formal/design qualities of these artists’ works, despite their ironic presentations, approximated too closely the visual strategies the media used to cultivate desire and thus could not escape the sexualized and lifestyle meanings that the media attached them. Kruger’s and Sherman’s ironic and innovative visual strategies were seen in the end by the media as a form of innovation that could be harnessed for its needs. Evacuated of their critical content, they were reappropriated by the media and used as even more powerful vehicles in the process of the production of consumption. One notable example is Madonna’s use of Sherman’s compositional style in her 1992 book *Sex*. Critics did not fail to see the significance, conversely, of Madonna’s sponsorship of the 1997 MOMA exhibit, “Cindy Sherman: The Complete *Untitled Film Stills*.” For a discussion of Cindy Sherman and Madonna, as well as a brief survey of critiques of Sherman’s work leveled by Mira Schor and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, for example, see Natlya Lusty, *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007, 148-150.

being offered is fully distorted, whether by the mechanisms of obfuscation or secrecy or by the visible proliferation and over-saturation of information, and that what appears “natural” or expected of the subject to assume or to carry out is not always in its best interests or the best interests of the collectivity, but the subject does it anyway—and it is in this “doing” that in the end, according to Žižek, ideological “illusion” lies.⁸ For a subject then who “knows better” but continues to “do” despite this knowledge, the unveiling of contradictions of the political “truth” of a situation will in no way compel it to act in defense of or reaction to this “truth,” as it already knows this “truth” and has *chosen* to ignore it.⁹ Like the strategies of negative critique, the artistic strategies designed to “interfere” with representation also became less effective after the fall of the Wall. In the fully informationalized and commodified context of contemporary capitalism, the practices of shock and defamiliarization as well as the deconstructing and reinscription of representation in order to change the meaning of an entity represented have become the mainstay of Capital’s deployment of representation, particularly visual representation in its processes of the production of consumption, so that the process of

⁸ See Žižek’s *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Tony Myers also offers a cogent summary of Žižek’s theory of ideology in *Slavoj Žižek*, 63-77. The editors of the volume *Communities of Sense* similarly believe that ideology critique is no longer effective in the contemporary moment. As they state in their introduction: “... in our contemporary information age, opacity is often not the outcome of a gap between political appearances and social realities, but the result of the ceaseless proliferation of information. It is the persistent emphasis on information and the ‘facticity’ of knowledge that leads to a particular economy of power and visibility in which, as Étienne Balibar argues, the dominant powers do not practice ‘secrecy’ any longer, since the ‘crucial determinants of our own action remain invisible in the very forms of (tele)visibility.’ Factographic strategies of institutional critique become complicit in the elimination of dispute by substituting the objectification of problems for the enactment of equality and the manifestation of wrong. The demarcation of “real” facts simply replicates the same forms of partition that enable the identification of parts and the distribution of roles, a division of the population into sociologically defined groups (capitalists and workers, oppressors and oppressed) whose conflicting interests can be resolved through laws and bureaucratic expertise” (10).

⁹ In other words, it is not to the subject’s advantage to act upon the knowledge provided by negative critique and to resist—to do so it would have to make a sacrifice, and as I have argued throughout the dissertation, the contemporary subject is not only unwilling but incapable of doing so as it no longer possesses a shared system of meaning to guide its actions.

destabilization and revolutionizing on which these practices rest, once the stronghold of the Left, has now become, as Žižek argues, the mode of operating and the mode of reproduction of Capital (*Parallax View* 318), and most significantly, the force that has shattered and continues to make impossible our shared systems of meaning and any form of social bond developed outside the operating structures of capitalism.¹⁰

With the traditional practices of the avant-garde already in crisis before the fall of the Wall and increasingly neutralized or co-opted by Capital after the fall, it became even more apparent to many artists and theorists as they entered the final decade of the 20th century that if art was going to function politically, so as to bring about subjective and social change, artists were once again going to have to “change the object” and thus the very nature of art and with it the practice of aesthetic politics. Aware that they inhabited a radically contingent and alienated world, where the negative strategies of ideology critique, shock and defamiliarization utilized by avant-garde of the 60s, 70s, and 80s had lost their ability to compel the viewer to act not only because they had been colonized by Capital but because they further fragmented, individualized, and destabilized the viewer in an extant context of social contingency and rupture, many artists began to turn their attention to the productive, world-generating nature of art and politics—the ability of art specifically to produce new forms of sociability, conviviality and, importantly, sociality or, in other words, to produce “creative alternatives” to the radically dirempted and alienating social, subjective and epistemological structures of the contemporary era of globalization and information. This project of creating new forms of sociability and sociality that was taken up by a number of artists across the globe in the early 90s, and

¹⁰ For a discussion of the breakdown of shared systems of meaning in the West, see, for example, Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*.

which has continued through to today, has been guided, as curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud argues, by the recognition of these artists of the “growing need for bonds and contact” in the highly individualistic society of the contemporary moment (“Berlin” 43). These artists, along with curators such as Bourriaud and art historians such as Grant Kester,¹¹ have been keenly aware of the devastating effects of the contemporary system of consumption on the subject, on the multitude—the ways in which, as I argued in Chapter Four, Capital’s colonization of the symbolic order, its production of imaginary ideals and fantasies of success and the good life, as well as its production of isolated social and cultural “identities” through market segmentation and differentiation, have produced singularized and depoliticized subjects who shun difference and, as such, have great difficulty forging inter-subjective bonds and building community outside the very regulated structures of capitalist production. Artists concerned with the disintegrating social bond have been confronted with the highly troubling fact that Capital’s colonization of the symbolic order and its differentiation of the multitude into different consumer identities and lifestyles creates a social context where the only way to forge a connection outside the relations of production organized by the capitalist economy is through and in the “spectacular” rituals and spaces of commodity culture, such that, as Bourriaud argues, relationships are “no longer ‘directly experienced’, but start to become blurred in their ‘spectacular’ representation” (*Relational Aesthetics* 9). In an attempt to address the inter-subjective fragmentation brought about by the new practices of consumption as well as the increasing difficulty of creating relationships between people

¹¹ See Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* and Kester, *Conversation Pieces*.

across class and culture (Kester 1), these artists have continued the processes begun in the early 90s of exploring the “field of the inter-human” (“Berlin” 43).

Bourriaud has charted the growth of the “movement” which explores the “inter-human” since the early 90s and has given the name “relational aesthetics” to this type of artistic practice.¹² This art is concerned first and foremost with the “socius” and, most importantly, with creating works of art that set out to repair the social bond and recreate the space of community at as much of a remove as possible from the structures of production and consumption of capitalism¹³ as well as to re-establish dialogue across the difference created not only by identity politics but by the segmentation of “the market,” or the multitude, into lifestyles that have now become the platform of many factions united by “identity.”¹⁴ Perhaps most importantly, this form of artistic practice sets out to explore ways to re-establish a shared system of meaning in the face of Capital’s constant revolutionizing of our shared symbolic systems, a system of meaning that might offer us a form of symbolic commonality that will allow for understanding in, through, and across difference. This attempt at commonality, at the building of inter-subjective and social bonds through interaction, is encountered in the contemporary works of artists from all over the world—indeed the relational “movement” is not confined to one geographical location nor is it confined to a uniform exhibition or production space. Relational works are certainly created and “exhibited” or more precisely activated or launched in traditional art spaces such as galleries, experimental contemporary art venues, and

¹² See Bourriaud’s book of the same name.

¹³ Bourriaud is most concerned with artists who attempt to create aesthetic and social relationality in traditional art venues—i.e. galleries, shared exhibitions spaces, biennials, etc.

¹⁴ Kester concentrates primarily on the work of artists who help to foster dialogue within and across already established communities.

biennials, but they are also produced and launched in the social at large as well. The art of New York-based artist Rirkrit Tiravanija, who has presented his works in contemporary art venues across the globe, and who usually confines his works to traditional exhibition spaces, offers several salient examples of projects that encourage viewers to participate directly in the generation of his artwork's meaning. In 1992 at 303 Gallery in New York, Tiravanija turned the gallery into a makeshift kitchen and dining area and cooked Thai food for gallery visitors, inviting them to interact with him as he cooked and to eat the food he prepared.¹⁵ At the 1993 Venice Biennale, Tiravanija placed in the exhibition space a metal gondola with a tub of boiling water lit by a gas ring in its center and offered his viewer-participants "instant" dehydrated Chinese soups that they could reconstitute with the water in the gondola and eat ("Berlin" 44; *Relational Aesthetics* 25, 47). In *Untitled (Tomorrow is Another Day)* from 1996-97 launched at the Kölnischer Kunstverein in Cologne, Tiravanija constructed a wooden to-scale model of his New York City apartment and opened it up to twenty-four-hour public use, inviting viewer-participants into his replicated home literally to live there and to engage in activities of daily life in the various rooms of the apartment—bathing, cooking, sleeping, and lounging.¹⁶ According to Tiravanija's colleague and sometimes collaborator, Liam Gillick, the model was used at all times of the day, included the early-morning hours, and by traditional and non-traditional museum-going visitors (Gillick 105), and appeared to have created a sense of "community" that was forged by direct access to a communal

¹⁵ For a further description of this "exhibition," see Jerry Saltz, "A Short History of Rirkrit Tiravanija" in *Art in America* (February 1996), 106, as well as Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 55-56.

¹⁶ For the show's exhibition catalogue, see Rirkrit Tiravanija and Udo Kittelmann, *Untitled, 1996 (Tomorrow Is Another Day)*, November 6, 1996-January 19, 1997, Kölnischer Kunstverein/Salon Verlag, Cologne.

space situated not, of course, completely outside the confines of capitalist production and consumption, but as far from its operations as might be possible in the contemporary moment: the show's curator noted that despite the fact that the apartment was open to all visitors at all times of day, unguarded and vulnerable to the vandalism typical of unsupervised spaces accessible to the public at night, the space was not damaged, and visitors used it as they would their own home or that of friends or family, concluding that "the art space lost its institutional function and finally turned into a free social space" (qtd. in "Antagonism" 68).



Fig. A. Rikrit Tiravanija, *Untitled (Tomorrow is Another Day)* 1996 (Installation View I)



Fig. B. Rikrit Tiravanija, *Untitled (Tomorrow is Another Day)* 1996 (Installation View II)

While Tiravanija and many of the artists of interest to Bourriaud confine their work to institutional exhibition spaces, artists such as the California-based Suzanne Lacy have taken their work outside the traditional spaces of the art world and have creatively orchestrated “collaborative encounters and conversations” across diverse communities (Kester 1). Lacy, for example, in her performance-based collaborative work, *The Roof is on Fire* from 1994, organized (along with Annice Jacoby and Chris Johnson) a series of improvisational dialogues amongst more than two hundred Black and Latino high school

students on a rooftop parking garage in downtown Oakland after teaching a media seminar to high school students in the community. As Kester describes the collaborative art event—where, as he explains, Lacy provided the context and the students the content—the students, seated in parked cars, were given the opportunity to articulate and discuss many of the problems facing African-American and Latino youth in California at the time, including racial profiling, media stereotypes, and underfunded public schools. More than a thousand Oakland residents as well as crews from local and national media satellites were invited to attend and listen to the students as they talked (Kester 3-5). In staging the rooftop dialogues as an “art” and performance event, it would appear that Lacy created a liminal situation, freed from the expectation usually faced by non-aesthetic community organizing or action for immediate efficacy—for an immediate social solution or for an outcome determined before the action begins—a situation that allowed the students in an open, exploratory, and collaborative way to begin to take hold of and to rearticulate the destructive stereotypical images and clichés of themselves disseminated by the media without producing an end product.¹⁷

It is difficult to group the wide variety of relational works produced during the last two decades together formally. They have, however, important elements in common: they all have as their primary “materials” or “media” relational interactivity and the creation of inter-subjective bonds, and they all thus invite the viewer to assist in the production not only of their formal structures but most importantly their contents or meanings. Indeed, for artists working with a relational aesthetic, the artwork no longer

¹⁷ This event did, however, eventually lead to further conversations and collaborations with the Oakland Police Department and resulted in the production of a videotape that the police department used in its community policing program (Kester 5).

serves as a self-enclosed mode of address or critique that stands outside the passive viewer with its form and content already made. It does not offer the viewer self-contained and already-made meaning to contemplate, nor does it attempt to educate the viewer—indeed as Bourriaud suggests, relational practice is “an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space” (*Relational Aesthetics* 14). Here, then, where the viewer is no longer the beholder but the co-creator of the work, this form of art practice invites the viewer to create the work’s meaning in the viewer’s interactions with the work and other viewers, such that, according to Bourriaud, the forms that the artist “presents to the public do not constitute an artwork until they are actually used and occupied by the people” (“Berlin” 45).

While the new relational art appears in its ephemeral and non-objective qualities to be a continuation of the critical ideas and practices of the avant-garde of the 60s, 70s, and 80s, these earlier artistic manifestations—which, like relational practices of the last two decades, concentrated at times on the creation of sociability and sociality—did not expand out into forms of direct social praxis; they never truly effaced the presence of the artist, turning the production of meaning almost completely over to the viewer-participant(s), nor did they situate themselves in already-existing social communities. Their forms of sociability were used instead, if we follow Bourriaud, primarily as forms of innovation and “linguistic subversion” and to broaden the boundaries and the definition of art, and as such they did not pursue “art’s capacities of resistance within the overall social arena” to the degree that the new relational aesthetic does today (31). Moreover, as Bourriaud further suggests, the artists of the 60s, 70s, and 80s who engaged

with sociability, such as those orchestrating Fluxus happenings and performances, gauged and planned the trajectory and even the outcome of their works, while contemporary relational artists have no idea of what the outcome of their work will be—indeed with contemporary relational practices, art is made in the spatial or social setting of its exhibition and reception or its activation and launch (40).¹⁸ In this context, then, where the relational artwork “is presented as a period of time to be lived through, like an opening to an unlimited discussion” (15), as an open process of co-constitution, both the work and the viewer’s subjectivity remain open to possibility, the possibility of new meanings and new understandings and of course new relationalities. What relational works ultimately create through their open and interactive processes and formal structures is, once again, new forms of “being-together,” of sociability and sociality or, in other words, new connections, bonds, and most importantly understandings between people. Indeed, as Bourriaud explains of the new art practice, “as part of a ‘relationist’ theory of art, inter-subjectivity does not only represent the social setting for the reception of art, which is its ‘environment’, its field (Bourdieu), but also becomes the quintessence of artistic practice” (22).

While the new relational art practices offer us, I believe, a very powerful though nascent alternative to the now defunct practices of ideological critique, “interference,” defamiliarization, etc., they have been subjected to fierce and plentiful criticism over the last decade. It is not surprising that the most ardent and substantive criticism leveled at the new relational aesthetic comes from critics steeped in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy as well as the work of neo-Marxist thinkers such as Ernesto Laclau, Étienne Balibar and

¹⁸ Unlike Bourriaud, Kester sees a direct link both formal and conceptual between relational art and the twentieth-century avant-garde. See in particular the introduction to *Conversation Pieces*.

Jacques Rancière, and from Rancière himself. These critics have understood the new relational art practices to be consensus producing practices, practices which, they believe, shut down the sphere of antagonism, struggle, and dissensus, and thus the sphere of the political, replacing it with the ethical. The clear clash between the highly interventionary and importantly political intentions of the artists, theorists and curators working with relational practices and the skepticism of their critics not only gives us the opportunity to explore the political potential of art—the potential of art to bring about lasting social change—but it also highlights and provides insight into the workings and the conflicts of the philosophical and aesthetic discourse of modernity in the contemporary moment as well as the very particular political dilemmas we face today in the context of informationalized and biopolitical capitalism. While the majority of criticism surrounding relational aesthetics has focused on what has been seen as its consensus-producing nature, the new practice has also been subjected to critique because its detractors believe that when relational practices are housed in art-world venues, they are usually situated in art spaces that differentiate themselves from traditional museums by their experimental and “art factory”-like ethos and thus, as critic Claire Bishop argues, “create a buzz of creativity and the aura of being in the vanguard of contemporary production,” so that these venues begin to function like a commodified “space of leisure and entertainment” (“Antagonism” 52). Bishop suggests, in fact, that in the context of the new experimental contemporary art venues, “project-based works-in-progress ... begin to dovetail with an ‘experience economy,’ the marketing strategy that seeks to replace goods and services with scripted and staged personal experiences” (52).

Bishop's observations are without doubt perceptive: it may be argued, in fact, that the venue-based work of an artist such as Tiravanija does not even require the "buzz" created by the fashionableness of the new and experimental contemporary art venue to function as a marketed or commodified experience. Indeed in its very conceptualization and construction—in its invitation to the viewer to enter it and inhabit it as a "leisure-time" or non-work activity, to eat in it, to be serviced by it, to sleep in it, and importantly to forget or put aside his or her daily life within its operations—this form of artistic practice appears to function much like the mundane spaces and experiences of consumption and the service industry that the subject (or the multitude) escapes to in its daily living to feel connected to others and to alleviate some of its general alienation, spaces and experiences such as Starbucks, the lifestyle-oriented restaurant, the mall, or the theme park. These spaces and experiences, while scripted, are certainly not personalized, but they do feel "valuable" to the subject because they replicate a sense of being-together or being-with-others. Yet it is exactly here, in this understanding of belonging in commodified spaces, where we need to be careful in our comparison of the experiences and spaces of commodification with the experience of relational artworks. While the spaces of Starbucks, the restaurant, the mall, and the theme park are again certainly scripted, they are scripted by Capital and not by the artist, and most importantly, they are not scripted for human interaction. In these spaces, which are built to accommodate relatively large groups of people at once, the subject is allowed to enter a "community"—a community, to be clear, of consumers, consumers who share the same lifestyle and consumer preferences—and to experience the company of others. But though the subject may feel as if it has entered into a community with which it shares an

ethos of living, the subject never directly interacts with others in this community. The subject is in no way obliged by the conceptual or marketing structure of the space or its scripted nature to acknowledge the presence of others or to relate to them—indeed the conceptual structure of the space is much more concerned with propagating fantasies of the “good life” or particular lifestyles than with facilitating relationality. Thus, while the scripted mise-en-scène of the commodified space’s marketing design allows the subject to feel as if it is in the company of those whose “values” it shares, the subject—because these spaces do not promote any real form of relationality but rather only fictions of togetherness based on “lifestyle”—is literally “alone in a crowd,” alienated in this fantastical space of consumption and even further alienated outside of it because its only understanding of community comes from such commodified encounters.

While there is no doubt that the high-profile exhibition venues for contemporary relational art as well as the works of internationally renowned relational artists may serve as facilitators for leisure and entertainment and that the experience and consumption of such cultural phenomena may be used to demarcate identity and status or to build “cultural capital”—while there is no doubt, in other words, that artworks and exhibition spaces have been commodified and colonized by Capital—the tendency of critics to group together as one relational artworks and contemporary spaces of consumption that offer the consumer-subject a scripted and commodified “experience” not only denies the complexity of the relationship between art and Capital but serves to evacuate relational art of its political and interventionary potential. Although relational art, especially those works launched in traditional art-world venues such as the installations/performances of Tiravanija, create highly conceptualized, designed and leisure-like experiences that

resemble the products of the “experience economy,” these works—while potentially designed by their artists either to be sold in order to generate income or to promote the artist’s reputation (or “brand”) in the art world so as to secure the future generation of revenue—are not entirely scripted by Capital; they are not structured, like the highly creative, innovative and aestheticized spaces, products and experiences fabricated by Capital to produce large-scale and sustained profit—they are not conceptualized, and their mise-en-scène is not designed, in other words, to generate revenue from the singular encounter of each human subject who interacts with them (though, again, they may be designed to maintain the “brand” of the artist who produces them).¹⁹ Instead these works, if we are to take at face value the claims of the artists and of curators such as Bourriaud, are brought into being in order to foster just the type of relationality that is foreclosed by the experiential spaces of Capital, by, for example, Starbucks, the restaurant, the mall, and the theme park. Indeed, relational artworks are conceptualized and designed to make possible not just the gathering-together of people but interactions between them. These

¹⁹ Artists, like academics, brand themselves primarily in order to achieve cultural value; revenue is, of course, a likely and often desired aim, but notoriety—professional recognition, cultural visibility—is far more important and, indeed, possible for the artist. The “brand” of the corporate product or the corporation itself must always translate cultural value into economic value. In contrast, the artist’s “brand” (unlike, for instance, the athlete’s, which must generate economic capital and is literally owned by the corporation) can stop at cultural value and, in most instances of high art—such as with the work of Tiravanija—is not owned by a corporation. Tiravanija does sell the leftover pieces of his installations, ostensibly generating profit, though he resists the notion that these commodities function as art objects: “Basically I started to make things so that people would have to use them, which means if you want to buy something then you have to use it...It’s not meant to be put out with other sculpture or like another relic and looked at, but you have to use it” (From the Catalogue text from the exhibition *Performance Anxiety*, April 19-July 6, 1997, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago). In 2004, Tiravanija was the recipient of the Hugo Boss Prize, which entails exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum and an award of \$50,000. Without doubt, this prize speaks to the broader relations—and dependencies—between the art world and Capital, but in the case of the individual artist, monetary profit still remains relatively insignificant in relation to the profits generated by corporations through their creation and dissemination of cultural or intellectual property, or, in other words, their brand. Relational art and artists have by no means escaped the relations of Capital, but perhaps this art form offers us the first inklings of the notion—or the possibility—of a social and cultural reality in which cultural value does not translate automatically into economic value. Relational artworks can, at least, prompt us to ask what such a reality might look like.

artworks put into place the conditions of possibility of dialogue and exchange and importantly visibility. In these works, the viewer-participant is encouraged by the mise-en-scène to encounter other viewers, as Bourriaud argues, as “neighbors,” acknowledging their presence and interacting with them directly (*Relational Aesthetics* 45). The relational artwork then creates a context of sociability that is impossible in the commodified spaces of Capital—it is the relational work’s removal, in fact, of mundane experiences, such as dining in a group or the privatized and commodified experience of domestic living, from the realm of the commodity, and its placement of these experiences into the context of art, that ultimately encourages the viewer to confront the other in a relational way, that ultimately persuades the viewer to reach out to the other and to interact with him or her. The placement of these experiences in the liminal, sometimes performative, and therefore often freeing context of an artwork, while certainly defamiliarizing, does not, however, shock the viewer but instead, in its strangeness and novelty, begins to break down those experiences of difference, created and naturalized by the “lifestyle” fictions engendered and enforced in the commodified spaces of Capital, that keep us fearing and separate from each other, making sociability once again possible. Most importantly, what differentiates the new relational artworks from the aestheticized and innovative experiential products of Capital is that they are free at least structurally, in the way that the creative and aestheticized productions of Capital are not, to innovate beyond the norm—that they have at least structurally some autonomy from the market, an autonomy that grants them the potential to innovate to the point of changing worlds and of innovating Capital out of existence. The realm of art or the aesthetic, in other words, as a realm that still holds some autonomy from everyday life and from the direct pressures

of the market, is structurally poised to innovate us beyond what is known and what can be thought.

Even as critics of relational art have been troubled by its close resemblance to the products of Capital's "experience economy," these critics have been even more concerned with what they believe is the tendency of relational art and its supporters to champion without question this artistic practice as a form of political (or democratic) praxis specifically because it produces human relationships. Critics such as Claire Bishop have suggested in contrast to the practitioners and supporters of relational art that artists working in the relational mode, particularly those such as Tiravanija who "exhibit" in traditional art venues, are not engaging in a political activity, but rather aim to produce interpersonal relations as their own end, not as a means to political insight or impact ("Antagonism" 68).²⁰ Indeed, the only politicality Bishop can detect in relational practices of artists such as Tiravanija—and for Bishop this politicality is very weak—is that these practices advocate dialogue over monologue, but, for Bishop, this dialogue is not democratic since she feels all political questions raised by relational practices return to the "hackneyed nonissue" or the irrelevant question of "is this art?" (68). While the

²⁰ Here, Bishop leaves the most succinct articulation of this problem to Bourriaud himself, by quoting him admittedly out of context: "To be fair, I think that Bourriaud recognizes this problem—but he does not raise it in relation to the artists he promotes: 'Connecting people, creating interactive, communicative experience,' he says, 'What for? If you forget the 'what for?' I'm afraid you're left with simple Nokia art—producing interpersonal relations for their own sake and never addressing their political aspects'" ("Antagonism" 67-8). It is worth noting Bishop's use of this quote both because these words do, in fact, best articulate her objection, and because these words, offered by Bourriaud in a 2001 *ArtForum* interview, were intended to describe a problem to which he believed relational art served to respond. In this section of the interview, Bourriaud speaks of "the early-90s crisis in the art market" that led galleries to open themselves up to "unsalable and immaterial kinds of art projects," noting that "Of course, one fears that these artists may have transformed themselves under the pressure of the market into a kind of merchandising of relations and experience," the sentence spoken directly before the ones Bishop cites (Simpson, Bennett. "Public Relations: Nicolas Bourriaud Interview." *ArtForum*, April 2001). From Bourriaud's perspective, it was the potential of art to lose its political aspect that was addressed by the rise of relational art: for Bourriaud, in the context of the production of immaterial and experiential art for the sake of marketability, the relational art "movement" made a *point* of asking "What for?"

critics of relational art clearly object to what they see as the a-politicality of the practice (and of course to the notion that the production of relationality or community is automatically political (“Antagonism” 65)), they feel nonetheless that the type of relationality or community produced by the new relational art is, in many instances, not just a-political but politically suspect. Indeed, most critics of relational art argue that the practice has had the tendency to engender homogeneous communities and an a-political form of consensus as it builds sociability and relationality. Art historian and critic Miwon Kwon, for instance, believes that relational art forms that are enacted outside the traditional art space and in the social at large often build uniform totalities that assert the identity of the collective over the particular identities of its members and, most troublingly, gain their collective identity from the exclusion of those seen as other, in effect creating essentialized (and even “fascist”) communities of exclusion. She is particularly suspicious of artworks that organize already-existing communities with a strong sense of group identity based on shared values (i.e. religious, social, ethnic), as she feels that these works tend to result in projects that affirm the group’s identity or sense of self, as well as each individual member’s, and thus lead to an uncritical embrace of the fiction of the collective, a fiction that she believes is in most instances created by the hegemonic social order.²¹ Similarly, Claire Bishop, in analyzing relational practices that are enacted in traditional art spaces, argues that community in these contexts is formed in a “harmonious” manner and functions as what Bourriaud calls a “microtopia” only because viewer-participants share something in common, i.e. their socioeconomic class

²¹ See Kwon, *One Place After Another*, Chapter 5: “The (Un)sitings of Community,” especially pp. 146-49.

(“Antagonism” 67, 68), and only, moreover, because this commonality “is based on exclusion of that which hinders and threatens the harmonious order” (69 n. 49).

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of relational art for its critics is that in what they believe is its homogenization of its viewer-participants, this art form replicates the consensus-making practices of liberal politics, the practices that they feel erase divisions and internal difference among subjects and thereby leave no space for disagreement and dissensus, ensuring the erasure of political dissent. The editors of the volume *Communities of Sense*, a collection of essays which attempts to rethink aesthetics, community and politics in the context of globalized and informationalized capitalism, are highly critical of relational art forms that they believe adopt, like the work of Lacy, “the model of art as public service,” arguing that “[a]rt in the public interest often presents the public good as consensus and replaces the disagreement of politics with a conciliatory and unproblematic approach to ideas of the public” (18). In the same volume art historian Toni Ross claims that Bourriaud “decants dissent from the adaptive and pragmatic sociability of relational aesthetics” through his understanding of relational art and importantly social reality as the “production of negotiation,” and, in evacuating art of its potential for dissent, Bourriaud, she argues, advocates not a novel democratic or political form but rather one that mirrors “the assumptions of liberal consensus politics” (Ross 86). Claire Bishop, on the other hand, referring once again to the output of artists such as Tiravanija, rails against relational works that “offer an experience of transcendent human empathy that smoothes over the awkward situation before us” (“Antagonism” 79). Eschewing art forms, then, that in their production of social relations, the critics of relational art believe, foster wholeness, reconciliation, or consensus, these critics

advocate instead for a different form of community than one built on harmony or “immanent togetherness” (“Antagonism” 67)—a community of dissensus or, as the editors of the volume *Communities of Sense* propose following Jean-Luc Nancy, a “contingent and non-essential manner of being-together in a community whose coherence is no more than a fiction or a potentiality and a manner of being” that “works at being-together only through consistent dismantling of any idealized common ground, form, or figure” (“Introduction” 2).

In calling for a non-essential form of community, the critics of relational art are clearly reacting both to the rise of what the editors of *Communities of Sense* point to as “the violent recrudescence of various nationalist or fundamentalist forms of communitarian politics” since the fall of the Berlin Wall (2, 16), and the evacuation of the political in the contemporary moment of capitalism through the minimizing of political difference and dissent by enforced negotiation and consensus, but these critics are also guided by their embrace of the work of theorists such Laclau & Mouffe and Rancière, whose theoretical framework relies on a politics of antagonism and struggle. In following the work of these contemporary theorists, the critics of relational art have created for themselves a vision of the political where the very conditions of possibility not only of the political but of society itself exist as conflict, division and instability. In this understanding of the political and the social, as Claire Bishop lays it out following Laclau and Mouffe in *Hegemony*,

... a fully functioning democratic society is not one in which all antagonisms have disappeared, but one in which new political frontiers are constantly being drawn and brought into debate—in other words, a democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are sustained, not erased. Without antagonism there is only the imposed

consensus of authoritarian order—a total suppression of debate and discussion, which is inimical to democracy. (“Antagonism” 65-66)

Likewise, for these theorists following Rancière, society can never fully constitute itself as a complete whole or what Rancière calls a “sum of its parts with nothing left over” (*Disagreement* 123). This is because the social in this model is always conceptualized as a space of exclusion, a space where one or more of society’s parts goes uncounted. Indeed in this model, where the social is always understood as a divided entity, politics will “exist,” as Rancière argues, “wherever the count of parts and parties of society is disturbed by the inscription of a part of those who have no part” (123). The political comes into being, in other words, when “the part that has no part” within society demands to be counted and recognized. Politics then, and importantly society itself, in the theories of Laclau & Mouffe and Rancière that have been adopted by the critics of relational art (as well as in the theories of Žižek and Hardt & Negri), can only be conceptualized as unending social struggle and change.

Armed with this understanding of politics as continuous social struggle and change derived from the works of Laclau & Mouffe and Rancière, it is not surprising that the critics of relational art have been able to see this art form only as an a-political or exclusively ethical practice. Indeed, it is because relational works strive to repair or recreate the social bond through the production of new forms of relationality rather than maintain the social as a divided and antagonistic entity that by definition (at least the definition of politics offered by their critics) they cannot be conceptualized by their critics as political; again, they can only be understood as ethical, and ethical in the scheme of relational art’s critics cannot be conceptualized as political precisely because

the political here is understood only as struggle and antagonism. In a similar way, the critics of relational art feel that the primacy of the ethical in relational artworks has minimized the aesthetic qualities of these works, such that it has become very difficult to ascertain what in them is actually of an aesthetic nature instead of purely social or ethical nature. Critics such as Bishop are particularly troubled by the fact that the rise to prominence of relational art and the writings of its promoters such as Bourriaud have led many critics of contemporary art to begin to assess the quality of artworks on the basis of “political, moral and ethical” judgments instead of on the basis of aesthetic judgment (“Antagonism” 77). For these critics—who, according to Bishop, are now judging the “relations” that are produced by relational artworks instead of their aesthetic form, but who have no idea of how to judge the quality of these relations (“Antagonism” 64, 65)—better politics equals better art (“Antagonism” 77). According to Bishop, “this is partly because postmodernism has attacked the very notion of aesthetic judgment, and partly because contemporary art solicits the viewer’s literal interaction in ever more elaborate ways (“Antagonism” 77).

The followers of Laclau & Mouffe and Rancière in the fields of art history and art criticism are not the only thinkers who have come to understand relational art as purely a-political and ethical. Rancière himself, in his recent writings on aesthetics, has similarly argued that relational art as well as other art forms which attempt to repair and recreate the social bond are operating in a manner in which “[u]ltimately, both politics and aesthetics vanish in ethics” (“Contemporary Art” 40). Rancière’s dismissal of art forms which attempt to recreate the social bond, including relational artworks, as ethical instead of political stems, of course, from his particular theorization of politics as struggle, but it

also arises from, importantly, his understanding of art and aesthetics in the modern period. For Rancière, “Art,” as it has taken shape from the French Revolution to the fall of the Berlin Wall, is a specifically modern phenomenon with a very specific character, a modern phenomenon whose positivity, whose ability to be seen or “sensed,” is produced by a historically specific “frame of visibility or intelligibility,” one that, like all historical frames, is very much open to contestation and change (31). The frame of visibility or intelligibility that grants positivity to art in modernity, according to Rancière, is formed of a dialectical and paradoxical relationship, where he points to two “equalities” of the aesthetic that are at the same time opposed and tied together: one in which art becomes equal to life by subsuming itself in life, and one in which art, by removing itself from “the forms of sensory connection proper either to the objects of knowledge or to the objects of desire” and constituting itself as a “separate form of human experience,” becomes “‘free appearance’ responding to free play” and, as such, elicits “a nonhierarchical relation between the intellectual and the sensory faculties,” a relation, in other words, of equality (36, 37-8). Indeed, for Rancière, art is identified “in the interplay of the two forms of equality attached to its separateness and its inseparateness”; it is identified “through the dialectic of its autonomy and its heteronomy” (41). In Rancière’s theorization of modern art, political or critical art is an art that specifically negotiates this relation between art as an autonomous form of human experience and art as immersed in everyday life. A political or critical art is, for Rancière, “a sort of third way” between the two equalities of aesthetics (41), a practice, he argues, which, taking the form of collage or montage, “weaves” its way between the two equalities, setting up forms of heterogeneity or, more precisely, making possible “the encounter, and possibly the clash,

of heterogeneous elements,” including the two equalities of sense—a clash, or a “dialectical collision or dissensus,” which is supposed to “provoke a break in our perception, to disclose some secret connection of things hidden behind everyday reality” (41). According to Rancière, this clash is “the flash that enlightens,” but it can only be produced if the heterogeneity of the entities brought together “resists the homogeneity of meaning” (42); each heterogeneous element is to remain “opaque” and is to “enhance political energy” through this very opaqueness. In the end then for Rancière, “the ... juxtaposition of heteroclite elements” such as art and non-art or autonomous art and art immersed in everyday life—a juxtaposition which is, Rancière claims, in its very nature a juxtaposition “endowed with a political power”—appears as “a dialectical clash playing witness to a political reality of conflict” (42).

When approaching art of the present moment, especially relational art, Rancière sees none of the tensions described above at work—there is no radical heterogeneity, no juxtaposition, no clash. The artwork of the present, as Rancière understands it, does not, like its modern predecessors, shock its viewer; it does not engage in defamiliarization or attempt to “provoke a break in our perception,” and it certainly does not attempt to reveal hidden connections, secrets, or powers concealed by “the prose of bourgeois life” (41). In fact, for Rancière, “the dialectical form of the aesthetic dissensus” that granted modern art its political energy has been broken apart, in the contemporary moment, into four compellingly discerned “forms,” or four different modes of artistic operating: these forms are, as Rancière describes them, the *joke*, the *collection*, the *invitation*, and the *mystery* (46-7). With the *joke*, the dialectical tension between heterogeneous elements found in modern artworks is turned into a game played, Rancière suggests, “on the very

indiscernability between procedures that unveil secrets of power” and on the procedures of delegitimization and domination produced by the media, commercial entertainment or advertising. The joke becomes a “game,” according to Rancière, instead of political revelation, because—though the clash of heterogeneous elements points to the unveiling of some form of political secret—no secret is unveiled, precisely because the process of delegitimization has been evacuated of its political efficacy by the cooptation of this process (or what Žižek would call revolutionizing) by Capital’s various forms of media (43, 46). In the *collection*, heterogeneous elements such as artworks, personal photographs, daily-use objects, advertisements, and commercial videos are brought together as they were in modern art, not, however, “to provoke a critical clash,” Rancière argues, but rather as an attempt at “collecting the traces and testimonies of a common world and a common history” and in an effort to serve as a form of recollection and a way in which to evoke, through the equal weight given to each object in the collection, “the life of a community”(46). The *invitation*, as Rancière conceptualizes it, is the category under which relational art falls. In this form, the artist invites the viewer into the artwork to participate in the construction of its meaning and, in the process, to generate new connections and relations with other viewer-participants (47). With Rancière’s last form, the *mystery*, which as he explains does not mean “enigma” or “mysticness,” heterogeneous elements are juxtaposed not to emphasize “the heterogeneity of the elements in order to show reality framed by antagonisms” as was the case in modern art, but rather to create an analogy, “a familiarity of the strange, witnessing to a common world—where heterogeneous realities are woven in the same fabric and can always be related to one another by the fraternity of a metaphor” (47). The “logic of the mystery,”

for Rancière, is “a testimony of co-presence,” and it is one radically different from the logic of dissensus of the modern artwork (48).

Indeed, for Rancière, the logic of mystery, or what he calls “symbolism,” permeates all four forms of contemporary art he charts, and the rise to prominence of symbolism in contemporary art indicates, he argues, the emergence of a new “frame of visibility or intelligibility,” or a new “aesthetics of politics,” which he describes as “the way politics frames a common stage.” This new frame or aesthetics of politics, according to Rancière, takes the form, unsurprisingly, of “consensus” (48). For Rancière, however,

...[c]onsensus does not simply mean the agreement of the political parties or of social partners on the common interests of the community. It means a reconfiguration of the visibility of the common. It means that the givens of any collective situation are objectified in such a way that they can no longer lend themselves to a dispute, to the polemical framing of a controversial world within the given world. In such a way, consensus properly means the dismissal of the ‘aesthetics of politics.’” (48)

It is this new a-political frame of consensus that, according to Rancière, has given to art its new shape in the contemporary moment, a shape that Rancière, of course, understands as ethical. In the new ethical art, he argues, all forms of conflict and struggle, all forms of dissensus, are replaced by processes of inclusion, by the concern for “empowering threatened identities,” as well as “reframing a sense of community” and repairing the social bond. Not only does Rancière argue that this new form of contemporary art reconfigures the political in the form of the ethical, and in the process suppresses the autonomy of art, but he most strongly suggests that the “reversal of the modernist paradigm of the politicity of art” follows the trend set by “French aesthetic thought of the eighties,” including the work of Roland Barthes, Jean-Luc Goddard, and Jean-François

Lyotard, of dissolving “political dissensuality in an archipolitics of exception and terror from which only a Heideggerian God can save us” (40).²²

These are harsh words, and they are clearly a testament to Rancière’s commitment to the aesthetics and most significantly the politics of modernity, particularly in the form of Marxist politics. I have devoted a good portion of the dissertation, with the aid of the work of Foucault and Baudrillard, to a discussion of what I understand as the highly problematic nature of modern political theory, particularly Marxist or productivist theory. While Rancière’s theories both political and aesthetic do not attend directly to the productivist nature of Marxist theory, as does the work of Hardt & Negri for example, his conceptualization of politics as division or struggle places his work squarely in the camp of Marxism and modern theory generally, and in the end leads to a politics of antagonism and conflict and a vision of the social based not only on fragmentation and dissensus but on radical instability, rupture and change as well. It also leads to an aesthetic theory that privileges, through the “dialectical clash” of heterogeneous elements, shock as well as defamiliarization and disorientation, and at times to a type of sensory and intellectual violence perpetrated against the viewer. There is no doubt that within the framework of Rancière’s political and aesthetic visions, it will be difficult for consensus to take shape. But it will also be difficult for any dialogical or concordant manner of relationality to be formed—and this is what, in my opinion, is most troubling about the neo-Marxist theories not only of Rancière but of Žižek and Hardt & Negri as well. In a social context

²² Rancière defines the term Archi-Politics (*L’Archi-politique*) in his “Glossary of Technical Terms” to *The Politics of Aesthetics*: “The prototype of archi-politics, one of the three major types of political philosophy, is to be found in Plato’s attempt to establish a community based on the integral manifestation of its *logos* in material form. The activities of individual citizens are regulated in relation to their role in the organization of the communal body in such a way that everyone has a designated space and an assigned role. The democratic configuration of politics is thereby replaced by the police order of a living *nomos* that saturates the entire community and precludes any breaks in the social edifice” (83).

such as the one we inhabit today—where Capital’s production of radical and alienating difference, through its discourses of consumption, through its production of imaginary ideals and fantasies of success and the good life as well as differentiated and isolated social and cultural “identities,” has shattered and continues to make impossible a shared system of meaning and any form of social bond developed outside the operating structures of capitalist production and the forms of liberal consensus-making that have been called into being to negotiate and manage the social fragmentation produced by Capital’s discourses of consumption, so that Capital may continue to operate—it seems almost counterintuitive to advocate for Marxist and especially modern models of politics and visions of the social which are based fundamentally on division, struggle, conflict or antagonism. The social bond in the contemporary moment, on both the universal and particular level, on the level of both institutions and singular individuals, despite Hardt & Negri’s claims to the contrary, has been so shattered by the new (globalized and informationalized) relations of Capital that—at least in “developed” countries and amongst those who are not “poor” in Hardt & Negri’s terms—the multitude no longer knows how to relate to each other, and, as such, has great difficulty forging intersubjective bonds and building community outside the very regulated structures that Capital has in place to regulate the multitude’s lives. In this context, instigating fragmentation upon fragmentation hardly seems a viable model for any kind of social change.

Under these conditions it also seems highly problematic—especially if we believe that the aesthetic may function as a means of social change, as do so many of the thinkers I have touched upon in this dissertation—to theorize the political potentials of the

aesthetic as resting on the procedures of shock, defamiliarization, disorientation and ultimately the sensory and intellectual violence that Rancière and art critics of a younger generation, such as Bishop and Kwon, advocate. There is no doubt that during the 20th century, with the work of the avant-garde, the procedures of shock, defamiliarization and sensory disorientation were effective at least at producing new sensations and forcing the viewer to rethink his or her standard assumptions (though, once again, by the late 20th century the efficacy of these tactics was already beginning to wane). However, in the contemporary globalized and informationalized social, where Capital has taken over these procedures for itself in order to create the sensory and intellectual conditions (including the fragmentation, individualization and disorientation or destabilization of the consumer-viewer-subject) required for the production of consumption and its own reproduction, these procedures have become less and less meaningful. The contemporary consumer-viewer-subject is in fact becoming immune to these tactics once used by the avant-garde and now colonized by Capital, since, as the standard and recycled operating procedure of Capital, these tactics themselves and the “clashes” they produce can now no longer shock and thus can no longer generate anything truly new.

What these tactics do generate in the contemporary viewer is ultimately further alienation and unease. In her attack of relational art, Bishop, like Rancière, positions the art of shock, defamiliarization and discomfort as the positive political counterpoint to what she sees as the a-political and even deleterious, because consensus-producing, nature of relational art, and she offers up the work of the Spanish artist Santiago Sierra as a promising model of the type of defamiliarizing art that is being produced in the contemporary moment. In his artworks, Sierra invokes and indeed employs the

exploitation of the other both to alienate and to produce discomfort in the viewer and thus, as Bishop suggests, to educate the viewer (“Antagonism” 70, 79). In many of his works in the new millennium, Sierra “hires” street vendors, illegal immigrants, or those on the “fringes” of society (“collaborators from diverse socio-economic backgrounds,” as Bishop calls them (70)) to take part in his work as “actors.” Sierra orchestrates scenarios in which violence of various degrees is enacted upon his “collaborators”—they are tattooed, placed under cardboard boxes, submitted to hair bleaching, and made to masturbate—in order to call attention to the fact that those at the “fringes” of society are willing to do almost anything for money, even take part in an art project that demeans, exploits, or enacts violence upon them, and as such to reveal the exploitative nature of the relations of Capital. Even if we accept Bishop’s particular interpretation of Sierra’s work in which she understands his art forms not as a cataloguing of capitalist exploitation but rather as “a kind of ethnographic realism, in which the outcome or unfolding of his action forms an indexical trace of the economic and social reality of the place in which he works” (70), it is difficult to believe that the humiliation and violence Sierra enacts upon his “collaborators” is worth the supposed lesson Bishop claims Sierra’s viewers are taught—“the impossibility of a “microtopia” (70)—by having to confront their unease and discomfort in the face of their participation in such a spectacle.

Sierra’s work, as well as Bishop’s enthusiasm surrounding it, begs the question: Today, in the age of globalization, must we be exposed to a spectacular—and, I would argue, gratuitous—replication of exploitation in order to be made aware of the exploitative relations of Capital, especially as it affects migrant workers, illegal aliens, and other disenfranchised members of the multitude? Bishop, I fear, as well as Rancière,

would argue that the viewer's immediate confrontation with the exploitation of the other in the context of art—a confrontation that makes the viewer ultimately complicit with this exploitation by virtue of the fact that s/he participates in the unfolding of the artwork's meaning—forces the viewer to face directly what s/he chooses to ignore, and can ignore, in his or her daily life as s/he weaves her way through the exploitive spaces of Capital. But again, does the viewer require this experience in order to confront the realities of exploitation in his or her daily life, and will this confrontation have any effect on the viewer? The answer is most likely no. If we return to Žižek's theorization of ideology discussed above, the subject is already aware of the “hidden” social relations that ideology critique attempts to unveil, and thus the tactics of ideology critique such as shock and defamiliarization have become less and less effective today—as they have greater difficulty producing new meanings or new sensations and greater difficulty compelling the subject to act. Indeed, in the context of contemporary capitalism, the subject is already too depoliticized by the relations of consumption and the loss of a shared system of meaning that these relations have brought into being, and too traumatized by the fragmented and shattered social spaces and relations which it inhabits, to act on its knowledge—to do something about that which it “knows.” This does not mean, however, that there exists no collective desire for social justice and a new form of social relationality amongst the multitude. I would argue that on the contrary, the multitude does crave something new, a new and imaginative form of sociality to help it (including those who are excluded) repair the social bond. Indeed, the multitude possesses a collective desire for innovation and thinking community beyond the fragmented experiences of community produced by Capital and championed by neo-

Marxists philosophers, a desire that sits in tandem with the multitude's fear of difference and one another, a desire that is not yet powerful enough in its own right (not yet harnessed, indeed, by the artist) to lead the multitude to relate to one another on the basis of its collective longing. This desire manifests itself most explicitly in the multitude's voracious appetite for those fantastical and speculative fictions, produced, of course, by Capital (i.e. the tale of *Harry Potter*, the *X-Men* comic books and films, the "Heroes" television series, *The Lord of the Rings* films (with the subsequent revival of Tolkien's trilogy), the recent film *Avatar*, and a whole array of narratives offered up as entertainment by Hollywood and mainstream publishing), which offer the multitude a glimpse, no matter how escapist, idealized and commodified, of a better, more integrated world. In the contemporary moment, it is Capital that has hold of this powerful ethical and indeed political impulse—one might argue that it is Capital that cultivates or even produces this impulse. But whether the origins of this impulse derive from the multitude's direct experience of social fragmentation and alienation or from the spectacular productions of Capital's media machinery (it is most likely a combination of both), this impulse is without doubt ripe for harnessing by the artist.

The possibility of harnessing this impulse, however, requires an aesthetic practice radically different from the practices of shock, defamiliarization, disorientation, and ultimately violence advocated by thinkers such as Kwon, Bishop and Rancière. It requires a far more imaginative, interactive, and immersive art, an art that moves beyond the above tactics as well as beyond critique and pedagogy, transforming itself into a form of social praxis, while at the same time retaining its aesthetic autonomy. It calls, then, for a utopian ethos that is capable of envisioning possibility, while at the same time keeping in

mind the problematic conditions of the contemporary moment that must be overcome; this ethos must, more precisely, be capable of envisioning socialities and subjectivities radically different from those of today, striving to bring them into being. It is no coincidence that artists working in the present moment in the relational mode, or in the ethico-political modes of the collection, the invitation, or the mystery that Rancière outlines, share the same political impulses as the multitude, the impulses for relationality, community and the repair of the social bond. We can deny or disparage these impulses as do Kwon, Bishop, Ross, and Rancière, and read them as depoliticized ethical impulses that serve as further indications of the ways in which Capital guarantees the consensus it needs to operate—after all, the artist is a part of the multitude and is just as susceptible to Capital’s colonizations and cultivations of the unconscious through the media, or to its discourse of consumption, as any other member of the multitude. Or we can understand the artist as something of a barometer, one who, though deeply immersed in the capitalist system, is able to see, in response to the ethico-political impulses of the multitude which it shares, just how we might harness the potential of these impulses (even if they may be generated by Capital) in order to bring us beyond capitalism and perhaps beyond modernity itself.

If we are indeed willing to conceptualize the artist as a possible barometer, then we may begin to understand the contemporary artist’s turn to the ethico-political as a sign that a new form of the political is greatly needed in the contemporary moment. Like the new theologian, the contemporary artist is indicating to us that the social bond is in dire need of repair. It is not surprising, then, that art and theology are revisiting each other in the contemporary moment and that notions of “re-enchantment,” or the recreation of a

shared system of meaning and thus a shared bond, are returning to the forefront of the concerns of artists. Indeed, it might possible to see the new forms of art that Rancière charts—not necessarily the joke, but the collection, the invitation, and especially the mystery that he argues permeates all four forms—as so many attempts at “re-enchantment,” as “theological” at their very foundations. But though it appears to share the concern for re-enchantment, for the repair of the social bond, and as such appears to be theological in nature, the new contemporary art should not be grouped together with theology—while both practices do indeed share a strong ethico-political ethos and speak to the contemporary need to recreate a shared system of meaning and to repair the social bond, it is art that truly provides us with the means to accomplish these goals.

While both theology and art have been colonized by Capital—their practices and their ethos incorporated into the capitalist system’s relations of production and consumption²³—and, as such, seem to be submerged in a socio-cultural context of “de-differentiation” where the cultural has been collapsed back into the social in a manner similar to the way it was in premodernity,²⁴ both theology and art do still retain a degree of autonomy from the social in the contemporary moment—they retain, that is, a small measure of autonomy from the structures of profit and efficiency of Capital—and do still function, at least somewhat, on the basis of their own autonomous logics. The autonomous logic of theology, however, while concerned with relationality and the social bond, does not lend itself to the processes of radical experimentation with the norm and of world-generation as does the logic of art. The logic of theology, in fact, is one that sets

²³ For an initial discussion of theology’s relation to capitalism as well as a bibliography of further sources on the subject, see James K. A. Smith’s introduction to *After Modernity*.

²⁴ For a discussion of de-differentiation, see Scott Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism*, Chapters 6 and 7.

norms and preserves or conserves rather than generates worlds (and here one may argue that it conserves a particularly premodern set of norms and a premodern vision of the social). Art's logic, on the other hand, is one of radical innovation and openness, a logic of possibility and the new. Thus while both theology and art are able to retain some autonomy from the structures of profit and efficiency of Capital, it is art whose structural logic grants it the power to imagine new shared systems of meaning and to begin to repair the social bond. This is because art's structural logic allows it to innovate to the point of changing worlds and of innovating Capital out of existence; to innovate, in other words, beyond the norm, beyond what is already known, and beyond what can be thought.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, relational artists and those working in various ethico-political modes are using the autonomy of the aesthetic and the power of innovation to create liminal spaces where we can experiment with new forms of relationality outside, even if only slightly, of Capital, outside the social norms or the lifestyle fantasies and identities as well as the expectations of efficiency and profit that determine our ways of living and our ways of understanding each other in the world. These new liminal spaces, in allowing us to produce relationality outside of Capital—if only fleetingly—open up the potential, in ways that the modernist practices of clash, juxtaposition, defamiliarization and disorientation never could, for truly new experiences both sensory and intellectual, new experiences of relationality and community. Indeed, they allow us to experiment with the multitude's desire for relationality and community in spaces that exist at a slight remove from the pressures of capitalist consumption and production. While relational art's critics accuse the new relational practices of mirroring the consensus-making practices of liberal politics, relational art is in fact designed in

most instances not to produce consensus but rather dialogue, dialogue across difference. Indeed, I would argue that relational art practices are attempting to recreate a shared system of meaning so that differences may proliferate within a context of mutual understanding instead of in a vacuum, as they do in the contemporary capitalist system. The liberal or capitalist practices of consensus-making are certainly not working to build a bond of mutual understanding across difference—it is Capital itself, as we will recall, that served to destroy our shared system of meaning—instead they are working to preserve the status quo or more precisely the policies of neo-liberal capitalism that allow for the unchecked development of the globe and the continued reproduction of the capitalist system.

It seems then that the critics of relational art have collapsed the dialogue-producing practices of relational art into the practices of liberal-capitalist consensus-making without giving sufficient thought to their differences or, most troublingly, without considering the truly ruptured and alienating nature of the contemporary social system. Only such oversight would misunderstand or dismiss the political potential of relational practices that attempt to reinstitute dialogue—dialogue that takes place at as far a remove from the space of Capital as can possibly be reached in the contemporary moment (and this remove, again, is located in the space of art)—between the fractured and fragmented “singularities” of the multitude. It seems to me that only a lack of imagination or an inflexible adherence to a theoretical or methodological position would allow for an inability to differentiate and separate notions of consensus from notions of mutual understanding across difference, notions of the inclusion into the status quo or the amelioration of wrongs from a dialogue that, in fostering mutual trust, could engender a

political coalition that could potentially destroy the status quo or the reigning system of Capital. It would be a gross oversight indeed if we dismissed, in relational art, a forum where the members of the multitude might actually begin to speak to each other about Capital. It is the naturalization of capitalism, I would argue, more so than the consensus-producing mechanisms of this system, that has prevented the multitude from acting politically against it. What if relational art, then, created the space for dialogue not to right wrongs that have been perpetrated nor to produce understanding for the sake of understanding, but to forge the communities and the understandings that will allow the multitude to denaturalize Capital, to see its operations and exploitations and to begin to throw it off? To dismiss an opportunity for dialogue of this sort is to dismiss any opportunity the multitude might seize to throw off Capital and to reappropriate the communicative means of production. Contrary to Hardt & Negri's idealized notion of workplace cooperation, the multitude has yet to attain the mutual understanding that might lead to organization; such understanding can come only from the ability to recognize the operations and effects of Capital. If there is any medium left in which the multitude might discover a space in which to see Capital as well as each other, it is indeed relational art, which might yet serve to provide the structure to train the multitude to communicate with itself and thus distinguish, here inside its naturalized existence within Capital, the shape and extent of Capital's influence.

But while relational art may serve as a highly valuable form of social praxis and as a discovery ground for new forms of social relationality, it is still too modest in its conceptualizations, its practices, and in its ambitions to serve as an aesthetic model for large-scale and systemic social change, or what Claire Bishop calls "the transformation of

public culture” (“Antagonism” 69). While proponents of relational art such as Bourriaud rightly argue that this practice possesses a very specific emancipatory ethos—one Bourriaud claims is similar to that of the early 20th-century avant-garde, in that it is concerned with “changing culture, attitudes and mentalities, and individual and social living conditions” (*Relational Art* 12)—it is not, as Bourriaud explains, future-oriented, but rather concerned with interventions into the present moment. Indeed, Bourriaud speaks of relational art forms as “little services rendered” or as “little gestures” where “art is like an angelic programme, a set of tasks carried out beside or beneath the real economic system, so as to patiently re-stitch the relational fabric (36). Defending what he sees as the more present-oriented nature of the new relational art, Bourriaud states:

“Today’s fight for modernity is being waged in the same terms as yesterday’s, barring the fact that the avant-garde has stopped patrolling like some scout, the troop having come to a cautious standstill around a bivouac of certainties. Art was intended to prepare and announce a future world: today it is modeling possible universes” (13). But once again, the “possible universes” to which Bourriaud refers are intentionally small-scale ones. Bourriaud, in fact, sees this modest project as similar to what Jean Francois Lyotard has envisioned for postmodern architecture, which is, as Lyotard argues and Bourriaud cites, “condemned to create a series of minor modifications in a space whose modernity it inherits, and abandon an overall reconstruction of the space inhabited by humankind” (13). For Bourriaud, this condemnation to the minor is not a limiting structure. Rather it allows artists working in the relational mode to “spread their wings” and to learn “*to inhabit the world in a better way*, instead of trying to construct it based on a preconceived idea of historical evolution. Otherwise put, the role of artworks is no longer to form

imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real...” (13). The artist, Bourriaud argues, “dwells in the circumstances the present offers him, so as to turn the setting of his life (his links with the physical and conceptual world) into a lasting world” (14).

This world that the relational artist creates, if we follow Bourriaud here, seems to function less as a means of social change and more as a device of compensation. Here, where art functions something like a laboratory where both the artwork and the viewer/participant serve as elements in an experiment in art and sociality, the relational project appears small and conservative, even as it moves outside the confines of the usual context of art—its familiar homes in galleries and exhibition spaces—and enters into the social at large.²⁵ In every instance, the true indicator of relational art’s minor scale is in its focus—stemming, of course, from its concerns with everyday relationality and all that Bourriaud notes above—on the social particular rather than the social universal. What relational art must expand, if it is to serve as an agent of social change, is the scope of its aims: it must target the social *systemically*, working to shift the symbolic order, the mode of being of language. As I have argued in response to relational art’s critics, relational art serves up a crucial example of art’s ability to become social practice without losing its autonomy as art, keeping the space open for experimentation somewhat outside of Capital. Those forms of experimentation must extend beyond pockets of the social to the social as a whole. The laboratory of contemporary art must not be contained within the boundaries of any particular social crisis; it should attend to *the* crisis of the social to which modernity and capitalism has brought us and which art alone might address.

²⁵ Such a move outside the gallery does not comprise an expansion of scope, because the work still targets specific communities, whether already-existing ones or the ones created by the context of the artwork, whether audiences familiar with the art space or ones entirely new to it.

The challenge I have posed here for relational art might be helped along, as it happens, by Rancière himself. In his lament over what he sees as the transformation of contemporary art from the political to the ethical, Rancière does not advocate a return to the practices of the historical avant-garde or to the practices, which he sees in the work of the contemporary artists he understands to be operating in a truly political mode, of making real objects instead of recycling images or of attempting to uncover the “real.” Instead he lays out a very succinct theory of art tied directly to his notion of the “aesthetics of politics” discussed above: “Art does not do politics by reaching the real. It does it by inventing fictions that challenge the existing distribution of the real and the fictional” (“Contemporary Art” 49). What Rancière ultimately advocates here is the use of art to build a new “frame of visibility and intelligibility,” or what I have called, throughout the dissertation, a new symbolic narrative. Here, where Rancière leaves behind the more world-destroying practices of the contemporary avant-garde and takes up the more world-generating practices advocated by Foucault and more recently Hardt & Negri, he lays out a plan, though inadvertently, not only for large scale social change, but for a potential move beyond modernity as well. In further developing his theory of art, he asserts:

Making fictions does not mean telling stories. It means undoing and rearticulating the connections between signs and images, images and times, or signs and the space that frame the existing sense of reality. Fiction invents new communities of sense: that is to say, new trajectories between what can be seen, what can be said, and what can be done. It blurs over the distribution of places and competences, which also means that it blurs over the very borders defining its own activity; doing art means displacing the borders of art, just as doing politics means displacing the borders of what is recognized as the sphere of the political. (49)

A careful reading of these words reveals that Rancière sounds very much like the early Foucault, the Foucault of *The Order of Things*. Indeed, in *The Order of Things*, Foucault offers coherent and systematized theories of linguistic and epistemological change, theories that make possible new frames of visibility and intelligibility as well as a new “aesthetics of politics.” Foucault understood from the time of his archaeologies that the bringing into being of a new epistemological framework, one that would allow us to transcend modernity, would need to harness the world-generating nature of culture and particularly art in order to shift the modern frame of visibility (or the modern mode of being of language). Once again, while Foucault never explicitly theorizes the use of art, culture or aesthetics to shift the mode of being of language or to bring into being new forms of sociality, his work provides a valuable model for artists attempting to rise to the challenge of working systemically to shift our uses of language and forms of subjectivity, and to envision—and indeed enact—new forms of sociality. My work in the previous chapters of the dissertation has attempted to provide Foucault’s theories, in combination with the contemporary visions of Žižek and Hardt & Negri, as a framework for these aesthetic potentials.

As brief examples of the sort of contemporary work that might serve as large-scale “laboratories” for the exploration of such potentials and possibilities, I can offer two artists of digital media, Bill Seaman and Char Davies. Seaman, who came to the visual arts from backgrounds in poetry and the sciences, created in 1995 with programmer Gideon May (with whom he has continuously updated the project since that time) *The World Generator/The Engine of Desire*. This “virtual world generator” presents users with a “spinning interface of container wheels” with which they can select world

variables from a “multimedia database of media-elements and processes, including 3D objects, 2D images, poetic texts, musical loops, digital movies as well as processes relevant to different forms of media construction and abstraction,” creating and altering this virtual world alone or in collaboration with others (“Recombinant Poetics” 126).

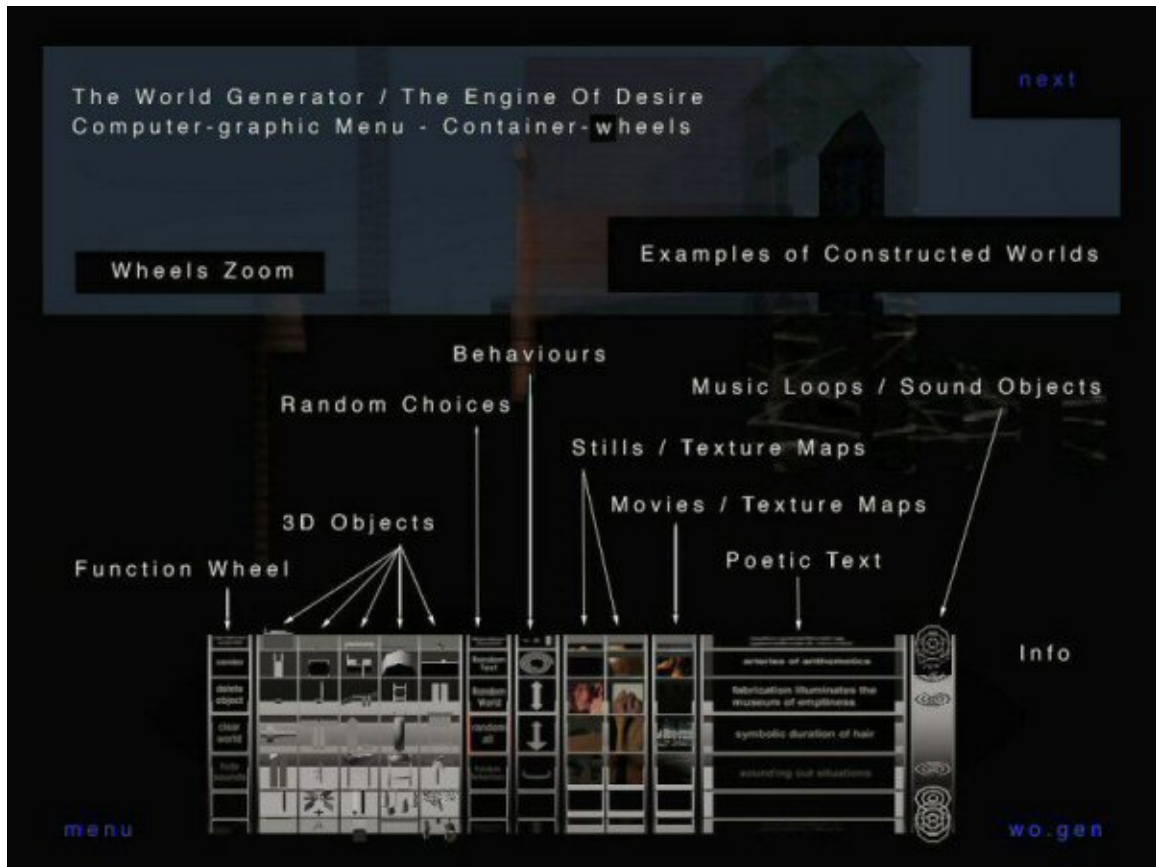


Fig. C. Bill Seaman, *The World Generator/The Engine of Desire* (1995).

In its basic operations, *The World Generator* speaks directly to the potential of interactive art to enable multiple (if not a *multitude* of) users²⁶ to collaborate in the invention and investigation of alternate realities. Like many popular virtual-reality games, Seaman’s

²⁶ Seaman eventually brought the interface to the Internet, so that remote users could collaborate in the act of “world generation.” See Wilson, *Information Arts*, Chapter 7.2, for a description of the remote-user project.

interface indicates the limitations of such programs in that it only enables its users to select from existing variables, limiting possibility even as it attempts to engender it. Seaman's work, of course, does so in "high art" fashion, drawing, unlike popular gaming, on more abstract visual forms and his own poetic inventions (words and especially word clusters). While this may increase the complexity of the work's use and its possible outcomes, it also suggests the ways in which *The World Generator* is in fact more limited in its potentials than virtual reality games, which often invent not just new worlds but new narratives—in this sense, *The World Generator* is not itself a tool for the collaborative creation of collective myth. Seaman himself points out that this is not his goal, arguing that "this is not a narrative strategy. It is a poetic approach to the combination and recombination of loaded poetic fields...*The World Generator* explores the potential *open* arrangement of media-elements in a virtual volume" (122-23). What Seaman seeks to explore, then, is not new worlds or new myths, but new understandings of "meaning production" (124) itself. Through word and image recombination (Seaman explains that he coined the term "recombinant poetics" in 1995, the year *The World Generator* was launched, and takes his interest in recombination from a variety of traditions, including the OULIPO poets and Dada collage), according to Seaman, "participants function in a unity with the media through interaction, bringing a history of media relations with them as one particular field of meaning-relation. By operating on the media-elements in the works, they derive or better *create* emergent meaning..." (125). The degree of poetic and visual abstraction in Seaman's work might lead us to question whether the recombinant "worlds" his users are invited to create can sufficiently speak to our own world or offer viable transitions into alternative ones. I do believe, however, that

The World Generator does serve as a model of art in the form of experimentation with possibility, especially the possibility of language, suggesting a potential link to the possibilities raised in the visions offered us by Foucault and his notion of the historically specific mode of being of language. Seaman argues that his work opens up just such possibilities: “The incorporation of differing media-elements in a virtual volume presents a radical new space for meaning ‘construction’ and elucidation” (134). While his program itself, in my view, does not yet open any “radical new space[s],” its underlying principles and vision suggest that contemporary developments in art might be pushed to the point where, in Seaman’s words, it “begins to approach the potentials of a new linguistics” (136).

Char Davies, who comes to digital media from painting and a Hollywood-based career in 3D software design, works more explicitly with the field of “immersive” virtual reality, and has written extensively about her intent to employ the very technologies used for film and especially gaming in radically alternative ways:

Rather than approaching the medium as a means of escape into some disembodied techno-Utopian fantasy, I see it as a means of return, i.e. of facilitating a temporary release from our habitual perceptions and culturally-biased assumptions about being in the world, to enable us, however momentarily, to perceive ourselves and the world around us *freshly*...Immersive virtual space is thus a philosophical *and* a participatory medium...[It] may be used to redirect our attention from our usual distractions and assumptions to the sensations of our own condition as briefly embodied sentient beings immersed in the flow of life through space and time. (“Virtual Space” 2)²⁷

In creating her virtual environments *Osmose* (1995) and *Emphémère* (1998), Davies set out to work against the tendency, observed by Richard Coyne, of virtual reality to be

²⁷ Page citations for “Virtual Space” correspond to the electronic version of the article, available on Davies’ website at < <http://www.immersence.com/>>. For a full citation of the article as it appears in the volume *Space: In Science, Art and Society*, see Bibliography.

designed as a “literal re-enactment of Cartesian ontology” (qtd. in “Virtual Space” 3), and against the way in which virtual reality design, including its user interface methods, “reinforces a particular way of being in the world in terms of mastery, domination, and control” (3). The user, or what she calls the “immersant,” enters one of Davies’ environments by donning an “interface vest” and a “stereoscopic viewing helmet (known in the field as a head-mounted display or HMD),” an interface which, Davies states, is “intended to counter the medium’s bias with a vision of the medium as a channel for ‘communion’ rather than control” (9). The immersant’s experience of the virtual world—where he or she “travels” (whether horizontally across various landscapes, upward into celestial environments, or downward into subterranean realms) and what he or she sees (whether the plants, water, skies, etc. in the landscape move or change)—is determined by the user’s gaze, body movements, and breathing, and is thus partly a voluntary process, partly involuntary, depending on how much control the user assumes of the experience. Davies has said that many immersants begin their fifteen minutes of virtual exploration with an attempt to gain control of the interface and move swiftly through as much of the interface as possible, but soon “their facial expressions and body gestures loosen...and they begin to slow down, as if perceptually mesmerized” (21). In this combination of control and letting-go, Davies identifies the power of the experiences she engenders through her art: the immersant is simultaneously crafting her own experiences while turning that experience over to functions as involuntary as breathing—and moving through a universe distinctly reminiscent of, but not purely reflective, of our own. In this sense, Davies’ work suggests yet another potential, this time of alternative subjective states, created by the effect she describes as one “of floating

within a world which is neither wholly representational (i.e., recognizable) nor wholly abstract, but hovering in between” (10).



Fig. D. Char Davies, *Forest Stream, Emphémère* (1998).
Digital still image captured during live performance of immersive virtual environment.

Davies’ intent is not necessarily one of shifted subjectivity, but rather of enhanced perception: “our intent was to heighten ambiguity in order to focus the participant’s attention on their own act of perceiving, or rather of *being*” (10). Indeed, much of her work is a reaction to the somewhat opposite extremes of the tendencies she saw in the software and movie industries and her personal experience of extreme myopia (she explains that her eyes “require a thickness of 17 corrective lenses to see the world...as everyone else”(5))—with her virtual environments, she seeks to release each immersant from his or her culturally *and* physiologically determined assumptions, showing them something more “free.” The potential she articulates for her projects, however, speaks to an openness to the creation of alternative perceptions, beyond, even, what she herself can envision or determine through the design of her work: “the intent is to foster psychological conditions which lead to an ‘undoing’ of habitual perceptions in favor of alternative sensibilities...which leads to perceptual expansion” (22). This “perceptual expansion” is achieved, in Davies’ work, not through the characteristically jarring defamiliarization—Rancière’s “clash of heterogeneous elements”—of the art of previous

decades, but through a gradually transformative, temporal, bodily-based immersion; perception shifts in the virtual experience not, at first, intellectually, but viscerally, enacting, perhaps, microscopic shifts of the subjective that may or may not be sustained when the experience is done. For this reason, the notion of “expansion” might point to the ways in which work like Davies’ may function as yet another art “laboratory” in which aesthetic experiments—in this case, in virtual reality—might allow us to explore alternative ways of being in the world similar to the non-modern ontologies evoked by Foucault. Davies’ discussion of the temporal nature of the immersive experience further highlights this potential: “In this perceptual state, rather than being mentally focused on the future and thus inattentive, even absent, to the present, one becomes acutely aware of one’s own embodied presence inhabiting space, in relation to a myriad of other presences as well” (5). It is important to note that for Davies, those other “presences” are virtual representations of nature and the human body (and other digital entities such as abstract sound and projections of computer code), not, in her works thus far, other humans—participation of others in the single immersant’s virtual journey is limited to the projection of what the immersant sees onto a screen where an audience (others waiting to try the interface) may watch. While these spectators are not participating in the individual immersant’s choices and thus in the creation of the virtual journey, they are privy to the immersant’s experience and subject in their viewing to the immersant’s choices (rather than solely the artist’s) in the case of each individual viewing. In this sense, the work is somewhat relational, in its ability to expose the voluntary and involuntary workings of one individual to many others. Perhaps the element of “other presences” could be expanded in work such as Davies’ to include more collaborative virtual experiences, a

means by which the virtual and the relational projects could combine to foster the collective creation of new experiences, subjectivities, and worlds. Davies' work, along with Seaman's, clearly provides a nascent model of world-generation through art. Their projects, which typify much of the most politically and philosophically visionary art of our time, follow in the footsteps of the world-generating side of the counter-enlightenment arm of the philosophical discourse of modernity, providing but an initial inkling of how art might yet carry out the discourse's interventionary vision, and carry us beyond modernity itself.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barnett, Ronald. *Being a University*. London and New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Bataille, Georges. *Visions of Excess*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
- Bataille, Georges. *The Tears of Eros*. Trans. Peter Connor. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Mirror of Production*. Trans. Mark Poster. St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1993.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Consumer Society*. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Beck, Ulrich. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage Publications, 1992.
- Beck, Ulrich and Beck-Gernsheim, Elisabeth. *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2002.
- Berger, James. *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner. *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1991.
- Bishop, Claire. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 51-79.

- Bishop, Claire. "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents." *ArtForum* 44:6 (February 2006): 178-83.
- Bourriaud, Nicolas. "Berlin Letter About Relational Aesthetics." In *Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation*, Claire Doherty, ed. London: Black Book Publishing, 2004. 43-49.
- Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods. Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2004.
- Castro, Eduardo Viveiros de. *From the Enemy's Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society*. Trans. Catherine Howard. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Davies, Char. "Immersence." <www.immersence.com>.
- Davies, Char. "Virtual Space." In *Space: In Science, Art and Society*. François Penz, Gregory Radick, and Robert Howell, eds. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 69-104.
- Dean, Carolyn J. *The Self and Its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentered Subject*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Doane, Mary Ann. *The Desire to Desire*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Doane, Mary Ann. *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Paul Rabinow. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Elkins, James and David Morgan, eds. *The Art Seminar, Vol. 7: Re-Enchantment*. New York and London: Routledge, 2009.
- Foster, Hal, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. New York: The New Press, 1998.

- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Vol 2: The Use of Pleasure*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1986.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Vol 3: The Care of the Self*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1988.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Vol 1: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- Foucault, Michel. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Paul Rabinow, ed. New York: The New Press, 1997.
- Foucault, Michel. "Technologies of the Self." In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Paul Rabinow, ed. New York: The New Press, 1997. 223-251.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo*. Trans. A. A. Brill. New York: Vintage Books, 1946.
- Fried, Michael. *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Gablik, Suzi. *The Re-Enchantment of Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993.
- Gane, Nicholas. *Max Weber and Postmodern Theory: Rationalization versus Re-enchantment*. Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002.
- Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1990.
- Gillick, Liam. "Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.'" *October* 115 (Winter 2006): 95-107.
- Gould, Stephen Jay. *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977.
- Greenberg, Clement. *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965.

- Groys, Boris. "Religion as Medium." Trans. Stephen Lindberg. In *Re-Enchantment*. James Elkins and David Morgan, eds. New York and London: Routledge, 2009. 79-85.
- Gutting, Gary. *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vols. 1 & 2*. Trans. Thomas McCarthy. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1986-1989.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Trans. Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonia Negri. *Multitude*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2004.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Commonwealth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Herman, David J. "Modernism versus Postmodernism: Toward an Analytic Distinction." In *A Postmodern Reader*. Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, eds. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993. 1157-192.
- Hinderliter, Beth, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick, eds. *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009.
- Hinderliter, Beth, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick. "Introduction." In *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*. Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick, eds. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009. 1-28.
- Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53-93.

- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Post-Contemporary Interventions)*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*. London and New York: Verso, 1998.
- Jameson, Fredric. "The End of Temporality." *Critical Inquiry* 29 (Summer 2003): 695-718.
- Jones, Robert. "Teaching Survey." *Frieze Magazine*. 125 (September 2009). 15 Feb. 2011 <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/teaching_survey/>.
- Kandinsky, Wassily. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Trans. M.T.H. Sadler. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1977.
- Kester, Grant H. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2004.
- Kwon, Miwon. *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits*. New York: Norton, 1977.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. New York: Norton, 1978.
- Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London and New York: Verso, 2001.
- Lash, Scott. *Sociology of Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Lash, Scott. *Critique of Information*. London: Sage Publications, 2002.
- Lash, Scott and Celia Lury. *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things*. Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007.
- Lears, Jackson. *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.
- Lears, Jackson. "Reconsidering Abundance: A Plea for Ambiguity." In *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*. Susan Strasser, Charles McGover, and Matthias Judd, eds. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 440-466.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital, Vol. 1: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*. New York: International Publishers, 1967.

- Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse*. Harmondsworth: Penguin/New Left Review, 1973.
- Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. New York: Dover, 2007.
- McCarthy, Thomas. Introduction to *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990. vii-xvii.
- McRobert, Laurie. *Char Davies' Immersive Virtual Art and the Essence of Spatiality*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.
- Megill, Allan. *Prophets of Extremity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Melville, Herman. *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. Hoboken, NJ: Melville House Publishing, 2004.
- Milbank, John. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. 2e. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Milbank, "The Gift of Ruling." In *After Modernity? Secularity, Globalization and The Re-enchantment of the World*. James K. A. Smith, ed. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008. 17-43.
- Morgan, David. "Enchantment, Disenchantment, Re-Enchantment." In *The Art Seminar, Vol, 7: Re-Enchantment*, James Elkins and David Morgan, eds. New York and London: Routledge, 2009. 3-22.
- Morgan, David. "Art and Religion in the Modern Age." In *The Art Seminar, Vol, 7: Re-Enchantment*, James Elkins and David Morgan, eds. New York and London: Routledge, 2009. 25-45.
- Myers, Tony. *Slavoj Zizek*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Inoperative Community*. Trans. Peter Connor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. New York: Random House, 1967.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Trans Douglas Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Genealogy of Morals*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003.
- Rajan, Tilottama. "The Phenomenological Allegory: From Death and the Labyrinth to The Order of Things." *Poetics Today* 19:3 (1998): 439-466.

- Rajan, Tilottama. "The Mask of Death: Foucault, Derrida, the Human Sciences and Literature." *Angelaki* 5:2 (2000): 211-221.
- Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Trans. Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London, New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Rancière, Jacques. "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics." In *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*. Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick, eds. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009. 31-50.
- Ross, Toni. "From Classical to Postclassical Beauty: Institutional Critique and Aesthetic Enigma in Louise Lawler's Photography." In *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*. Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick, eds. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009. 79-110.
- Ruskin, John. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. New York: Dover Publications, 1989.
- Schiller, Friedrich. "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man." Trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby. In Friedrich Schiller, *Essays*, Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom, eds. New York: Continuum, 1993.
- Silverman, Kaja. *The Subject of Semiotics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Seaman, Bill. "Bill Seaman/Recombinant Poetics." <www.billseaman.com>.
- Seaman, Bill. "Recombinant Poetics and Related Database Aesthetics." In *Database Aesthetics: Art in the Age of Information Overflow (Electronic Meditations)*. Victoria Vesna, ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. 121-141.
- Smith, James K. A., ed. *After Modernity? Secularity, Globalization, and the Re-enchantment of the World*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008.
- Spinoza, Baruch. *Complete Works*. Trans. Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002.
- Van Schepen, Randall K. "From the Form of Spirit to the Spirit of Form." In *The Art Seminar, Vol. 7: Re-Enchantment*, James Elkins and David Morgan, eds. New York and London: Routledge, 2009. 47-68.
- Waldau, Paul and Kimberly Patton, eds. *A Communion of Subjects: Animals and Religion, Science, and Ethics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

- Ward, Graham. *Cities of God*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Ward, Graham. *True Religion*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.
- Ward, Graham. *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Talcott Parsons. London: Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1930.
- Weber, Max. *Economy and Society*, Vol. 1. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.
- Wilson, Stephen. *Information Arts: Intersections of Art, Science, and Technology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.
- Wolin, Richard. "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism." *Telos*. 67 (1986): 71-86.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York: Verso, 1989.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *The Ticklish Subject*. New York: Verso, 1999.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *The Parallax View*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*. New York: Verso, 2009.
- Zizek, Slavoj and John Milbank. *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *Living in the End Times*. New York: Verso, 2010.