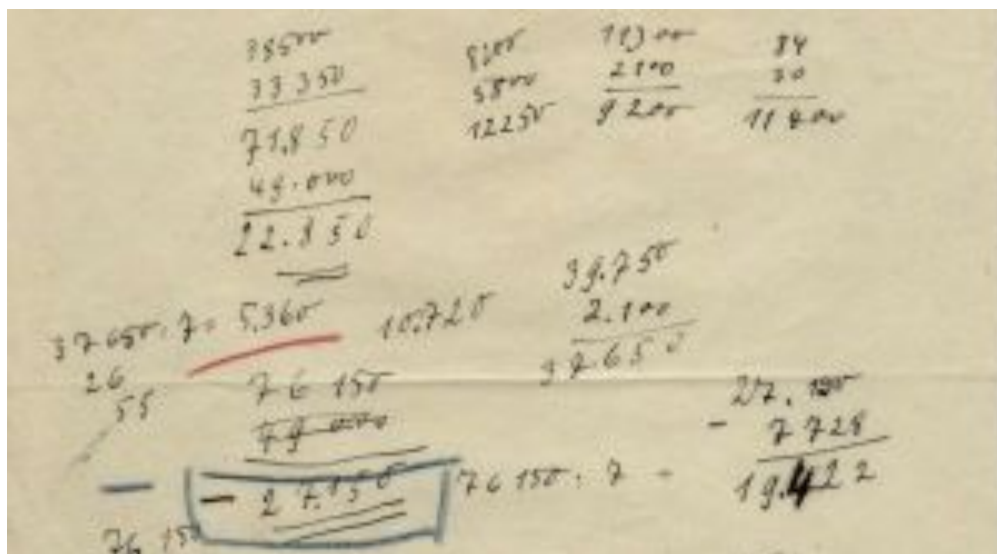




AFFECT, EFFECT, BERTOLT BRECHT

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ARTICLES

BRECHT DOSSIER:

SIX ESSAYS ON PAINTING AND THEATER

BERTOLT BRECHT

On Painting and the Painter

from *The Book of Twists and Turns*

To Me-ti as a young painter, whose father and brothers were barge-haulers. There ensued the following conversation: “I don’t see your father, the barge-hauler, in your pictures.” sf— “Should I only paint my father?” “No, there could be other barge-haulers, but I don’t see any of them in your pictures.” – “Why does it have to be barge-haulers? Aren’t there other things?” – “Sure, but I also don’t see other people who work a lot and get paid very little in your pictures.”— “Can’t I paint what I want?” “Sure, but what do you want? The barge-haulers are in a terrible situation, one wants to help them or should want to help, and you know the situation, you can draw, and yet you draw sunflowers! Is that excusable?” “I don’t draw sunflowers, I draw lines and patches and the feelings I sometimes have.” – “Are they at least the feelings about the terrible situation of the barge-hauler?” – “Maybe.” – “You have forgotten them and now you only remember your feelings?” “I participate in the development of painting.” – “Not in the development of the barge-hauler?” “As a human being I’m in the Association of Mi-en-leh, which wants to eliminate exploitation and oppression, but as a painter I develop the forms of painting.” – “That’s like saying: as a chef I poison the food, but as a man I buy medicine. The situation of the barge-hauler is so awful, because they

cannot wait. While your painting develops, they are starving. You are their messenger and you take too long to learn how to speak. You feel something general [*Allgemeines*], but the barge-haulers who have sent you for help, feel something specific [*Besonderes*], namely hunger. You know what we don't know, and share with us, what we know. What does this mean: you learn to operate ink and brush when you have nothing specific [*bestimmtes*] in mind? You only find it difficult to operate ink and brush when something specific [*Bestimmtes*] should be expressed with them. The exploiters are speaking of a thousand things, but the exploited speak of exploitation. You erstwhile barge-hauler!"

Translated by Todd Cronan

Critique of Empathy

1. *Truth in Art.* Artists have almost always discouraged those who wanted to see a criterion in the degree of similarity of their images of reality with reality itself. At least in our time, painting considered as the capacity to paint similarly was seen as mere craftsmanship; it had nothing to do with art. Even with jobs where it concerned copying—be it a garden, a pet or a family member—value was placed on perceptibility, one must be able to have the illusion that it was the beloved object. (Here the buyer was somewhat sensitive when artists were only delivering him their associations on the occasion of the object.) In general, artists probably arrived at the fact that the optical use that one could make of an object was as pleasurable as any clever use which one could make of an object that has been manipulated. (One can also discover the pleasure in the body part that lines up cleverly.) The enjoyment of the cherries of Cézanne is thoroughly understandable, though perhaps not those of Apollonius, which birds pecked at.

It was a real asset to the viewer when he learned to make a new use of a thing presented this way, or a new use of his eyes.

2. The best way for an emotion to occur in art is the way it occurs in the rest of life. One does not live to have emotions, but one lives and has emotions.

3. From an emotional standpoint, one can both see better as well as worse, that is, the interests, emotionally assembled [*umgesetzt*] to make our actions more practical or less practical.

Translated by Todd Cronan

The Blue Horses



I like the blue horses of [Franz Marc] which stirred up more dust than the horses of Achilles. And I'm irritated when the painters are told they are not to paint horses blue; I don't see any crime in that, society can surely stomach such minor rearrangements of reality. Yes, in a pinch, let's say, in order not to upset the painter, our biologists could even try to breed blue horse hides, if it does not take too much time, on a very small scale of course. Nevertheless some assertions on the side of the defenders [of Marc] irritate me. Namely, I highly doubt whether through arts education one can make the working people supporters of blue horses,

and even more, I doubt whether such an education would be desirable. If there is still there a class of people who stand in a very different relationship to the environment than [Marc] and I do, to people for whom these animals must be groomed, unharnessed, corralled, shod, slaughtered, they do not have, like us, only impressions of horses. Footsteps in the sand may be very attractive for the casual hiker and idler, but they might not satisfy the cobbler so much. In order not to prefer footprints in plaster, he first had to free himself from all sorts of demands for accuracy, which he feels every day.

Translated by Todd Cronan

The Worker Who is a Painter

Since you're a painter, we would like to know how you see things. Surely you see things differently from us, because you have a finer optic nerve. So you can perceive in things aspects that we cannot make out. Seeing gives you pleasures that it does not give us, but you can give us these pleasures, these pleasurable views: through your pictures.

Since you're also a worker, we would like to know how you see things, as one of them who bring about so many things and with whom so many things are produced. Surely you see things differently than the rulers, because you live differently and have different goals.

Since you are a worker who paints, you can show us things differently through your pictures than we are accustomed to seeing them: more precise, richer, more practical. Surely a bowl is for you a different thing than for your employer. You not only see lines and colors differently from other painters, but also the bowl as bowl you see differently. Also you perceive a different side of people with the help of your lines and colors.

Translated by Todd Cronan

On Chinese Painting

from a letter to George Grosz (1936)



As we know, the Chinese do not use the art of perspective. They don't like looking at everything from one single point-of-view. In their pictures several things are ordered in relation to each other the way a town's inhabitants are distributed throughout the town, not independent of each other but not in a state of subordination which threatens their very existence. It is necessary to look at this comparison a little more closely. The families we are comparing with these things live in a town, represented in our picture, in greater freedom than we are accustomed to living in. They don't exist just by virtue of their connections with a single family. The Chinese composition lacks an element of compulsion to which we are completely accustomed. This order requires no force. The designs contain a lot of freedom. The eye is able to go on a voyage of discovery. The things that are represented play the role of elements which can exist on their own, and yet in the relationship which they form on the page they constitute a whole, if not an indivisible one. You can cut the pages into sections without rendering them meaningless, but also not without altering them.

The Chinese artists also have lots of room on their paper. Some parts of the surface appear to be unused; but these parts play an important role in the composition; judging by their extent and their form they appear to be just as carefully devised as the outlines of the objects. In these gaps the paper itself or the canvas acquires a quite specific value. The basic surface is not simply denied by the artist through covering it up completely. The mirror in which something is here mirrored retains its value as mirror. Among other things that signifies a laudable abandonment of the thorough subjugation of the viewer, whose illusion is not fully completed. Like these pictures I love gardens in which the gardeners have not shaped nature completely, which have space, here things lie side by side.

Translated by Anthony Maslow, with modifications by Todd Cronan

Prospectus of the Diderot Society

International societies of correspondence devoted to the interchange of scientific experience have existed for hundreds of years. The arts (we are concerned here with the theatrical arts, including the cinema) have not known corresponding societies of this sort. This fact may be explained by the traditional contrast between the methods of science and of art. The sciences have their technical standard, their common vocabulary, their continuity. For the arts (as we have known them hitherto), with their thoroughly individualistic character, such features have not been considered necessary.

As long as the theatre was regarded simply as a medium dedicated to the self-expression of the artistic personality, it was hardly possible to speak of a technical standard of theatrical art, except with regard to innovations in the mechanics of stage lighting, scene shifting, etc. For one artist to borrow from another a *means of expression* is to admit failure-to parade in borrowed plumage. (Be it noted, however, that this taboo does not apply to the soulless machinery of the stage!) On the other hand the tasks assumed by science have never been limited to the capacity of individuals. The criterion of science has been, not the degree of individual talent, but the degree of general advance in the mastery of nature.

Like the theatre, science works by constructing images of life, in a fashion peculiar to itself. Scientific images seek to control the factual world. This is not so with the images created by the theatre. Theatrical images, shaped to a greater or lesser degree by the creative will of individuals, have sought rather to construct an independent world of emotion—to organize subjective sensations. For this purpose neither accuracy nor responsibility is required.

In recent decades, however, a new kind of theatre has developed—one which sets itself the goal of an exact picture of the world and which admits of objective, non-individualistic criteria. The artist who belongs to this theatre no longer attempts to create *his own world*. He does not set out to add to a stock of images which are essentially portraits of the portrayer. He does not assume that the laws of life are already codified and immutable. On the contrary, he regards the world as unknown and in constant process of change. His purpose is to create images informative of the world rather than of himself.

It is not easy to create images which will aid in mastering objective fact. This attempt naturally encounters great difficulties, and obliges the artist to refashion his technique to suit his new purpose. The visionary ignores discoveries made by others; experiment is not among the mental habits of the seer. The *inner eye* has never needed microscope or telescope. But the outer eye needs both. Unlike the visionary or the seer, the artist in pursuit of a new goal finds no subliminal apparatus ready to serve him. He must renounce the technique of hypnotic enchantment. Under certain circumstances he must even forego the usual method of emotional communication used by the artists of earlier periods. The building and projection of this new type of image is a technical process beyond the limited capacity of individuals. The new artist therefore helps to develop a technique which will be at the service of all artists. To this end he offers inventions of his own and makes use of the inventions of others. (Thus, in spite of the great differences between them, the stage and the cinema can operate together, insofar as both dramatic mediums explain nature and human relationships.)

THE DIDEROT SOCIETY intends to help gather systematically the experience of its members; to create a terminology; to review, scientifically, the historic conceptions of theatre. It will collect the reports of artists engaged in experimental work in theatre and film, and arrange for an interchange of these reports. (Papers sent to the Society may be published simultaneously elsewhere, with the subtitle: *Report to the Diderot Society*.) Members receiving reports from other members abroad will endeavor to place these writings in periodicals in their own language. It is proposed that an editorial board reissue all papers, numbered, in book form. The scope of any paper is left to the discretion of its author. Papers may be comprehensive essays or brief notes. They may describe an entire theatrical production; a mechanical discovery or intention of great or minor importance; experiences with audiences or with stage artists. Unsolved problems may be submitted. Technical details are especially interesting. Scenic innovations such as the treadmill stage (Piscator); analyses of new rhythmic forms; problems in the projection of stage or screen characters; the social meaning of certain texts; the dramatic development of a theme; utilization of facts; planning of preliminary work; study of source-material, of documents or of scientific methods; suggestions for a technical

terminology; critiques of criticism, etc., etc.-all these may be the subject of reports to the Society.

There being no dues or other requirements, the Society will be considered organized when a sufficient number of qualified experimental workers indicate their willingness to contribute papers at their convenience, along the lines indicated. For the present the address of THE DIDEROT SOCIETY will be: care Brecht, Svendborg, Denmark.

The Society will welcome information regarding periodicals or journals interested in publishing its reports.

Signed: BRECHT, SVENDBORG

Translation by Mordecai Gorelik modified by Todd Cronan

NOTES

All texts are translated from: *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe. Band 22: Schriften 2. 1933-1942.*

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Bertolt Brecht (10 February 1898–14 August 1956) was a German poet, playwright, theater director, and Marxist. This issue is devoted to his art and its politics.

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POETRY AND THE PRICE OF MILK

JENNIFER ASHTON

1. Brecht Now

Devoting this *nonsite* issue to Brecht inevitably raises the question of why we should be reading Brecht now.¹ But we might just as well ask, as Dana Ward does in his most recent book of poems, *The Crisis of Infinite Worlds*, why haven't we been reading him all along:

Bertolt Brecht was a great writer with a special feeling for the question of solidarity, & it seems people don't talk much about him anymore is there some idea that his work is too didactic or plain in its political motivations to satisfy certain contemporary sensibilities conditioned to prize only those aesthetic objects that reflect an education in certain critically (& now canonically) privileged strategies of experimental modernism & postmodernism I guess I mean is the avant-garde too myopic to really love Brecht? I'm not sure about any of this of course but I have an image of him in my mind that I love where he's on a little fishing boat with Benjamin have I conjured this picture for my private pleasure or is there a photograph like this in circulation? My favorite poem of Brecht's is called "Concerning Poor B.B." & the insouciance in it is manly, very social & delicious in perhaps the way we remember Snoop Dogg as a teen. (52-53)

Ward's answer to why we haven't been reading Brecht is itself posed as a question: "is there some idea that his work is too didactic or plain in its political motivations to satisfy certain contemporary sensibilities...?" It's not surprising that Ward calls our attention right away to something that has been of consistent interest to those who do read Brecht's work, namely "its political motivations." What is immediately surprising about this question, however, is that having foregrounded Brecht's politics, Ward's answer to why the work goes unread nevertheless doesn't come down to the politics but to something else: "certain contemporary sensibilities." What exactly is meant, then, by "contemporary sensibilities"?

Insofar as these "sensibilities" explain whether or not we're inclined to read Brecht, the determining factor in the equation, apparently, is whether something does or does not "satisfy" them. Ward's choice of the word "satisfy" is suggestive to begin with, but all the more striking is that what fails to provide the requisite satisfaction is once again not Brecht's political motivations but something else: it's the style ("didactic and plain") in which they present themselves that fails to "satisfy." From the standpoint of whether a particular style can "satisfy" our "contemporary sensibilities," we don't have much further to go before Brecht's unpopularity is a matter of taste and its solution a matter of marketing. Enter the "manly, very social & delicious" Brecht, stripped of the "didactic and plain" attire of his "political motivations" and re-clothed in the style of a teenaged Snoop Dogg.

The title of the poem in which Brecht appears is "Things the Baby Liked, A-Z," and the poem itself is organized in tercets, with three lines for each letter of the alphabet. It's an alphabet song of sorts, in which "B" stands (albeit temporarily) for "Brecht." We have already begun to see the force of Brecht's makeover, which transforms his work from being defined by its "political motivations" to being defined by its ability to "satisfy" and be "delicious." Is Ward simply saying that for Brecht to appeal to "contemporary sensibilities," we need to be able to see his work as an aesthetic rather than a political project? But that doesn't seem quite right, because it doesn't account for why this Brecht belongs among the "Things the Baby Liked." Another way to put this is to say that Brecht's "didactic and plain" style, the form his work takes, has reasons for being what it is, reasons that include his political motivations. But no reasons at all, aesthetic or political, are required for the baby to like Brecht (or for Ward to love the image of Brecht in his mind). Brecht only needs to satisfy baby's taste, or as Ward puts it, his "contemporary sensibilities."

Which brings us to the question of what is meant here by "contemporary" (especially if the best way to appeal to our "sensibilities" is to approximate the feel of a late Eighties Snoop Dogg). The ease with which Ward can move the social into the same register as individual preference, replace political motivations (fairness and justice, say, or the critique or defense of capitalism) with consumerist ones (pleasure and satisfaction), and make Brecht

himself look like Snoop Dogg, is completely consistent with the degree to which these “sensibilities” are contemporized: they’re an index of what we want right now, but also of who we are right now, neither of which will be what they were 5 minutes ago. That is, the old Snoop envisioned as a teen is appealing to our sensibilities because he is more new (more contemporary) than the newest Snoop (rebranding efforts notwithstanding).² The rapid shifts Ward makes from modernism’s committed Brecht, to postmodernism’s distasteful Brecht, to post postmodernism’s Doggy-style Brecht positions both Ward and the “Things the Baby Likes” within the recently charted territory of so-called “metamodernism.”³

“Constant repositioning” is a phrase Timotheus Vermeulen has used to characterize the movement (Vermeulen “Interview”). And in one of the first academic publications on the subject, Vermeulen and his collaborator, Robin van den Akker, depict how the world appears from a metamodern perspective in terms that could just as easily describe a “crisis of infinite worlds”:

...[M]etamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity. Indeed, by oscillating to and fro or back and forth, the metamodern negotiates between the modern and the postmodern. One should be careful not to think of this oscillation as a balance however; rather, it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles. (Vermeulen and van den Akker)

Once the poles among which we find ourselves “oscillating to and fro or back and forth” are not just 2 or 5, but “innumerable,” we inevitably start swinging from one aesthetic or political commitment to another, too: “For us,” Vermeulen says in a later interview, “the prefix meta indicates that a person can believe in one thing one day and believe in its opposite the next. Or maybe even at the same time. ...It repositions itself with and between neoliberalism and Keynesianism, the ‘right’ and the ‘left,’ idealism and ‘pragmatism,’ the discursive and the material, web 2.0 and arts and crafts, without ever seeming reducible to any one of them” (Vermeulen “Interview”). Metamodernism, with its innumerable poles, succeeds in turning beliefs (political and aesthetic alike) into something more like attitudes or inclinations. Ward’s Brecht moves easily into this frame, among the “things the baby likes” one moment, among the dislikes in another, out of liking range altogether in another. The modernist Brecht, meanwhile, surely would have choked on his cigar at the idea of such “constant repositioning” (liking communism one moment and National Socialism the next?). The metamodernist,

“social and delicious,” Brecht might look like he can swing between “innumerable poles.” The modernist Brecht clung to the pole he had.

Hannah Arendt understood this well and condemned Brecht’s art for it. That is, she saw Brecht’s aesthetic commitments as consistent with his commitment to communism, and his unwavering commitment to communism, including Stalin’s version of it, even in the wake of the purges, as, in effect, collaboration with totalitarianism in its most brutal form. For Arendt, this consistency (or better yet, complete refusal of any “repositioning”) manifested itself in an aesthetics that, from the beginning to the end of Brecht’s career, could not tolerate the “personal” and thereby made him an enemy of the individual, and particularly, of freedom of expression.

The extent to which Arendt values the “personal” is particularly vivid in her decision to make the centerpiece of her essay Brecht’s poem “Der Herr der Fische,” which she claims is “among his very best works” and “the only strictly personal poem he ever wrote” (Arendt loc. 3270). The eponymous “Herr” in Brecht’s poem “Der Herr der Fische,” however, in his visits with the men and women of his fishing village, is, if anything, strikingly impersonal:

And though he never contrived
To remember their names
Where their work was concerned
He knew all sorts of things.⁴(Brecht *Poems* 95)

Whether the poem is as “strictly personal” as Arendt thinks is clearly contestable. But she understood Brecht’s larger aesthetic aims sufficiently well to imagine that whatever is “strictly personal” about this poem, it must be something Brecht actively sought to suppress: “he never published it; he did not want it to be known.” Moreover, what Arendt views in Brecht’s artistic practice as a repression of the personal becomes in her account, a personal trait of Brecht himself, one that she understands as simultaneously a “great virtue” and a “curse.” (loc. 3269-70). The reason “Der Herr der Fische” is, for Arendt, “strictly personal,” despite its impersonal central figure, and the reason she believes that for Brecht it’s sufficiently scandalous that it needs to be kept from public view, is that it is, at bottom, a “self-portrait”: “Brecht’s portrait of the poet as a young man—for this, of course, is what it really is—presenting the poet in all his remoteness, his mixture of pride and humility, ‘a stranger and a friend to everybody,’ hence both rejected and welcome, good only for ‘Hin- und Widerreden’ (‘talk and countertalk’), useless for everyday life, silent about himself, as though there were nothing to talk about” (loc. 3299-3301). The scandal for Brecht, on this account, is that the poem exposes him candidly talking about himself. The scandal for

Arendt, however—the scandal of Brecht’s art as a whole—is that it’s *only* in this poem that Brecht is “strictly personal”; in the rest of his work, he consistently chooses to be “silent about himself.”

Arendt was writing about Brecht at the height of the Cold War, at a moment when communist states like the Soviet Union were under constant attack for, among other things, the enforcement of their citizens’ silence about themselves. And when Arendt imagines what she views as Brecht’s isolation as an artist during the 1920s, when “Der Herr der Fische” was written (“he cut a rather solitary figure among his contemporaries”), it’s his refusal of the personal, set against a contemporary cohort who “resented the fact that the world did not offer them shelter and the security to develop as individuals” that keeps him apart (loc. 3256). But in the half century since 1968 (the year *Men in Dark Times* was published), and particularly since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the systematic economic exploitation by capitalism that Brecht believed a communist state could overturn has instead overturned most communist states, and, if anything, intensified.⁵ At the same time, “talking about [one]self” and the freedom to “develop as individuals” have never been more valued. If there’s a “crisis of infinite worlds” for poets like Ward, writing at a moment when the commitment to human capital in the form of self-actualization seems to be at a world-historical peak, the “crisis” looks to them more like a cause for celebration than for revolution. As one reviewer of Ward’s collection puts it, “Dana Ward’s ‘The Crisis of Infinite Worlds’ is based on the idea that talking about someone and what they do makes them more familiar to you. Ward takes us to an alternate universe where to quote from movies, graffiti, and the experience of walking through commercial stores is a way to relate back to the origin of our feelings, and is a trajectory towards the infinitely possible worlds our expressions can create” (Gregorian).⁶

My contribution to this *nonsite* Brecht feature is certainly intended at least in part to suggest a very literal understanding of Brecht’s current relevance. If we think for two seconds about the moment in *The Messingkauf Dialogues* where the Actor recalls a role in which he “pointed out that all the wheels would stop turning if the strong arm of the proletariat so willed it,” the reasons might seem too obvious for comment: “It was at a moment,” the Actor goes on, “when several million workers were going about without work. The wheels had stopped turning whether their strong arm willed it or not” (Brecht *Messingkauf* 21). At a moment when closer to 200 million worldwide are “going about without work,” it’s hard to imagine a clearer reason to be reading Brecht. But there is another important reason, one that should be (but hasn’t been) so obvious. For if it’s true, as Ward suggests, that many of our contemporaries and immediate predecessors—and particularly poets—haven’t been interested in Brecht, it isn’t quite right to say that it must be because Brecht’s work is “too didactic or too plain in its political motivations” (or, we could say, too committed). Rather, I would argue, if Brecht

has held little interest, with respect to aesthetics and politics alike, it's because aesthetics and politics alike have been "strictly personal," transformed into a matter of "talking about [one]self"—of expressing one's attitudes and "special feelings"—instead of what they were for Brecht: impersonal, a matter of accuracy and normative judgment.

Brecht believed art, in the form of what he called "epic theater," could "give an accurate representation of great financial operations on the stage" (cited in Jameson 91). *Verfremdungseffekt* or V-effekt, Brecht's term for the technique by which he believed the epic theater could achieve this, functions above all to prevent the theatergoer from identifying with the characters acting on the stage. Brecht's strategy of blocking empathy is designed, as he put it, "to alienate the social gest underlying every incident," where "[b]y social gest is meant the mimetic and gestural expression of the social relationships prevailing between people of a given period" (Willett 139).⁷ Such "alienation" is intended to prevent the theatergoer from becoming absorbed in the emotional crescendo and release of traditional theater, but the larger goal of short-circuiting the audience's empathy is to create a critical distance from existing social life and its relations of production—including those specific to theatrical and literary production. Imitated with a difference, social roles, customs, and habits are foregrounded, commented on, rendered forced or unnatural, performed self-consciously. "What is involved," writes Brecht, "is...taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labeling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural. The object of this 'effect' is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view" (Willett 125). What a Brechtian method aims to produce, in other words, is a specific effect on its audience: a critical apprehension of the disparities and contradictions of capitalism—implied in the events being depicted as well as in the depiction itself—and in turn, the will to effect revolutionary change.

Brecht's artistic commitments to the alienation effect are political and sociological, to be sure, but the difference (from what Brecht imagines as "traditional" theater) that this technique rehearses is ultimately a logical one. That is, in estranging or alienating us from social life as we live it, the epic theater is designed to produce the recognition that we ought to be living otherwise. But Brecht's epic theater also rehearses the categorical difference between these two things, between the world of our everyday habits and practices, in which social life runs its course, and the world of art, in which we evaluate, criticize, and see the reasons for a need to change. One is the world in which we have our emotions, responses, and social exchanges (our "special feelings" and "sensibilities"); in the other, we discern their formal outlines and apprehend their workings in the service of just or unjust states of affairs. By marking the separation of these worlds from one another, Brecht insists on a logical distinction that runs like a vein of ore through modernism—it's the difference, say, between personality and

impersonality in T.S. Eliot, between impressionism and imagism for Ezra Pound, or in the case of Gertrude Stein, between human nature and the human mind. This abiding logic, in connection with the fact that the modernists who adhered to it and forked to the right politically were responding to the same “grand financial operations” that inspired Brecht’s sustained commitment to the communist left, is one subject of this essay.

The other, which I’ve already begun to elaborate, harkens back to Ward, and more specifically to the imagined scene in which Brecht “is on a little fishing boat” with Walter Benjamin. From a strictly historical perspective, the fantasy of Brecht and Benjamin being, as it were, “in the same boat” isn’t all that implausible, either literally or figuratively. After all, in 1933, both had separately fled Nazi Germany to avoid persecution. Moreover, in 1934, Benjamin spent some time with Brecht, who was then living in the Danish city of Svendborg, on Funen island in the Baltic Sea. A fishing boat would not have been impossible to come by. We might bear in mind, too, that in April of that year, two months before arriving in Svendborg, Benjamin had prepared a lecture entitled “The Author as Producer” to deliver before an audience of the Institut des Études du Fascisme in Paris. In it, Brecht (now famously) serves to illustrate the contention that literature can only have the right politics if it has the right literary technique (a more extreme version of which claim would be something like no good politics without good art). Benjamin goes further and turns the Brechtian alienation effect—the inducement “to criticize constructively from a social point of view”—into a kind of revolution in itself. Brecht’s epic theater, Benjamin argues, presents “an improved apparatus for [our use],” one that “leads consumers to production” and “in short...is capable of making co-workers out of readers or spectators” (Benjamin 93). It’s as if, for Benjamin, the alienation effect were a kind of cure for the alienation of labor, handing the means of production from the capitalist to the worker. In giving us not only the *author* as producer, however, but the *reader/spectator* as producer as well, Benjamin has also bequeathed to contemporary poetry the basis for the aesthetics we find in Ward, one that can just as easily stand on its head and celebrate “The Author as Consumer.” What Ward’s “infinite worlds” give us is an infinite array of attitudes and affective poles from which to swing, an A-Z of ever new (and old) things to “like.” We can call it “metamodernism” (but in another 5 minutes, we might wish to call it something else). It’s fitting therefore, that when the metamodernist views Brecht and Benjamin in the same boat, they appear to him as either of two possibilities: a “picture conjured for personal pleasure” or a “photograph,” a mechanically reproduced object that might or might not be “in circulation,” for which there might or might not be a market.

2. The Judgment of the Man on the Street

Across an expansive body of work on the technique of alienation, Brecht recurs frequently to what he sees as two particularly effective models for a method of acting suitable to the revolutionary aims of the epic theater: the method whose origins he locates in the techniques of professional actors in the Chinese theatre (which I'll return to later) and that which he identifies with more or less impromptu reenactments of events in ordinary life, such that, for example, bystanders recalling an accident become analogs for the actors and the audience of the theater. As we shall see, these turn out to be versions of the same thing insofar as they both are built upon an understanding of citation. I want to begin with the example of the accident that Brecht describes in a 1938 fragment as "The Street Scene." "It is comparatively easy to set up a basic model for epic theatre," Brecht writes,

For practical experiments, I usually picked...an incident such as can be seen at any street corner: an eyewitness demonstrating to a collection of people how a traffic accident took place. The bystanders may not have observed what happened, or they may simply not agree with him, may 'see things a different way'; the point is that the demonstrator acts the behavior of the driver or the victim or both in such a way that the bystanders are able to form an opinion about the accident. (Willett 121)

It's easy to map most of the "street scene" elements onto their counterparts in the theater. The "demonstrator" clearly inhabits the role of the actor; the bystanders are the audience for his "demonstration"; and the demonstration itself is equivalent to the actions taking place on the stage. It should also be clear by now that the epic theater equivalent of "form[ing] an opinion about the accident" is, as Brecht puts it in the passage I cited earlier, "to constructively criticize from a social point of view." But insofar as "forming an opinion," is "the point," of the street scene, we can learn something by negation from the three other considerations Brecht lists that are not.

The three things Brecht determines to be beside the point are: 1) "The bystanders may not have observed what happened." 2) "They may not...agree with" the demonstrator. And 3) They "may 'see things a different way.'" We notice right away that the third almost serves as a paraphrase of the second; however, Brecht is actually marking an important difference here, and we can begin to grasp it by registering that the phrase "see things in a different way" allows for two completely incompatible meanings. One is already available in the previous statement that "The bystanders may not agree with the demonstrator." Their disagreement requires that there be a truth of the matter about which some will be right and the others wrong. Either the driver hit the brakes, or the driver hit the gas. The pedestrian had stepped into the crosswalk, or else she hadn't. In everyday parlance, we often say two people "see

differently” and mean by it simply that they disagree. Brecht’s quotation marks around “see things in a different way,” moreover, serve to remind us that this is a conventional way of expressing the idea, a manner of speaking. At the same time however, we can use the same phrase to mean something like the opposite: we can say we “see things in a different way” and mean that we each have a different experience of things. In this case, to paraphrase the difference as disagreement would be to render nonsense. It would be as if one bystander said to the other, “No, you didn’t see it that way.”

What, then, does it mean to “form an opinion about the accident,” if disagreeing about what happened, seeing what happened differently, and (to go back to the first of the three), failing to see what happened at all, are equally beside the point? So far I’ve just been following the translation but it’s worth noting here that the word that Brecht uses to capture what *is* “the point,” “*Urteil*,” has strong juridical connotations of the kind that “opinion” carries only in its more restricted uses (my German to English dictionary, for example, lists for “*Urteil*,” the following connotations: judgment, sentence, decree, conviction, decision, finding, and verdict). If we are Brecht’s bystanders, then, the “point” of the street scene seems to be that opinions of this kind can be rendered independently of our having seen the incident, of determining its causes, or of our distinctive perspectives about it. On what basis then, is our opinion formed?

The answer emerges especially clearly if we put “The Street Scene” version of the accident scenario together with an earlier version of it, in a passage from a poem written in 1930 called “On Everyday Theater”:

Take that man on the corner: he is showing how
 An accident took place. This very moment
 He is delivering the driver to the verdict of the crowd. The way he
 Sat behind the steering wheel, and now
 He imitates the man who was run over, apparently
 An old man. Of both he gives
 Only so much as to make the accident intelligible, and yet
 Enough to make you see them. But he shows neither
 As if the accident had been unavoidable. The accident
 Becomes in this way intelligible, yet not
 intelligible, for both of them
 Could have moved quite otherwise; now he is showing what
 They might have done so that no accident
 Would have occurred.⁸ (Brecht *Poems* 177)

Now, from a few paragraphs later in the “Street Scene” prose fragment, here is a two-sentence version of this section of the poem, telescoped down to just a few of its lines, and delivered in the voice of the “man on the corner”: “The driver was guilty, because it all happened the way I showed you. He wouldn’t be guilty if it had happened the way I’m going to show you now” (Willett 127). In the poem, judgment consists explicitly in reaching a verdict: “now he is delivering the driver to the verdict of the crowd.” We needn’t doubt that it’s the judgment of the crowd in the street scene that is at issue, and by analogy, the judgment of the epic theater audience. The first clause from the prose version, meanwhile, enacts the pronouncement of a verdict (“the driver was guilty”), which in turn is presented as the result of the demonstration in the second clause, “because it all happened the way I showed you.” Moreover, while the sentence tells us the driver is guilty because of what happened—the accident itself and what the driver did—at the same time, it shows us that the verdict is pronounced “because” of the reenactment and what the performer did—“the way I showed you.” In other words, we have two simultaneous renderings, one in which the actions of the driver determine his guilt and another in which the imitation of those actions compels a verdict. They inhabit the same sentence but they are not the same proposition.

The poem’s version achieves this same differentiation by other means. It separates what literally happened from its reenactment by means of a subordinating conjunction, a line break, and a rapid shifting of tense. In “he is showing how / an accident took place,” what actually “took place” is grammatically subordinate to the man’s “showing how.” But the empirical events and their representation are also severed: spatially, by the line break; grammatically, insofar as the subordinated clause reads as a stand-alone sentence—“An Accident took place” (this is true of the German as well); and temporally, insofar as the accident takes place in the past tense and its reenactment in the present (it “*took* place” while “he *is showing* how/...*this very moment*”). “This very moment,” of course, is intended to modify the line that follows (“he is delivering the driver to the verdict of the crowd”) in which the “man on the corner” performs his demonstration. But by positioning “this very moment” in the same line with “an accident took place” instead of with the line containing the sentence it modifies, Brecht achieves the further effect of reminding us that the sentence, “An accident took place,” albeit in the past tense, is itself a representation occurring not just in the grammatical present, but “this very moment,” as in the paradigmatic moment of reading, where the sentence is present before its reader. In the poem “this very moment” is also, as we’ve already seen, the moment in which the delivery of the performed reenactment coincides with the delivery of the verdict: “he is delivering the driver to the verdict of the crowd.” Thus the poem gives us two separate worlds: one consisting of what “took place,” the empirical world of accidents, causes and effects, on the one hand; and on the other, a representational world, the

world of the reenactment, but also of judgment, for the poem insists, both grammatically and propositionally, that that the latter is where verdicts reside.

We now see that “forming an opinion about the accident,” the part of the street scene that models the alienation effect and is the point of epic theater more generally, is a matter of rendering judgment, of assessing a wrong. The second sentence in the prose “Street Scene,” “He wouldn’t be guilty if it had happened the way I’m going to show you now”—and its counterpart in the poem—“Now he is showing what/They might have done so that no accident would have occurred”—make clear that reaching a verdict entails our judgment not just of what is wrong, but of what is right. In the prose version, the model of the epic theatre compels our recognition of the conditions of a better world, one in which the accident would not take place. The poem is even more emphatic; the demonstrator depicts a world in which “no accident would have occurred.”

The minute “forming an opinion about the accident” becomes a judgment of what is right, not just for this world or that, but in effect, for all possible worlds, the spectator is in the business of making truth-claims, and therefore in the business of the normative and absolute. The “opinion” that the model of epic theater seeks for us to render is one that obtains, in other words, regardless of whether we identify with the driver or the pedestrian, feel pity or rage. And by the same token it’s a judgment that obtains regardless of the driver’s or the pedestrian’s point of view, or for that matter, the demonstrator/actor’s point of view. The judgment remains the same, regardless of “the way we see things.”

3. Finance Modernism

I want to turn for a moment to two other poems by Brecht that illustrate, by showing us the same thing from different perspectives—literally by citing themselves, repeating the same words—that judgment is not a matter of perspective. We’ll begin with one of Brecht’s best known poems, “A Bed for the Night”:

I hear that in New York
 At the corner of 26th Street and Broadway
 A man stands every evening during the winter months
 And gets beds for the homeless there
 By appealing to passers-by

It won’t change the world
 It won’t improve relations among men
 It will not shorten the age of exploitation

But a few men have a bed for the night
 For a night the wind is kept from them
 The snow meant for them falls on the roadway.

Don't put down the book on reading this, man.

A few people have a bed for the night
 For a night the wind is kept from them
 The snow meant for them falls on the roadway
 But it won't change the world
 It won't improve relations among men
 It will not shorten the age of exploitation.⁹ (Brecht *Poems* 181)

The poem begins with a situation that is itself understood as repeated (it takes place “every evening”), signaling that the need to shelter the homeless, taken up by the man who stands every evening at 26th and Broadway, is an ongoing state of affairs. The next three lines, which will become the last three lines of the poem, make a pronouncement on the man’s activity: “It won’t change the world / It won’t improve relations among men / It will not shorten the age of exploitation.” The next three lines, turning on the oppositional conjunction “but,” introduce themselves almost as a response to the previous lines, and they seem to offer a qualification of their judgment, as if the speaker were saying, “what I just said may be true, *but* at least a few men have a bed for the night.” The reason for thinking the judgment might be qualified—in other words, for treating it as relative rather than absolute—is clearly based on what appears good, but from a limited perspective, that of the “few men” who succeed in receiving “a bed for the night.” When this line is repeated in the last stanza, however, it no longer functions as a countervailing claim about the judgment that giving a few homeless a bed for the night changes nothing. In its second incarnation, the line serves instead simply as a description of what’s happening in the world at a given moment. At the end of the poem, the lines of judgment that stood to be qualified in the previous stanza now return with the full force, the force of final judgment, and as a direct response to the claim that called upon us to view these matters from the point of view of those served by the charitable actions of man in the first stanza. By the time we reach the end of the poem, even though we have seen these lines quite literally from different perspectives as we move our eyes down the page, the judgment that they pronounce (the judgment against a capitalist order that produces men in need of a bed for the night) has not changed.

One word among the six repeated lines does, however, undergo a change from the first iteration to the second, and the force of the change is much easier to grasp in the German. The word for those few who “have a bed for the night” is “Männer” in the first instance, then becomes “Menschen” in the second. “Männer,” the plural of “Mann,” in German is used to refer to an individual person gendered male, while “Menschen” refers to all humankind. In the context of the unfolding of the poem, then, it’s as if recognizing the homeless as members of the class of mankind, rather than as individual men in need, is a precondition for the type of judgment that occurs in the final lines of the poem. At the same time, however, insofar as the lines of that judgment occur first in the series of iterations, it’s as if judgment itself is the precondition for the shift from seeing the homeless as individual men to seeing them as representative of mankind. If we go back to the beginning of the poem, it’s worth noting that the ones who get a bed for the night do so through the man (“Mann,” not “Mensch”) appealing to the good graces of the passers-by. The homeless are “Männer,” in other words, when their conditions are a matter of empathy; once they are “Menschen,” the judgment can reveal the homeless and the charity that serves them alike as effects of systematic exploitation.

Another poem exemplifying this device of repetition/self-citation consists entirely of its repeated lines. And in this case, the poem announces its subject matter clearly in terms of point-of-view:

The peasant’s concern is with his field
 He looks after his cattle, pays taxes
 Produces children, to save on labourers, and
 Depends on the price of milk.
 The townspeople speak of love for the soil
 Of healthy peasant stock and
 Call peasants the backbone of the nation.

The townspeople speak of love for the soil
 Of healthy peasant stock
 And call peasants the backbone of the nation.
 The peasant’s concern is with his field
 He looks after his cattle, pays taxes
 Produces children, to save on labourers, and
 Depends on the price of milk.¹⁰ (Brecht *Poems* 212)

We can see at a glance that the first of the seven-line stanzas gives us two perspectives: the first four lines are devoted to that of the “peasant,” and the last three to that of the “townspeople.” We start with the simple, unadorned descriptions of the practicalities that occupy the peasant’s mind, all of them fully legible in economic terms. The lines devoted to the townspeople, by contrast, serve also as a perspective on the peasant, only now he appears as a clear type, and painted in highly idealized terms.

The second stanza starts by repeating, word for word, the idealized view of the townspeople, then repeats word for word the view of the peasant. This time around, however, the peasant’s point of view reads as a corrective to the townspeople’s idyllic image of him. The concerns of the peasant reemerge, now quite literally from beneath the idealized picture of the townspeople, as harsh realities that have been painted over, as it were, by the picture of him that hangs over them. But before we are tempted to say that this poem invites us to violate the directives of Brecht’s epic theater and identify with the peasant’s familiar financial worries, we should notice that the peasant’s concerns make their own omissions. That is, the worry that from his perspective appears simply as the “price of milk,” and, especially when the prices are high, contributes to his need to “save on laborers,” is an index of an economic totality, a system of relations of production that includes the townspeople, and for that matter, their perspective on the peasant.

In Germany between the end of World War I and when this poem appeared in 1934, the price of milk could certainly testify to the kinds of consequences its fluctuation could have for peasants and townspeople alike. Obviously during the period of stunning hyperinflation of 1922 and 1923, to have said that “prices fluctuate” would have been the understatement of the century. A bottle of milk that cost the equivalent of \$1.20 in 1922 would have risen to a price of 2 million dollars in September of 1923, and by November it would have cost a cool 3 billion. By 1931, however, the monetary pendulum had swung the other way; Germany was in a period of deflation, accompanied by widespread unemployment and general reductions in wages and social spending. By 1934, Brecht was in exile, and Hitler had risen to power on a message of love for the soil and healthy peasant stock who are the backbone of the nation.

The point here isn’t that “The Peasant’s Concern” is really a poem about the Nazi takeover of Germany or even a poem about the price of milk. For Brecht, as we have already seen, and as the technique of word-for-word quotation that he deploys serves to make plain, the price of milk and the changing political regimes in which it fluctuates are alike effects of capitalism. Momentous changes in the price of goods (or in the value of the money to buy them) can (and do) occur without altering the market system in which those goods and money come into being in the first place. What both Brecht’s self-quotation poems do is to distinguish between the variable, phenomenological effects of markets—the price of milk goes up or

down, this or that homeless man gets a bed for the night—and the market logic that entails both homelessness and price fluctuations.

In the period between World War I and 1933, the German case was the most extreme, to be sure, but the U.S. as well as the other major powers of Europe had also seen wide swings between inflation and deflation, whether as a result of unintended shocks in supply or demand, or as a result of deliberate national strategies for inducing them. What's striking in the work of the three other modernists I mentioned at the beginning of this paper—Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and T.S. Eliot—is that their work not only invokes the monetary policies that affected what Stein called “the meaning of money,” but that the meaning of money becomes for each of them something against which to measure the meaning of poetry.¹¹ Thus, for example, in *The Waste Land*, not exactly forthcoming in its views on political economy, the pervasive tropes of fluidity read a little differently when one considers Eliot's employment in the Foreign Department of Lloyd's during the time in which he wrote the poem. “I am busy tabulating the balance sheets of foreign banks to see how they are prospering,” wrote Eliot to his sister Charlotte in one of many letters that also complained bitterly about high prices for goods that were not in scarce supply (Eliot *Letters* 1 162). Now consider these well known lines from the brief “Death By Water” section of *The Waste Land*:

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep seas swell
And the profit and loss.

A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. (ll. 312-316)

Juxtaposed with “profit and loss,” “a current under sea” is hard not to read in this context as a somewhat distorted homophonic pun on “currency.” And if we consider the lines in the previous section that introduce us to “Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna Merchant / Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants / C.i.f. London: documents at sight” (ll. 209-211), what is otherwise among the more baffling of the endnotes Eliot provides with the poem, becomes another occasion for a pun on currency: “The currants were quoted at a price ‘carriage and insurance free to London’; and the Bill of Lading, etc. were to be handed to the buyer upon payment of the sight draft” (fn 210).

Pound's writings of the early to mid-30s, in their explicit embrace of Mussolini and social credit, are nothing if not a response to the kinds of volatile monetary conditions that had much earlier made Eliot, as he told his sister, so keen to know “the assets and liabilities of every bank abroad” (Eliot *Letters* 1 162) and that Brecht had understood as cause for

revolution. In 1933, the same year that Brecht was fleeing Nazi Germany, Ezra Pound was busy publishing his own denunciations of capitalism in response to ongoing instability in the value of currency, a problem he believed fascism could solve. Pound, however, unlike Brecht, criticized capitalism not so much for its impoverishment of the worker as for its impoverishment of the artist and the arts. The problem he argues, in “Murder by Capital,” is “maladministration of credit” (for which Pound, like Hitler, chose to blame Jews), and the solution, he suggests, is to replace the banks with a system of social credit administered by the state. The idea behind social credit was to redistribute state wealth among the citizens in the form of vouchers to be used in direct exchange for goods. Pound imagined that the “slips of paper,” would “correspond[] to extant goods,” and the value of the currency, if we wish to call it that, would remain constant because each slip of paper would be earmarked for a specific good. The absence of such a system, Pound contended, was “at the root of bad taste” (Pound *Selected Prose* 229). Pound’s fantasy of a one-to-one correspondence between the commodity and the currency used to purchase it (a fantasy also, of the end of price fluctuation from the perspective of the consumer) had its analogue, moreover, in Pound’s highest standard for poetic achievement, in which “The meaning of the poem can not ‘wobble.’” (Pound *Gaudier-Brzeska* 257). Insofar as the poetic meaning that both Pound and Eliot sought was something that belonged not to the wobbling world of fluctuating interests rates and prices—that is, to contingencies of the material conditions of production and consumption—but to an unwobbling world that is of the same order as the absolute world of judgment that Brecht severs from the world of individual experiences and perspectives as well as the fluctuating price of milk.

4. Revolution and Anti-Theatricality

It should be clear by now why another central component of Brecht’s alienation method involves overcoming both the spectator’s and the actor’s inclinations to identify with the characters and prevent becoming consumed by their characters’ actions and feelings. In a 1936 essay, “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting,” Brecht proposes Chinese acting as an ideal model for the epic theater because its techniques, he believes, are the most effective in defeating any tendency to empathize. This defeat is accomplished in large part, Brecht claims, by the actor removing from his performance all traces of illusion that the events are real and his actions genuine. He “never acts,” Brecht writes, “as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. He expresses his awareness of being watched.... The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place. ...A further means is that the artist observes himself” (Willett 91-92). As Brecht points out, the fiction of the fourth wall and the actor who performs as if the audience did not exist are among “the European stage’s characteristic illusions.”

The greatest exponent of these “illusions” was the French aesthetic philosopher Denis Diderot. Brecht’s insistence, meanwhile, on the actor’s utter self-consciousness and the collapse of the fourth wall couldn’t appear more diametrically opposed to Diderot’s essentially anti-theatrical commitments. Diderot’s instructions to actors in his 1758 *Discours sur la poésie dramatique* are striking in their contradiction, virtually point for point, of the techniques that Brecht extols in Chinese acting. Here is Michael Fried’s translation, from *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*: “Think no more of the [spectator],” writes Diderot, “than if he did not exist. Imagine, at the edge of the stage, a high wall that separates you from the orchestra. Act as if the curtain never rose” (Fried *Absorption* 96). For Diderot, as Fried explains, these imperatives were transferable to works on canvas, so that what compelled the beholder of certain paintings by Chardin, Greuze, and Vien, whose figures were depicted in the acts of reading, drawing, or, most unselfconsciously of all, sleeping, was their achievement of what Fried calls “the supreme fiction that the beholder did not exist” (Fried *Absorption* 103). The condition for producing convincing absorption in both painting and the theater for Diderot—the illusion that the beholder did not exist—would eventually become, most pervasively in the literature we have come to associate with modernism, not so much a fiction or an illusion as the ontology of the autonomous work of art. For Brecht of course, there is no theatrical situation in which the beholder does not literally exist, but as we shall see, he proves to be no less committed than Diderot to the logic of autonomy if not to its ontology.¹²

Gertrude Stein, meanwhile, in a series of lectures delivered between 1934 and 1936, produced, as I have argued elsewhere, what is surely among the most consistent and explicit modernist defenses of this ontology of the work of art, and she does so in thoroughly Diderotian terms. A work of art is only a masterpiece, Stein argues in “What Are Master-Pieces and Why Are There so Few of them” insofar as it “is an end in itself.” What she means by this is that the masterpiece is not an end for anyone or anything else. What it is as a work of art is independent of what it is for any reader or beholder who encounters it. Stein elaborates this claim by differentiating the “entity”—the being as “an end in itself”—achieved by the masterpiece from the “identity” that structures situations that entail an audience. To illustrate this difference, she specifically invokes oratory and letter-writing:

One of the things that I discovered in lecturing was that gradually one ceased to hear what one said one heard what the audience hears one say, that is the reason that oratory is practically never a master-piece. ...It is very interesting that letter writing has the same difficulty, the letter writes what the other person is to hear and so entity does not exist there are two present instead of one and so once again

creation breaks down. I once wrote in writing *The Making of Americans* I write for myself and strangers but that was merely a literary formalism for if I did write for myself and strangers if I did I would not really be writing because already then identity would take the place of entity.¹³ (Stimpson 356-357)

When Stein declares that she wrote her novel *The Making of Americans* (which she certainly believed was a masterpiece) for an audience of “myself and strangers” only to qualify that claim by saying that her audience was “merely a literary formalism,” the qualification is a matter of kind rather than degree. For Stein when the audience is formal, what it isn’t is literal, which is to say, there is no audience at all.

If no audience at all is a requirement of the ontology of the masterpiece, it’s hardly surprising that in Stein’s aesthetic theory, plays pose a deep problem with respect to their claim to be art. What defines the theater for Stein (and what she thinks differentiates it from literature and painting), is the necessity of an audience, which means that the play, in her terms, cannot be an entity—it consists in the recognition of its audience and therefore is a matter of identity—and therefore cannot be a masterpiece. Indeed, Stein imagines the relationship between the play and its audience in terms of a temporal disjunction that she also links to identity, an unfolding in time that is quite the opposite of the “completed presence” of the masterpiece as entity: “The thing that is fundamental about plays is that the scene as depicted on the stage is more often than not, one might say is almost always in syncopated time in relation to the emotion of anybody in the audience” (Stimpson 244). As she puts it a few pages later, “The emotion of you on one side of the curtain and what is on the other side of the curtain are not going to be going on together. One will always be behind or in front of the other.” (Stimpson 245).

The logic that separates great painting and acting from theatricality in Diderot and masterpieces from everything else in Stein is a logic that also defines modernism against a postmodernism that above all seeks to solicit the reader or beholder. From this standpoint, Brecht looks less like a modernist and more like a postmodernist *avant la lettre*. As we have already begun to see, however, the very thing Brecht demands from his audience, namely their judgment, is necessarily atemporal and absolute, much as Stein envisions the entity achieved by the masterpiece. “The Business of Art,” Stein writes in “What Are Master-Pieces,” “is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present, and to completely express that complete actual present.” This “complete actual present” is offered precisely by way of contrast to the unfolding temporality of remembering and recognition that constitutes “identity” in Stein’s terminology.¹⁴ The operative word here is “complete.” In Brecht it is the same presentness of judgment, as we have seen it achieved in Brecht’s poems, and as it is inscribed in the “Urteil” that is the “point” of epic theatre. In short, there is no contradiction

between the imperative of the theater to address the spectator in Brecht and its imperative to ignore the spectator in Diderot. In each case the art never consists in the response of this or that viewer; it is the work or the judgment that holds regardless of who is viewing.

Brecht sought to make the theater revolutionary by making it anti-theatrical. There can be no revolution, of course, without revolutionaries; hence Brecht's interest in behaviorism and advertising, which, as Todd Cronan shows in "Art and Political Consequence," Brecht imagined might be employed to manipulate theatergoers' affective responses in controllable ways. But Brecht's investment in these tactics doesn't make the aesthetics of his theater any less anti-theatrical or its revolutionary politics, any less indifferent to the revolutionary (or not) feelings of its audience. Brecht could hope for a predictable response in the theatergoer—the desire for revolution—just as the advertising industry can hope to produce predictable responses in the consumer—the desire for this or that commodity. But Brecht understood that the reasons for revolution—systematic exploitation and the structures of capitalism that entail it—are the same regardless of how many (or how few) theatergoers can be made to see them or feel something about them. The reasons for buying a commodity, meanwhile, are potentially as many as the consumers available to buy them, and advertising's job, which Brecht understood perfectly well, is to capitalize on the most likely hits or to invent new ones. Brecht also understood that the reasons of the consumer (her likes and dislikes) and the reasons of the revolutionary (her political beliefs) are categorically and incommensurably distinct. After all, there is no coherent account of political disagreement (or for that matter, aesthetic disagreement) without appeal to beliefs that are normative, subject to judgments of truth or falsehood, right or wrong, good or bad. The likes and dislikes of the consumer, meanwhile, however they may lend themselves to statistically based claims for what is or is not "normal," are precisely non-normative—there is no account of them that can be coherently framed in terms of disagreement or coherently admit to judgment. The fundamental anti-theatricality of both Brecht's aesthetics and his politics—their fundamental indifference to the responses of an audience is, in short, necessary to their claims to deliver judgment. Which is to say that Brecht proves to be a difficult fit for a metamodernist fantasy of oscillating among "infinite worlds" made up of "infinite selves" and their infinite inclinations. For metamodernism, in this respect, is nothing if not capitalism's fantasy of the market, one in which what we "like" can also masquerade as a politics. Reading Brecht correctly might well serve as its antidote.

NOTES

¹ My contribution to this issue would not have been possible without substantial conversations and exchanges with Nicholas Brown, Michael Clune, Todd Cronan, Brigid Doherty, Michael Fried, Walter Benn Michaels, Matthew Moraghan, and Jen Phillis.

² Snoop released his most recent album, the aptly titled *Reincarnated* (RCA 2013), under the name Snoop Lion.

³ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, the two Dutch cultural theorists who founded the English-language web journal, *Notes on Metamodernism*, in 2009, were still presenting themselves as part of an emerging network of scholars and artists working on the subject when I met them at a conference in Uppsala earlier this year. The movement has in fact gained considerable traction in the U.S., sufficiently so that the editors at *Huffington Post* thought its readers ought to know about it and the *American Book Review* saw fit to give it a special issue.

⁴ From “Der Herr der Fische” (poem appears in the *Werke* as “Ballade vom Herrn der Fische”:

Ihre Namen sich zu merken
Zeigte er sich nicht imstand
Doch zu ihren Tagewerken
Wußte er stets allerhand. (Brecht *Werke* 14 359)

⁵ Between 1973 and 2011 productivity grew 80%, enough, as a 2012 report by the Economic Policy Institute puts it, “to generate large advances in living standards and wages if productivity gains were shared.” The gains, however, were only narrowly shared: “[T]he annual earnings of the top 1% grew 156% [and] the remainder of the top 10% had earnings grow by 45%,” while the median hourly compensation during the same four decades grew only 10%. (Mishel 3,6).

⁶ Michael Clune locates the aesthetic origins Ward’s work in pop art, which is especially appropriate given that Andy Warhold once said, in response to an interviewer who asked what pop art was about, “it’s about liking things.” I first became aware of this remark when Kenneth Goldsmith cited it in a series of posts on conceptual writing for *Harriet* in 2007 (it’s especially fitting that later that year Goldsmith went on to write a series of posts proposing a “pro-consumerist poetry”).

⁷ Jameson makes clear why the proper English translation of *V-effekt* should be “estrangement”: “It is no disparagement of John Willett’s immense service to the Brechtian cause...to stress what is misleading about his translation...of *Verfremdungseffekt* as ‘alienation’ effect. The Marxian concept we identify as ‘alienation’ is, however, *Entfremdung* in German, so that this one had better be rendered ‘estrangement’ in keeping with its Russian ancestor (*ostranie* – a ‘making strange’)” (Jameson 85-86). I have not troubled to pursue the correction consistently, however, because the perceived ties to Marx’s term are sometimes relevant for Brecht’s readers, however convinced one may be that they are mistaken about those ties. For an extremely useful analysis of the concept of *gest* in the context of vocational aptitude testing in Germany in the 1920s, see Doherty, “Test and Gestus.”

⁸ From “Über Alltägliches Theater”:

Seht dort den Mann an der Straßenecke! Er zeigt, wie
Der Unfall vor sich gang. Gerade
Überliefert er den Fahrer dem Urteil der Menge. Wie der
Hinter der Steuerung saß, und jetzt
Ahmt er den Überfahrenen nach, anscheinend
Einen alten Mann. Von beiden gibt er
Nur so viel, daß der Unfall verständlich wird, und doch
Genug, daß sie vor euren Augen erscheinen. Beide
Zeigt er aber nicht so, daß sie einem
Unfall nicht zu entgehen vermöchten. Der Unfall
Wird so verständlich und doch unverständlich, denn beide
Konnten sich auch ganz anders bewegen, jetzt zeigt er, wie nämlich
Sie sich hätten bewegen können, damit der Unfall
Nicht erfolgt ware. (Brecht, *Werke* 12 319-20)

9. "Die Nachtlager":

Ich höre, daß in New York
 An der Ecke der 26. Straße und des Broadway
 Während der Wintermonate jeden Abend ein Mann steht
 Und den Obdachlosen, die sich ansammeln
 Durch Bitten an Vorübergehende ein Nachtlager verschafft.
 Die Welt wird dadurch nicht anders
 Die Beziehungen zwischen den Menschen bessern sich nicht
 Das Zeitalter der Ausbeutung wird dadurch nicht verkürzt
 Aber einige Männer haben ein Nachtlager
 Der Wind wird von ihnen eine Nacht lang abgehalten
 Der ihnen zugedachte Schnee fällt auf die Straße.
 Leg das Buch nicht nieder, der du das liest, Mensch.
 Einige Menschen haben ein Nachtlager
 Der Wind wird von ihnen eine Nacht lang abgehalten
 Der ihnen zugedachte Schnee fällt auf die Straße
 Aber die Welt wird dadurch nicht anders
 Die Beziehungen zwischen den Menschen bessern sich dadurch nicht
 Das Zeitalter der Ausbeutung wird dadurch nicht verkürzt.
 (Brecht *Werke* 14 137-138)

10. "Der Bauer kümmert sich um seinen Acker":

Der Bauer kümmert sich um seinen Acker,
 Hält sein Vieh in Stand, zahlt Steuern
 Macht Kinder, damit er die Knechte einspart, und
 Hängt vom Milchpreis ab.
 Die Städter reddten von der Liebe Scholle,
 Vom gesunden Bauernstamm und
 Das der Bauer das Fundament der Nation ist.
 Die Städter reddten von der Liebe Scholle,
 Vom gesunden Bauernstamm und
 Das der Bauer das Fundament der Nation ist.
 Der Bauer kümmert sich um seinen Acker,
 Hält sein Vieh in Stand, zahlt Steuern
 Macht Kinder, damit er die Knechte einspart, und
 Hängt vom Milchpreis ab. (Brecht *Werke* 14 172-173)

¹¹ Stein's politics have tended to escape her readers, but in 1935, when she was preparing her most fully articulated theory of the autonomy of the work of art in her lectures and in *The Geographical History of America*, she was also roundly condemning Franklin Roosevelt's monetary policies for, as she put it, "making money into a thing having no meaning" (Stimpson 480). In a series of short essays on the subject of money published in *The New York Herald Tribune* the same year, Stein, while never mentioning Roosevelt or John Maynard Keynes by name, is clearly criticizing the Keynesian spending programs of Roosevelt's New Deal. And insofar as she chooses a side on the subject of economics, she emerges squarely in the camp of Friedrich Hayek in her championship of the free market and her belief that the unfettered growth of wealth was best way to improve the lot of the poor: "When there are rich," she writes, "you can always take from the rich to give to the poor but when everybody is poor" (which she clearly thought would be the result of New Deal programs and policies) "then you cannot take from them the poor to give to the ever so much poorer and there they are" (Stein "Money" 111). It's worth pointing out that at least in terms of monetary policy, far from trying to "get rid of money" as Stein thought (Stimpson 477), Roosevelt had been busy during his first term trying to put more of it into circulation. With Executive Order 6102, signed on April 5 of 1933, the President, citing the powers granted him by the Banking Act of 1933, declared that all privately owned gold must be turned over to the Federal Reserve in exchange for its cash equivalent. In order to view Roosevelt's order as a way of "getting rid of money," one would have to imagine the collection of gold as a way of making it disappear, and somehow with it, the standard of value it embodied (what Stein surely meant by "making money

into a thing having no meaning"). The idea isn't completely far-fetched, however, for by this time the gold standard had been all but abandoned internationally, and its erosion is frequently invoked as a major cause of the financial instability and collapse that prompted the extreme measures of the Banking Act to begin with.

¹² Brecht attempted the launch of a Diderot Society in 1936 (Gorelik 113), the press release for which appears in an updated translation in this feature by Todd Cronan. I'm indebted to both Cronan and Brigid Doherty for alerting me to Brecht's interest in Diderot and his plans for a "Diderot-Gesellschaft." Roland Barthes remarks at the end of "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein" that "Brecht knew hardly anything of Diderot (barely, perhaps the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*)."

Nevertheless, the consistency between Brecht and Diderot on the matter of theatricality as such, as Barthes himself recognizes, is more than a little convincing (Barthes 39).

¹³ Stein one-ups John Stuart Mill's often quoted remark that "eloquence is heard...poetry is overheard," insisting, in effect, that the masterpiece is what it is independent of overhearing and hearing alike, because independent of anyone who could be listening. Mill's ideal of the poem in which "no trace of consciousness that any eyes are upon us, must be visible in the work itself" is nevertheless an early claim to something very like the modernist commitment to the autonomy of the work of art (Mill "Thoughts"). In a short essay called "What Is a Poem?" Laura Riding goes yet one step further than Stein, contending that insofar as being something (anything) to someone (or anyone) is irrelevant to what it is, the poem is not "something" but "nothing," a "vacuum" (Riding *Anarchism* 16-17). For an extended analysis of modernist uses of airlessness (Stein's and Wyndham Lewis's in particular) as a trope for aesthetic autonomy, see Lisa Siraganian, *Modernism's Other Work*.

¹⁴ It's worth pointing out here that Stein's "complete actual present" of the masterpiece is the ontological equivalent of the "presentness" that Michael Fried understands to inhere in art, as distinct from the literal presence to the beholder that is a feature of everything else (all that is "non-art"). I discuss Fried's concept of "presentness" as it pertains to intentionality and aesthetic autonomy in the last chapter of *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). The difference between the entity of the masterpiece and the identity of everything else for Stein, and between art and non-art (or modernism and literalism) for Fried has everything to do with relevance or irrelevance of the beholder before the work. Insofar as the literal presence of the audience is the inherent condition of the theater for Stein, it's what problematizes plays as art. And insofar as the beholder's presence becomes constitutive of the work in the minimalist project of the mid- to late 60s, it's what Fried argues renders that work non-art as well as what he understands as the movement's fundamental theatricality: "Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theater" (Fried *Art and Objecthood* 164). As it happens, in the section of "Art and Objecthood" in which this claim is made, Fried invokes Brecht (along with Artaud) to point out the degree to which theatricality emerges as a problem even for those producing works for the theater. In a footnote, Fried makes a different but equally important point about Brecht, that Brecht's techniques for transforming the theater are "not simply the result of his Marxism" (Fried *Art and Objecthood* 171). My own essay is intended at least in part to make clear the extent to which for Brecht, it's only through his aesthetic commitments that he is able to produce a Marxist art.

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Jennifer Ashton teaches at UIC. She is the author of *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge UP 2005) and edited *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry Since 1945* (Cambridge UP 2013). She is currently finishing a new book, tentatively titled *Labor and the Lyric: Contemporary American Poetry and Its Politics*. She also serves on the Contract Action Team for UIC United Faculty, AFT-IFT-AAUP-AFL-CIO Local 6456.

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ART AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCE: BRECHT AND THE PROBLEM OF AFFECT

TODD CRONAN

The truth must be spoken because of
the consequences which follow from it
for behavior.

—Brecht, “Five Difficulties in Writing
the Truth”

One thing I’ve learned, and dying I will
tell you: It makes no sense to say there’s
something deep inside you that won’t
come out! Can you think of *anything*
that has no consequences?

—Brecht, *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*

Consider the following note recorded for posterity in Brecht’s work journal for December 2,
1942:

a great discovery: the need to buy vitamins here in the form of pills. i was already clearly aware how bad my brain was functioning, how quickly i tired, how low one's vitality gets, and so on. five days of taking vitamins and i was fit again. what striking proof of the social origin of the proletarian "inability to think"!¹

It is, we might say, a deeply "L.A." thought. Brecht a little more than a year in Los Angeles discovers the wonders of vitamins. But Brecht was not much of a humorist, at least not in the *Arbeitsjournal*. This raises the question of how serious is the thought about the "social origin" of thinking. Then again, it's not really about the "social" origin of thinking at all, but about the chemical and biological roots of it. Is he truly advocating vitamins for all, an even distribution of vitamins to solve the problem of muddled thinking. Freely distributed *Centrum* as the path to Proletariat Revolution?

If this seems too slim a thought to hang a theory of radical behaviorism on Brecht, consider a more canonical source. In his "Notes from Svendborg" Walter Benjamin relates his encounters with Brecht over the summer of 1934 in Denmark.² At the conclusion to his notes he mentions, in Brecht's company, that he was reading Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. He also writes he wasn't feeling well. These were not unrelated events for Brecht. "[R]eading this novel was the main cause of my illness," Benjamin recalled of their conversation. Apparently, Brecht was speaking from personal experience. "By way of proof for my illness he told me how, when he was young, a chronic illness whose germ had been latent in him for a long time broke out one afternoon when a schoolfriend played Chopin on the piano, at a time when Brecht was already too enfeebled to protest. He ascribes to Chopin and Dostoevsky particularly dire effects on health."³ Was it a joke? Why Chopin and Dostoevsky specifically? How serious was the claim? Hanns Eisler recalled an evening with Brecht at Adorno's home in Los Angeles where they listened to Adorno's Stefan George settings ("Vier Lieder nach Gedichten von Stefan George," op. 7, 1944). Brecht's response was cutting, if not an obvious insult: "It reminds me greatly of Chopin."⁴ Knowing Brecht's feelings about Chopin (and Adorno surely did), one begins to see the point—the joke—of the otherwise anomalous appearance of Chopin's *Funeral March* in *Man Equals Man*.⁵ The final number performed at Widow Begbick's canteen, the song played at Galy Gay's funeral, has the soldiers "carry the crate on their shoulders and sing to the tune of Chopin's *Funeral March*: 'Now he will drink his Irish whisky no more.'"⁶ The song itself is one more nail in the coffin.

And if music could kill, it could also heal. There were "times when music could be used to treat disease," Brecht writes in "On the Use of Music in Epic Theater." Brecht observes that composers have largely forsaken the art of healing through music: "Our composers

on the whole leave any observation of the effects of their music to the café proprietors.” That Brecht was fundamentally concerned with the “effects” his plays had on the audience is uncontroversial, but that those effects were seen as inevitable and unstoppable is more surprising (and potentially problematic). Nonetheless, it is clear Brecht had a traditional vision of aesthetics in mind; it was a “science” of feeling.

On occasion Brecht appealed to sociological research in the study of effects on the audience: “One of the few actual pieces of research which I have come across in the last ten years was the statement of a Paris restaurateur about the different orders which his customers placed under the influence of different types of music. He claimed to have noticed that specific drinks were always drunk to the works of specific composers.” Chopin absinthe, Mozart vodka? How exactly could this “research” be utilized in the theater? Could it be marshaled to produce a new subject, as it were behind the viewers’ or listeners’ back? (Woody Allen unintentionally parodied Brecht’s point in his mock restaurant review “Fabrizio’s: Criticism and Response.” Spinelli (the chef’s) “linguine...is quite delicious and not at all didactic. True, there is a pervasive Marxist quality to it, but this is hidden by the sauce. Spinelli has been a devoted Italian Communist for years, and has had a great success in espousing his Marxism by subtly including it in the tortellini.”⁷ For Brecht, one did not need to be a connoisseur to feel the political effects of the pasta, it was available to everyone.) Brecht implied that theater directors could learn from the science of advertising and “produce music which would have a more or less exactly foreseeable effect on the spectator.” Did Brecht imagine he could produce a correctly political subject through the right kind of music? Did he seriously envision an art with “exactly foreseeable effects” on the viewer? More importantly, what *kind* of effects did Brecht hope to borrow from the lessons of advertising? If art bore political consequences, as Brecht assumed it did, then what kind of politics and what kind of art would produce the most progressive results?

We know that Brecht was guided on this question by contemporary developments in philosophy and social psychology.⁸ “Behaviorism,” he wrote in the “*Threepenny Lawsuit*,” “is a psychology that, based on the needs of commodity production, seeks to develop methods to *influence the customer*, an active psychology” and therefore “quintessentially progressive and revolutionary.”⁹ Progressive and revolutionary, that is, in the way that capitalist techniques of control are: when they are refunctioned from their invented purpose they become weapons in the war against their inventors (this is the point of the opening epigram to the lawsuit: “Contradictions are our hope!”¹⁰). In Brecht’s words: “Behaviorism’s limits are those that correspond to its function in capitalism....Here again the road leads only over capitalism’s dead body, but here again this is a good road.”¹¹ Put to alternate purposes, the effects of advertising could assume a revolutionary role. In other words, *Verfremdungseffekt*—with a

stress on the “effect”—was behaviorism with a Marxist bent. As the Philosopher observes in the *Messingkauf Dialogues*, his aim was to discover the “laws that would allow me to make predictions” and then to “influence” others (his customers) according to these laws.¹²

Although Brecht sought to influence the audience in exactly foreseeable ways, he nonetheless fundamentally distinguished this task from what he understood as the “*suggestive*” use of effects. One kind of effect (the *estrangement* effect, for instance, but not exclusively) functioned *persuasively* (and the aim was the highest form of predictability when received by a rational agent, with the assumption of necessary failures); the other type of effect (*suggestive*), was inevitable and automatic, as it were *surefire* and beyond failure. As I will argue, Brecht fundamentally differentiated effects of suggestion from effects of *influence*—two different kinds of artistic consequence—in ways that have yet to be considered. In Brecht’s finely tuned hypnotic terminology, the estrangement effect was a mode of influence but *not* of suggestion. It is upon this distinction that Brecht’s aesthetics turn.

In a passage entitled “Influence the audience (by the inductive method)” from the 1936 performance notes to *Round Heads and Pointed Heads* he wrote of the necessity for controlling effects in order to draw out the *right* responses from the audience: “A considerable sacrifice of the spectator’s empathy does not mean sacrificing all right to influence him. The representation of human behavior from a social point of view is meant indeed to have a decisive influence on the spectator’s own social behavior. This sort of intervention necessarily is bound to release emotional effects; they are deliberate and have to be controlled.”¹³ One might reasonably wonder what distinguishes Brecht’s vision of a work that produces a “decisive influence” on behavior from the kinds of suggestive control of the audience he ceaselessly critiqued (as Brecht well knew, influence and suggestion were both terms drawn from hypnotic literature and practice).¹⁴

One of Brecht’s guiding assumptions, we might call it his ontology, was the belief in the consequential nature of *all actions*. Effects, of some kind, were an *inevitable* fact of all art (and of life itself). The task was to *control* them, putting them to directed ends to influence the right kinds of behavior. Suggestive effects are ones that wash over the audience, putting them in a state of mind *undifferentiated from the life outside the theater*. For that reason suggestive effects are also ones where the audience feels themselves to be the *producer* of the work, a kind of bourgeois vision of life as the free play of the affects (rich and poor celebrate their differences in response). The latter is the subject of most of Brecht’s essays on the visual arts including the texts translated in this issue. (In addition, Brecht’s study of “Non-Objective Painting” stands as perhaps the central text on question of affective response in modernism. For a detailed discussion of that and related essays see my “Seeing Differently’ and ‘Seeing Correctly’: Brecht For and Against Abstraction” in the *Brecht Yearbook* [Dec. 2013].) For Brecht, the alternative

to the open-ended work that freely generated affect was the closed work that sought to control the production of effects, to attempt to foresee the result—to *intend* effects on an audience, even if that prediction might *fail*.

Taken at face value, Brecht's pursuit of "decisive influence" and "exactly foreseeable effects" on audience behavior might seem to undermine his basic political aims. It sounds like a formula for the much-lamented didacticism associated with Brecht's name. As T. W. Adorno famously argued, Brecht was authoritarian precisely because of his prioritizing of political effect over artistic autonomy. "As a virtuoso of manipulative technique, he wanted to coerce the desired effect," Adorno wrote.¹⁵ From Brecht's perspective, it's important to note, there was an essential difference between the "'direct,' flattening, impact" of traditional theater and the "indirect impact" he pursued through epic techniques.¹⁶ The epic stage was indirect insofar as it set out to "block" the spectator and "prevent his complete empathy"¹⁷ with the events described, thereby "leaving the audience to decide the matter for itself."¹⁸ Suffice to say, Adorno found the distinction, at least in practice, unpersuasive.

Of course for Adorno, putting the matter the other way around, autonomy was politically driven from the start and therefore hardly autonomous. As he put it in the *Aesthetic Theory*, "the resoluteness of [the work's] distance [from the world]...concretizes the critique of what has been repulsed."¹⁹ At no point did Adorno imagine autonomy as the work of art's immunity to the audience's response. It was closer to the opposite, the work of art meant insofar as it was detached from the author and received by historical audiences, giving expression thereby to the accumulated suffering inherent in artistic "material." In a sense it is difficult to see exactly where Brecht and Adorno differ on their account of political efficacy (both assume it is *indirect*), except to say that Brecht was forthright in his claims about effects (whether they worked or not is beside the point).

Adorno's "defense" of Brecht was that Brecht's didactic "theses took on an entirely different function from the one their content intended. They became constitutive...and contributed to the collapse of the unitary nexus of meaning."²⁰ The collapse of "unitary" meaning occurred in the process of artistic production. Brecht's actual productions, and his artistic impulses more generally, blocked his didactic intentions. Brecht's irrepressible artistry collided with his political aims. Adorno went so far as to (facetiously) claim of Brecht's "best work" that it was "hard to determine just what the author...meant."²¹ But the latter claim is in friction with Adorno's far more basic assertion that the meaning of every work of art was inherently "ambiguous."

In one sense, of course, Adorno was correct; Brecht sought, through research, to produce “desired effects” in his audience. Adorno’s defense, on the other hand, is less secure. Adorno’s assertion that works of art *necessarily*, by virtue of the incalculable demands of the artistic process, mean otherwise than what the author meant, makes it difficult to disagree with his claims. Adorno’s account of intention is limited to the notion of something like a thesis, an iconographic message, or preconceived idea lodged into the work, which is then delivered up to a reader (Brecht representing something like the apotheosis of the intentional fallacy for Adorno). Here is Adorno’s vision of the fallacy:

As Hegel well knew, what artists can say they say only through the form [*Gestaltung*], not by letting that form deliver a message. Among the most disastrous sources of error in the contemporary interpretation and critique of artworks is the confusion of the intention, what the artist supposedly wants to say, with the content [*Gehalt*] of the work. In reaction, the content of the artwork is increasingly lodged in what has not been cathected by the artist’s subjective intentions, whereas content is blocked in works in which intention, whether as *fabula docet* or as philosophical thesis, demands primacy....The philological procedure, which imagines that it grasps securely the content of the work when it grasps its intention, passes judgment immanently on itself in that it tautologically extracts from artworks what was put into them earlier....[N]o intention, however neatly presented, is assured of being realized by the work.²²

Setting aside the legitimacy of this claim as an account of Hegel, it should be clear that this is a rather thin image of what constitutes an intention. It amounts to something like a conscious message inserted into a work that is extracted by the critic/viewer/reader. Which is to say, a vision of intention that makes the artistic medium into something like a transparent vehicle for an idea that was fully formed before the work began. On this account, Brecht—the writer attached to the *Journals*, to theater notes, to *Brecht on Theater*—is guilty of the sins of contemporary interpretation. This is the Brecht that sees his works as the external materialization of a preformed idea. The idea is something that sits in the work and awaits its delivery to a viewer who pulls the idea from the work unaltered. To this (reductive) image of Brecht Adorno counters with Brecht the “artist.” Because Brecht was an artist (a better one than he knew) and not a critic, he necessarily performed the failure of his own intentions and therefore saved his work. The flip-side of Adorno’s claim here—meaning is foreclosed by works which are driven by didactic intentions—is realized by Brecht. His works succeed because the inner life of his material blocks his intentions. Adorno’s basic assumptions about the nature of artistic “material” (musical or otherwise) insist on the ontological divergence

of the work from the one who made it.²³ But they also render disagreement with Adorno's interpretations impossible; it is the "material" speaking, the accumulated history of human suffering "precipitated" into form, that Adorno finds expressed in the works he admires. Any interpretation of Brecht's work that was founded on the belief that it was the one the author intended, whether that intention is a matter of conscious or unconscious awareness, would, for Adorno, necessarily constitute a misconstrual of the nature of artistic signs, whose "content" is something like the negative image of human expressive agency, which is largely synonymous with instrumental reason.

If Brecht's putative didacticism, a vision made conspicuous with his claim to having a "decisive influence" on audience behavior, was at the center of the controversy around his work, consider too that he described all works of art as "necessarily...bound to release emotional effects." Which is to say, Brecht too had a vision of the non-intentional nature of artistic signs, only he imagined that fact as something that had to be continually *defeated*, neutralized by the artist. As Brecht saw it, one of the central tasks of his theater was to make the necessary release of emotional effects the expressive *problem* of the work itself, to thematize open-ended affect as the thing to be overcome, or to show how it had *not* been overcome by his characters, making that failure a problem to be resolved outside the theater.

Consequences: Brecht Watches *Gunga Din*

Brecht's most explicit engagement with the problem of artistic effects (and an associated range of loosely behaviorist ideas) appears in the short piece (c. 1940) asking "Is it worth speaking about the amateur theater?" "In the arts, if nowhere else," Brecht writes, "the principle that 'if it doesn't do much good at least it can't do any harm' is quite mistaken."²⁴ Good or bad, bourgeois or communist, *all art* makes "something happen to one" (BT, 150). All art produces inevitable *consequences*: "There is no play and no theatrical performance which does not in some way or other affect the dispositions and conceptions of the audience. Art is never without consequences....our morals are affected by it" (BT, 151). He concludes that "political, moral and aesthetic influences all radiate from the theater: good when it is good, bad when it is bad" (BT, 152). At this point Brecht cites an idea derived (through Russian sources) from William James's and Carl Lange's theory of emotion that says physiological affects generate specific emotional states, rather than the traditional account of emotions which argues the reverse. In Brecht's terms, "weeping arises from sorrow, but sorrow also arises from weeping" (BT, 152). Characteristically, Brecht gives the biological and timeless theory of weeping a specific human setting: a funeral. He observes how "education proceeds along highly theatrical lines....This can be seen at funerals, whose meaning escapes children entirely. These are theatrical events which form the character. The human being copies gestures, miming tones of voice." Education shows that behavior comes first, "logical

arguments only come later” (*BT*, 152). This is the same situation as when the customer unconsciously orders his drink to accompany the music that saturates the café.

Some recent commentary has focused on Brecht’s putative investment in the priority of bodily response over “logical arguments.” Brigid Doherty, in “Test and Gestus in Brecht and Benjamin,” takes up the problem of influence in the “era of psychotechnics.” Doherty considers how, according to Brecht and Benjamin (with special emphasis on Benjamin’s “*Karussell der Berufe*” of 1930), even or especially one’s “own occupation has influenced his or her mood, opinions, and relations with colleagues, as well as how each would compare the person she or he was at the time of taking up an occupation to the person she or he has become in performing that occupation.”²⁵ Similarly, in “Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street,” Miriam Hansen offers an influential assessment of the role biomechanics played in Brecht’s and Benjamin’s theories of artistic influence. According to Hansen, “A major reference point in this regard is Sergey Eisenstein who, drawing on and revising William James and the conservative philosopher Ludwig Klages...sought to theorize the conditions of transmitting or, more precisely, producing emotion in the beholder through bodily movement.”²⁶ She continues:

Seeking to adapt Klages’s (metaphysically grounded) concept of expressive movement for a materialist theory of signification and reception, Eisenstein, like his teacher Vsevolod Meyerhold, returned to James’s axiom that “emotion follows upon the bodily expression” (“we feel sorry because we cry”), although Eisenstein modified James by insisting on the two-way character and indivisible unity of movement and emotion. Without going into distinctions here, what seems important to me...is the notion of a physiologically “contagious” or “infectious” movement that would trigger emotional effects in the viewer, a form of mimetic identification....The recourse to neuro-physiological, mechanistic, and reflex psychology may not be as sophisticated as the insights of psychoanalysis; yet it may have been more in tune with new, technically mediated forms of aesthetic experience, predicated on mass production, unprecedented circulation and mobility, and collective, public reception.²⁷

Hansen’s media-based claims—the centrality of “psychotechnics,” “new, technically mediated forms of aesthetic experience predicated on mass production, unprecedented circulation and mobility”—grounded as they are in Benjamin’s writings, do not adequately reflect Brecht’s purposes. (It is worth recalling that Brecht considered Benjamin’s “Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility,” in particular the notion of aura, “pretty abominable” and

that his relationship to new media—radio and film—was never as central as his commitment to theater ²⁸) That new forms of technology matter, that they influence behavior, independently of the intentions of their users or receivers, a claim any media theory assumes, sounds something like the opposite of Brecht's claims. Brecht's interest in behaviorism was an interest in how it was people expressed themselves in their deepest intentions, even ones hidden from their conscious awareness (that intentions *were* readable), but not in how actions emerge unintentionally through precognitive response to stimuli. Despite Hansen's emphasis on the "two-way" character of Brecht's interpretation of James-Lange, she nonetheless assumes the viability and usefulness of "neuro-physiological, mechanistic, and reflex psychology," which, as she says, considers response as a matter of "movement and emotion."

Given this recent emphasis on technological and psycho-biological concerns in Brecht,²⁹ it is important to see how Brecht substantiates his point about response in the essay on amateur theater not by reference to music but film. He describes his affective response to seeing George Stevens' 1939 (very loose) adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's poem *Gunga Din*. I cite the passage at length as it touches on Brecht's most basic claims about the role of affect in art as well as his suspicions about its relevance:³⁰

In the film *Gunga Din* based on a short story [sic] by Kipling, I saw British occupation forces fighting a native population. An Indian tribe—this term itself implies something wild and uncivilized, as against the word "people"—attacked a body of British troops stationed in India. The Indians were primitive creatures, either comic or wicked: comic when loyal to the British and wicked when hostile. The British soldiers were honest, good-humored chaps and when they used their fists on the mob and "knocked some sense" into them the audience laughed. One of the Indians betrayed his compatriots to the British, sacrificed his life so that his fellow-countrymen should be defeated, and earned the audience's heartfelt applause.

My heart was touched too: I felt like applauding, and laughed in all the right places. Despite the fact that I knew all the time that there was something wrong, that the Indians are not primitive and uncultured people but have a magnificent age-old culture, and that this *Gunga Din* could also be seen in a different light, e.g. as a traitor to his people. I was amused and touched because this utterly distorted account was an artistic success and considerable resources in talent and ingenuity had been applied in making it.

Obviously artistic appreciation of this sort is not without effects. It weakens the good instincts and strengthens the bad, it contradicts true experience and spreads misconceptions, in short it perverts our picture of the world. (*BT*, 151)

Brecht is disturbed by the affective power of the film, as though the director could have taken control of the viewer without the audience's awareness.

In the film Cary Grant, Victor McLaglen and Douglas Fairbanks play sergeants in the Royal Army fighting off a murderous Indian cult in colonial British India. Brecht feels himself, as though at a biological level of behavior response, mirroring their moves, identifying with their roles. And yet, his affective responses are countered when he exits the theater (it is as though "suggestive" behavior tends to become intentional when the lights come up). Looking back he senses that his feelings were manipulated, as were likely those of everyone watching the film. Like the café owner, the film director made the audience consume, against their conscious will and morals, his (and Kipling's) politics.



Recall that Brecht *admired* the café owner's (and perhaps the director's) capacity to control response and that he sought to put behavior "research" to use in the theater. In other words, the problem with Stevens' film was not that he produced "foreseeable effects" on the audience; moreover, the problem was *not ultimately the politics* of the director, but rather the *kind* of effects deployed. In other words, Brecht was as critical of "Leftist" suggestive effects as he was of conservative ones. That's why he argued that it "is not enough to produce empathy with the proletarian rather than the bourgeois: the entire technique of empathy has become dubious (in principle, it's entirely conceivable that you could have a bourgeois novel which encourages empathy with a proletarian)" (AP, 230). Brecht's entire politics rested on the distinction between political (and artistic) commitment and affect along these lines.

In other words, Brecht's attitude toward empathy was *not* to say it wasn't real or effective. It was effective to the extent that it was a commonplace aspect of human behavior, it was *normal*: human beings mimetically respond to other humans at a very low level of identification (recall he was describing children at a funeral, or viewers at a film). Chopin, café owners, Hollywood film, and bourgeois actors and directors exploited this primordial fact. The point of Brecht's theater was to introduce cognition into affect, to "divide the audience," to provide space

to reflect on, even refuse, one's immediate reactions (not just succumb to them). And yet, Brecht also assumed that the kinds of responses produced by his plays would lead to certain predictable results. But the predictability of response he desired was not a matter of the viewer's normal response to stimuli—the products of empathetic identification—but rather to the *normative* demands of educated response, which, as social and historical, required the possibility of *failure* of response.

The problem of affective response in Brecht is difficult to construe because the normal and the normative overlap so closely in the language of Brecht's formulations. Paraphrasing Aristotle's *Poetics*, for instance, Brecht explains that when the actor imitates events from life those "imitations are supposed to have specific effects on the soul" (M, 16). The crucial mistake of Aristotelian aesthetics is not the production of "specific effects" on the audience, but rather that those effects occur at the level of the *psyche* or soul, that is, to the *biological* subject. Aristotle appealed to the normal subject for his "research" into audience response and that biological body inevitably responded to stimuli in the way that drugs affected any normal functioning biological unit. That is why empathy effects, in Brecht, is persistently identified with the effect of *drugs*.

Perhaps thinking of his experience of seeing *Gunga Din*, Brecht writes that sound film is the most "blooming branch of the international narcotics traffic." He describes "entire rows of human beings transported into a peculiar doped state, wholly passive, sunk without trace, seemingly in the grip of a severe poisoning attack. Their tense, congealed gaze shows that these people are helpless and involuntary victims of the unchecked lurchings of their emotions" (BT, 89). For Brecht the music-benumbed audience were not "seemingly" in the grip of a poison attack, they actually were. It was not the medium of film that was at fault. The effects available to *silent* film were crucial to Brecht's aesthetic because that allowed for contradiction, for performances that worked "*against...*the predetermined emotional states" produced by the music (BT, 90). (Of course Brecht also assumed that the intentions behind silent films were largely different from those produced by sound films, so it was not an ontological claim he was making about medium.) Brecht rejected *surefire*—what he calls "predetermined"—emotional reactions, those released in every "normal" subject, but not *predictable* reactions, those feelings which are culturally shaped and modified. The latter, crucially, allowed for a *failure* to come off, and required activation by the viewer—what he called "the active creative element" in response (BT, 164)³¹—while normal response always occurred, and outside of any context of meaning.

Shakespeare offered Brecht a test case on the difference between empathy and influence. The Philosopher in the *Messingkauf Dialogues* ribs the Actor about his performance of *Lear*: "When your Lear cursed his daughters a bald-headed man next to me started snorting in such an

extraordinary way that I wondered why he didn't wholly identify himself with your marvelous portrayal of madness, and start frothing at the mouth" (M, 28). Brecht's point here, part of the joke, was that the actor was better than he let on. The actor could not actually bring himself to produce a wholly seamless performance, one that hypnotized the spectator through the *actor's* total identification with the fevered Lear. Brecht called for the abandonment of the "expedient of suggestibility, which comes about as in epilepsy, where the epileptic carries along with him everyone disposed to epilepsy."³²

Bearing in mind the distinction between normal and normative claims in Brecht's aesthetics, it is easier to see the potential value of the contemporary sciences. Brecht frequently calls on writers to be aware of the latest developments in the science of the self. "Only very few of our 'realists,'" he writes, "have...taken notice of the development of views on the human psyche in contemporary science and medical treatment. They are still stuck with an introspective type of psychology, a psychology without experiments, a psychology without history, etc." (AP, 248). He repeatedly draws on the lessons of "physics" and "modern physiology," of Pavlov's experiments with dogs to explain theater (M, 17, 33). The Dramaturg in the *Messingkauf Dialogues* asks about the "transfer of direct sensations...when horror is aroused by horrible actions" (M, 33). The Philosopher explains that at the theater one typically experiences "rich, complex, many-sided incidents, comparable with those of Pavlov's dogs: food plus bell-ringing" (M, 34). For a failed actor, these complex events only show "secondary features," a dulled set of reactions, not the full sweep of emotions which is why the actor is "making the audience ill, just like Pavlov and the dogs." Given Brecht's understanding of the power of suggestive effects, one gathers that the illness is neither a joke nor imagined. The Pavlov experiment found its way into *Mother Courage* when Eilif recalls how he strategically starved his soldiers in order to make a raid (a massacre) on peasants storing ox meat. They were so hungry that "their mouths watered if they even heard a word beginning with *me*...like measles."³³ What Eilif, Hollywood directors, Pavlov and café owners share in common is their commitment to hypnotic suggestion and what Eilif's soldiers, Hollywood audiences, Pavlov's dogs, and the café guests share is their susceptibility to its effects.

Brecht's relation to Pavlov is rather complicated. Pavlov was largely celebrated by Lenin and his research was supported by the Soviet Union (the admiration did not go both ways as Pavlov held little regard for Lenin). The Marxist (re)vision of Pavlov comes out clearly in the *Threepenny Lawsuit*. Here, Brecht argues, "the reflexes are biological; only in certain of Chaplin's films are they social" (BT, 50). Before this he writes—part of which I cited earlier—"in the great American comedies the human being is presented as an object, so that their audience could as well be entirely made of Pavlovians. Behaviorism is...based on the industrial producer's need to acquire means of influencing the customer; an active psychology

therefore, progressive and revolutionary. Its limits are those proper to its function under capitalism (the reflexes are biological...).” These sentences have been the source of great trouble for commentators. It appears that Brecht is *distinguishing* the industrialist/café owner influencing the customer from the Pavlovian audience at the Chaplin film. Chaplin performs a scene open to the audience’s evaluation, while the café owner, performing his actions offstage, does not. In this sense, Pavlov was a crucial theorist of the normative. Pavlov showed how one can ring a bell and have the dog attack the owner under the right circumstances. The problem, of course, is that this suggests that Pavlov, like an actor or director, is someone who could *persuade* dogs (the viewers of epic theater) of the wrongness and rightness of their salivations (their actions) independent of their associations with the food (the object of empathy).

Suggestion/Influence, Empathy/Action

Continuing the line of thought explored in the 1940 essay on amateur theater—that every work of art, good or bad, “affects the disposition and conceptions of the audience”—in the period between January 11, 1941 and February 1, Brecht’s *Journals* are filled with discussion of the problem of “the social effect of works of art” (J, 130). The question, again, was not whether art had social effects, but what kind they would be. In these journal entries Brecht presents a slightly altered picture of his vision of epic theater. He now claims that “*empathy* in non-aristotelian theater” is a “*rehearsal* measure,” that is, one can use empathy in preparing for a role (J, 124). Above all, Brecht writes, “whatever empathy is achieved should incorporate no element of suggestion, i.e., the audience is not to be induced to empathize too” (J, 124-25). Here Brecht introduces a crucial distinction between empathy and suggestion, which he elaborates over the next several entries.

Although “in reality” empathy and suggestion “occur separately” Brecht reflects how difficult it is to maintain this distinction in current modes of theatrical production because “an actor...empathizing himself and inducing the audience to empathize (suggestive empathy)” is “identical” (J, 125). “Today’s actor,” he contends, it is a crucial moment in his argument, “cannot imagine effects being achieved without empathy, nor effects without suggestion” (J, 125). Even Brechtian performers Helene Weigel and Hermann Greid seem to reject the idea that empathy and suggestion can be separated in practice. Brecht observes that the only performance precedent for this kind of distinction is comedy (and, as cited earlier, outside theater, it is possible with silent film). The question Brecht raises is: “can the preventive techniques used in comedy to avoid empathy also be employed by tragic actors”? (J, 125)

In his January 14 entry Brecht again stresses that the “actor should empathize with the person presented in the play” but adds that it should not happen “on a suggestive basis, i.e. not so that the eventual audience would be forced to participate in this empathy” (J, 125). Brecht draws out the artifice of suggestive acting, showing that it is a set of techniques as much as epic theater is. Rather than being the simple natural expression of the human body in dramatic situation, Brecht dissects, or caricatures, the features of suggestive acting: “Tension in certain parts of the muscular system, head movements executed as if pulling on an elastic band, the feet as if wading in tar, intermittent stiffness, sudden changes, moments of restraint, also monotony of voice, remembered from church responses” (J, 125). As Brecht makes clear, suggestion is derived from the literature and practice of *hypnosis*; it is a technique the hypnotic operator uses to put the patient into a state of passive openness to the operator’s commands. According to Brecht, a certain pattern of muscle, head, feet, movement, and speech can “induce hypnosis” and “snakes, tigers, hawks and actors rival one another in this art” (J, 125-26). That is, snakes, tigers, and hawks use suggestive techniques to lower the defenses of their prey before they pounce and consume them. Above all, Brecht wants to dissociate “convincing, rounded acting” *including empathetic acting and its effects* from suggestive acting and its corresponding effects.

Brecht goes on to describe the traditional art of acting as a “simultaneous act of auto-suggestion and suggestion: he suggests to himself that he is somebody else, and he suggests to the audience that he is that other person” (J, 126). The actor drugs *himself* in the performance of his role and induces the audience to feel the same. The classical actor “makes his simulation suggestive, i.e. he forces the audience to go through it with him” (J, 126-127). As before, what marks the suggestive mode of acting problematic is the *forcefulness* of its social effects. The audience is *unable* to think and feel other than what the actor, as hypnotic operator, wants them to. Brecht’s seemingly casual reference to the hypnotic powers of snakes and tigers is more serious than it first appeared. He writes that in the “case of hypnosis by snake movements or by the look of a tiger[,] simulations also occur—of the movements or of rigidity” (J, 127). But at this point Brecht begins to hedge some of his more forceful claims about the separability of empathy and suggestion. “I cannot yet see exactly whether the act of empathy (which is an act of auto-suggestion) can be carried out without the suggestion affecting the audience,” he writes. He provocatively describes the possibility of empathetic acting without suggestive effects as “straightforward imitation, which in turn can of course only affect the persons presented” (J, 127). Indeed, marking a surprising shift of emphasis in his theorization of epic theater, he offers that “in the same way as the act of empathy the a-effect can also be used on a suggestive basis” (J, 127). As the latter makes clear, Brecht’s concern bears on *suggestive effects, that is to say, on audience response*, rather than techniques of

empathy or alienation. (Brecht mentions V-effects of a “demonic” kind, which he rejects for its suggestive results.)

Despite his own hedging over the separability of empathy/alienation and suggestion, he now writes that for *actors* “there is sometimes a fear of being unable to achieve any effect at all, except on a suggestive basis.” Rejecting this claim, Brecht returns to his basic supposition, “one thing at least is certain; there are some actors who ‘have presence’ without using any of the known means of suggestion” (J, 127). At this point Brecht briskly closes off the line of inquiry he opened up—“I do not set much store by all these speculations”—and considers the problem of empathy and suggestion as simply a practical matter. “It is more important to find exercises...which produce the desired effects. They are relatively easy to check” (J, 127). How does one “check” the success of a “desired effect”? If the effect is produced through suggestion, then one will observe a sequence of precise reflex actions. If the effect is produced on a non-suggestive basis, by *any technique available*, the audience will be driven to “causal scrutiny” of the actions (J, 127). Brecht's basic aesthetic aim was to *thematize* this difference—between causality and reflection on causes, between affect and cognitive awareness—in his works and to make the difference itself a matter of scrutiny.

NOTES

- ¹ Brecht, *Journals, 1934-1955*, trans. Hugh Rorrison, ed. John Willett (New York: Routledge, 1993), 272; hereafter cited in the text as *J*.
- ² Ongoing exchanges with Charles Palermo, Nicholas Brown and (especially) Jennifer Ashton on the problems raised here, and how best to put them, made this piece possible.
- ³ Walter Benjamin, "Notes from Svendborg, Summer 1934," trans. Rodney Livingstone, *Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927-1934* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 789.
- ⁴ Quoted in Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One Last Genius*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 160.
- ⁵ Chopin's march also appears in *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*.
- ⁶ Brecht, editorial notes to *Man Equals Man* in *Collected Plays: Two*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Mannheim (London: Methuen, 1994), 294. Also see the different phrasing, used here, in Brecht, *Baal, A Man's A Man, and The Elephant Calf*, ed. and trans. Eric Bentley (New York: Grove, 1964), 181.
- ⁷ *The Complete Prose of Woody Allen* (New York: Wings Books, 1991), 441.
- ⁸ The range of accounts of Brecht's engagement with behaviorism and related matters include: Hansjürgen Rosenbauer, *Brecht und der Behaviorismus* (Bad Homburg: Gehlen, 1970); John J. White, "A Note on Brecht and Behaviorism," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 7 (1971): 249-58; Jan Knopf, *Bertolt Brecht. Ein kritischer Forschungsbericht. Fragwürdige in der Brecht-Forschung* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1974), 85-86; Lutz Danneberg and Hans-Harald Müller, "Wissenschaftliche Philosophie und literarischer Realismus. Der Einfluß des Logischen Empirismus auf Brechts Realismuskonzeption in der Kontroverse mit Georg Lukacs," in *Realismuskonzeption der Exilliteratur zwischen 1935 und 1940/41*, ed. by Edita Koch and Frithjof Trapp (Mantol: Koch, 1987), 50-63; Lutz Danneberg and Hans-Harald Müller, "Brecht and Logical Positivism," *Essays on Brecht: The Brecht Yearbook* 1:5 (1990): 151-63; and Steve Giles, *Bertolt Brecht and Critical Theory: Marxism, Modernity, and the Threepenny Lawsuit* (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1997).
- ⁹ Brecht, "The Threepenny Lawsuit," in *Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio*, ed. and trans. Marc Silberman (London: Methuen, 2003), 172; my emphasis.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 172.
- ¹² Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1965), 18. Hereafter cited in the text as *M*.
- ¹³ Brecht, "Notes on 'Pointed Heads and Round Heads,'" *Collected Plays: Four*, ed. Tom Kuhn and John Willett (London: Methuen, 2001), 309.
- ¹⁴ I consider the theoretical and practical role of hypnotic influence played in a range of modernist practices in *Against Affective Formalism: Matisse, Bergson, Modernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). For a systematic treatment of hypnotic influence in psychoanalytic practice see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).
- ¹⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 242.
- ¹⁶ Brecht, notes to "The Mother," in *Collected Plays: Three*, ed. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1997), 356, 352.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 352.
- ¹⁸ Brecht, notes to "He Said Yes/He Said No," in *Collected Plays: Three*, 342.
- ¹⁹ I touch on these issues in "Literally Conceptual," review of Lisa Siraganian, *Modernism's Other Work, Radical Philosophy* 177 (Jan./Feb. 2013): 51-54.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 32.
- ²² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 150; translation slightly modified.
- ²³ Issues of intentionality in art are obviously complicated and I have vastly telescoped a range of detailed arguments here. On the problem of authorial intention in the work of Paul Valéry, and in Adorno's interpretations of his work, see Todd Cronan, "From Art to Object: The Case of Paul Valéry," in *Against Affective Formalism*, 221-51. On the problem of

intentionality and disagreement see Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

²⁴ *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. and ed. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1968), 150. Hereafter cited in the text as *BT*.

²⁵ Brigid Doherty, "Test and Gestus in Brecht and Benjamin," *MLN* 115:3 (Apr., 2000): 445.

²⁶ Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street," *Critical Inquiry* 25:2 (Winter 1999): 317.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 318.

²⁸ Brecht, quoted in Erdmut Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht: The Story of a Friendship*, trans. Christine Shuttleworth (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 48.

²⁹ Among the most technologically-centered of the recent accounts of Brecht is Devin Fore's *Realism After Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

³⁰ Earlier, around 1924 in Berlin, Brecht was inspired by Kipling's example to transform the setting of *Man Equals Man* from Ireland to a British-Indian military-colonial milieu.

³¹ Brecht further affirms that "the appeal has to be made to reader as a thinking and feeling person," what he calls the "responsive spectator" (*J*, 130, 131).

³² "New Dramatic Writing," in *Brecht on Art and Politics*, ed. Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles (London: Methuen, 2003), 72-73. Hereafter cited in the text as *AP*.

³³ Brecht, "Mother Courage and Her Children," in *Collected Plays: Five* (London: Methuen, 1995), 147.

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

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KURT WEILL, CAETANO VELOSO, WHITE STRIPES

NICHOLAS BROWN

If it is art, it is not for everyone, and if it
is for everyone, it is not art.—Arnold
Schönberg¹

Almost forty years after Theodor Adorno delivered what had seemed to be a death blow to some of Bertolt Brecht's most attractive claims, Roberto Schwarz had the audacity to return to a very basic question: How does Brecht mean what he means?² The problem is precisely that of autonomy, or rather its lack: in Adorno's essay on the question, the problem of "commitment," or art's heteronomy to politics.³

As is well known, Brecht's theater aims explicitly at autonomy from the market. Entertainment of course precedes the market: opera "was a means of pleasure long before it was a commodity."⁴ But under present conditions, "art is a commodity" whose value derives, in the case of opera, from "the social function of the theater apparatus, namely to provide an evening's entertainment."⁵ In *Mahagonny*, this pleasure is artistically neutralized by framing it:

As for the content of [*Mahagonny*], its content is pleasure: fun not only as form, but as subject matter. Pleasure is at least to be the object of inquiry, even as the inquiry is to be an object of pleasure. Pleasure enters here in its present historical form: as a commodity.⁶

The two sides of the chiasmus are not symmetrical. The inquiry as an object of pleasure (*Mahagonny*) is a commodity; pleasure as an object of inquiry (*Mahagonny*) is not. Supported by the theater apparatus, epic theater is all the same within it a “foreign body.”⁷ But autonomy from the market is understood to be heteronomy to something else. The goal of epic theater is “to develop an object of instruction out of the means of enjoyment, and to convert certain institutions from places of entertainment to organs of publicity.”⁸ Even as the culinary is retained, in other words, Brecht turns the ancient defense of poetry—“delight and teach”—more fundamentally into a choice of priorities: “Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater?”: theater for pleasure or theater for learning?⁹

Adorno raises an objection to this orientation that is in its essence very basic, and that returns to Hegel’s critique, in the introduction to his lectures on aesthetics, of the possibility of defending art by referring to its ends. From the most abstract perspective, the choice Brecht imposes is no choice at all: both theater for pleasure and theater for learning are theater “for” something; that is, both are to be judged by their effectiveness as a means to some external end. If the work of art is not to “have its end and its aim in itself,” but is rather to be valued as a means to some other end, then the appropriate focus of judgment shifts away from the work of art both to the end it claims to serve and to the efficacy of its status as a means.¹⁰ For Hegel’s critique, it matters not at all whether the purported ends are noble or base: Hegel’s offhand list includes “instruction, purification, improvement, financial gain, striving after fame and honor” (64). The point is rather that neither moment—neither that of the work of art’s status as a means (essential or arbitrary?), nor that of the status of the ends to which it is subordinated (desirable or not?)—is self-evident. This applies as well to today’s academic empathy-peddlers, amateur subjectivity-modelers, community do-gooders, and civic boosters as it does to yesterday’s radical theater.

In the early 1950s Adorno is, to say the least, suspicious of the ends to which Brecht is committed. More devastatingly, however, Adorno points to the implausibility of the work of art as a means. In order to do what it claims to do—namely, to “strike in images the being of capitalism” (416)—Brechtian theater has recourse to the technical means available to drama as a medium. But from the perspective of propositional truth, of the revolutionary doctrine the work of art is supposed to contain, these technical means are distortions. And here Adorno

does not merely disagree with Brecht, but rather shows Brecht necessarily disagreeing with himself. In *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, for example, Brecht legitimately requires a certain level of coincidence to condense an entire ensemble of contradictions onto the single figure of Joan. But “that a strike leadership backed by the Party should entrust a decisive task to a non-member is, even with the greatest latitude for poetic license, as unthinkable as the idea that through the failure of that individual the entire strike should fail” (417). The point here is not that Brecht should have written a treatise on revolutionary action rather than a play, but rather that a play cannot be at the same time a treatise on revolutionary action—or at least, not a good one. Indeed, the very requirement that *Saint Joan* be a play falsifies the treatise it also claims to be. The ostensible thesis of *Saint Joan*—that individual do-gooding is a compensatory substitute for collective action—is subverted by the fact that everything hinges—necessarily, since this is a play—on the success or failure of Joan’s individual do-gooding. Rather than, as might be expected, bluntly refuting Brecht’s claims, Adorno folds them delicately into what they seek to oppose, effectively aligning Brecht’s dramaturgy with formal aestheticism. For the next move is to insist that Brecht’s didacticism is in fact a formal principle rather than a political one. “Brecht’s technique of reduction would be legitimate only in the field of ‘art for art’s sake,’ which his version of commitment condemns as it does Lucullus” (419).

The brilliance of Schwarz’s late intervention is to see that this critique is devastating to Brecht’s claim to didactic effectiveness, but not to the play for which this claim is made. The loss is not as great as it might seem: after all, Schwarz reminds us, the Brechtian “lessons” are “of modest scope” and it is not obvious that they remain today ahead of historical developments (43). “Thus, against claims to the contrary, the truth of the plays would not lie in the lessons passed on, in the theorems concerning class conflict, but rather in the objective dynamic of the whole” (44). This is not to say that Brecht’s plays have no cognitive content or that they have no political potency, but rather that their content and their politics are mediated by the self-legislating nature of the autonomous work. As a corollary, when the work falters as a work, as *Mother Courage* does in its third act, the ostensible contents and politics of the play scatter to the wind like so many good intentions.

Schwarz’s revelatory re-reading of *Saint Joan*, which indeed brings this objective dynamic forward, deserves careful attention on its own account, but one aspect is particularly important here. “Relying on his exceptional gift for pastiche, [Brecht] presented the vicissitudes of class conflict and the calculations of the canned-goods cartel... in verses imitative of Schiller, Hölderlin, *Faust II*, expressionist poetry, or Greek tragedies (perceived as German *honoris causa*).” In Hölderlin’s “Hyperion’s Song of Destiny,” for example, which Schwarz highlights as central to the play’s system of citation, human destiny is figured as

heroic errancy: to wander without consolation, “Like water from crag / To crag hurled down.” In *Saint Joan*, it is rather falling stock prices that are “Thrown like water from crag to crag.”¹¹

In its barest outline, specifically modernist pastiche as a reciprocal commentary between the heroic past and the prosaic present is hardly new with Brecht; in terms of conspicuous virtuosity, the “Oxen of the Sun” episode in *Ulysses* had already developed this mode much further than Brecht ever cared to. But the Brechtian difference is a profound one, which in Schwarz goes by the circumspect label “unity of process” (49), otherwise known as history, or what in yet more abstract terms is the Hegelian “identity of identity and difference.” In other words, the peculiarly Brechtian sting lies not in the difference between the classical source and the modern material, but rather in their identity, which is not only in the design of the artist. The petty brutality of the businessman is the endpoint of romantic striving rather than its negation: “something of Mauler already existed in Faust” (56).

But there is no lesson in this identity, no external end to which the dramatic image is subordinated; rather the two moments of Faust and Mauler are posited as an identity in the dramatic image. That is all. What is presented is not a doctrine but a figure: Faust-as-Mauler, a poetic idea. We learn nothing from this figure about the way capitalism works; rather, Brecht opens up a line of questioning by way of a sensuous configuration. The Brechtian idea is a matter of positing available contents in a particular way: a familiar action (say) as the product of alterable motives rather than human nature; or bourgeois ruthlessness as continuous with bourgeois revolution.

In a well-known series of lists, Brecht contrasts traditional (*dramatische*) and epic (*epische*) form.¹² Some of the categories are primarily formal (is the sequence of events linear or in curves?), while others are more obviously ideological (are people unchangeable, or are they rather changeable and changing?). But the ideological commitments, which are indeed crucial, cannot be considered lessons. Even if the epic idea—say, “human nature is not given”—could be demonstrated to be correct, all that a play can demonstrate is its plausibility: an Aristotelian category rather than a particularly Brechtian one, and one which Brecht jealously preserves by framing his implausibilities as implausible. *Saint Joan* is successful precisely because it does not break fundamentally with the norms of art inherited from the early romantics. Doubtless, it critiques these norms, but it critiques them as poetry: indeed, it fulfills rather emphatically Schlegel’s demand that any critique of poetry be itself “poetry through and through and equally a living, vibrant work of art.”¹³

None of this, and this is the point to emphasize, blunts the materialist edge of Brecht's critique. Meaning is produced through a poetic critique of poetry, but this does not mean that meaning is restricted to the realm of poetry. The meaning, that is, is deeply compatible with the set of extractable lessons that Brecht is prevented from presenting without crippling distortion by the limitations of the form. Brecht's critique of Hölderlin and Goethe is along the lines of Marx's critique of Hegel or indeed Adorno's critique of Heidegger: by introducing concrete content back into abstract language, Brecht posits an identity between vulgar, everyday social content and sublime, abstract thought. The sublime existential risk of a world universally without guarantee becomes the risk of losing some money. (For others its endpoint, the "Unknown" in Hölderlin's song, is simply unemployment). Brecht's poetic idea—the petty manipulation of the stock market (petty in its motivations if not in the damage it wreaks) narrated in the language of human destiny—requires no particular accuracy in its depiction of the operations of the stock market, and is entirely produced by, rather than hindered by, dramatic condensation. When *St. Joan* is considered, perversely, as being about poetry rather than about capitalism (or about revolutionary organization), it loses none of its Marxist sting, because the ground that unites Faust and Mauler is the historical identity (Schwarz's "unity of process") of a class. "Unheroic as bourgeois society is, it nonetheless required heroism, sacrifice, terror, civil war, and the subjugation of nations to bring it into being."¹⁴ The bourgeoisie emerged in blood and glory, but soon enough had to subordinate its grand ideas, and anyone who still thought them, to the business of making money.

Pastiche—again, quite different from the pastiche that is practically standard modernist operating procedure, and also entirely different from the postmodern re-animation of dead forms—functions somewhat differently in *The Threepenny Opera*, where class-typical behavior is transposed across classes. The obvious example is bourgeois industry transposed to lumpens: Peachum's begging industry and, climactically, Mac's "What is the robbing of a bank against the founding of a bank?"¹⁵ But the example on which Brecht seems to have expended the most energy, at least following his "hints for actors," is that of love—or, more accurately, the ideology of love, that discredited "damned 'can-you-feel-my-heart-beating' text" (239). When Mac, the notorious criminal, marries Polly, daughter of the begging-agent, his second concurrent wife, in a horse shed, catered by members of his gang, the elements are in place for broad parody. And indeed we get some of that: a bit about the distinction between Chippendale and Louis Quatorze (244), generally omitted from contemporary productions, is pure Marx-brothers buffoonery. But the irony is not as straightforward as it appears.

The actors should avoid representing these bandits as a gang of those pathetic individuals with red kerchiefs about their necks who lively up fairgrounds and with whom no respectable person would drink a glass of beer. They are naturally dignified men: some portly, but all (aside from their profession) sociable. (433)

The spectacle of criminals putting on a bourgeois wedding in a stable is absurd not because the criminals are buffoons but because they are, aside from their profession, bourgeois. (Mauler, the captain of industry in *St. Joan*, is equally—aside from his profession—sociable). Even the genuine buffoonery conforms to this pattern. The omitted laugh line mentioned above comes at the expense of “Captain” Macheath, the pretentious lumpen, who doesn’t know the difference between Chippendale and Quatorze but pretends he does. Here the buffoonery seems to operate in the expected direction. But his henchmen, who do know the difference, allow themselves to be corrected. So Mac’s ignorance is a luxury, not a deprivation: he isn’t an ignoramus, but a philistine.

So when Mac, in the midst of setting up house in a barn with a stolen Chippendale grandfather clock, intones, a few moments later, “Every beginning is hard,” he is not citing Goethe’s famous line from *Hermann und Dorothea*, but repeating the cliché it has become. Brecht, on the other hand, is citing Goethe. Goethe’s line continues: “Every beginning is hard; hardest is beginning a household”—this last word translating *Wirtschaft*, more commonly enterprise or business. This entire scene, with its semi-rustic setting in the middle of London, is a commentary on *Hermann and Dorothea*: disreputable Mac, in the position of the refugee Dorothea, is repeating the words of the respectable father (and indeed is making a practical match), while it is Polly, at the center of the conflict between the household as centrally an enterprise and the household as centrally a love match, who occupies the position of the son, and who indeed embodies the contradictory impulses embodied in Goethe’s “Wirtschaft”:

It is absolutely desirable that Polly Peachum should impress the audience as a virtuous and agreeable girl. If in the second scene she has demonstrated her entirely disinterested love, now she exhibits that practical outlook without which the first had been mere frivolity. (434)

The manifold overtones of this parody could be pleasurably pursued into the deepest nooks and crannies of the scene, but the import of this moment for now is that while the scene is clearly about class—specifically, the economic content of bourgeois sentiment—it is only about class by being first about poetry.

Of course, there is more to theater than poetry. “Epic theater is gestic,” wrote Benjamin. “To what extent it can be poetic in the traditional sense is a separate matter.”¹⁶ But what is the Brechtian *Gest*? For Benjamin, it is a matter of interruption, which is to say a question of framing. Benjamin draws the appropriate conclusion from this:

In short, the action [is] interrupted. We may go further here and consider that interruption is one of the fundamental procedures of all form-giving. It reaches far beyond the sphere of art. It is, to pick out just one aspect, the basis of quotation. Quoting a text implies breaking ties with its context. It makes sense, therefore, that epic theatre, which is based on interruption, is quotable in a specific sense. The quotability of its texts would be nothing extraordinary. That of the gestures it makes use of is another matter entirely.

“To make gestures quotable” is one of the essential accomplishments of epic theatre.¹⁷

But the issue of quotation, far from being “a separate matter” from that of Brecht’s traditional literariness, is the core of his traditional literariness. The quotation—the twisting and turning repetition of Hölderlin’s “crag to crag,” the ironic repetition of Goethe’s “Every beginning is difficult”—is precisely gestic; indeed, as we have seen, the latter poetic gesture is intimately bound up with an ensemble of other gestures: those of Polly, Mac, and Mac’s subordinates. “From where does epic theater take its gestures?” asks Benjamin. “The gestures are found in reality.”¹⁸ Surely correct, but not very helpful. From what order of reality does epic theater take its gestures? Brecht “makes gestures quotable” precisely by quoting them—which is to say they are already quotable. The order from which they are taken is textual. The “damned ‘can-you-feel-my-heart-beating’ text” (239) may refer to romantic *Lieder*, just as “Every beginning is difficult” refers to Goethe. But it belongs equally to the ways lovers act with each other, just as uttering platitudes belongs to the way people act at a wedding. These are two different kinds of text—the gesture proper may experience itself as spontaneous, while the literary gesture is part of a self-overcoming aesthetic field—but they are both texts nonetheless, or else they would not be quotable. When, in *The Godfather*, Michael Corleone, played by Al Pacino, fleetingly registers the fact that his own hands do not shake as he lights a cigarette during a life-or-death bluff, this is a powerfully effective actorly gesture. But since it belongs only to the narrative situation, it is not a social citation and therefore not a Brechtian gesture—a fact which does not preclude an esoteric citation of other filmic cigarette-lightings. As the notes for actors make clear, narrowly gestic elements are a matter of embodied ideology, a social script: “Efforts not to slip on a slick surface become a social gest as soon as slipping would mean losing face.”¹⁹ The procedure followed in both Brechtian

pastiche and gestic acting is the same, namely citation, or framing a preexisting text in order to create a unit of meaning.

With reference to music the question of gesture acquires a new density. In “On the Gestic Character of Music,” which precedes Brecht’s first published comments on gesture, Kurt Weill proclaimed that “today the composer may no longer approach his text from a position of sensual enjoyment.”²⁰ Weill is contending here with the Brechtian problem of the entertainment-commodity. But what is proposed here is both more radical and less prudish than his statement suggests. The target of Weill’s criticism is the “theater of the past epoch,” which was “written for sensual enjoyment. It wanted to titillate, to irritate, to arouse, to upset [*kitzeln, erregen, aufpeitschen, umwerfen*] the spectator.”²¹ So “to irritate” and “to upset” are included under the heading of “sensual enjoyment.” Indeed what Weill forbids to what he calls “gestic music” is to provoke any kind of affective state in the spectator. This is not really a surprise, being very much in line with Brecht’s anathematization of such theatrical effects as “coerced empathy.”²²

But surely the production of affective states in listeners is part and parcel of what music is: to take only the most basic element, any perceived musical beat is enough to organize the internal or external movements of a listener.²³ In the first episode of the 1967 television series *The Prisoner*, the fact that the village is a totalitarian dystopia is established not by the video panopticon, which can in the end be evaded, but by the fact that the soothing music cannot be turned off. Hegel, no expert on music, did however understand this: while poetry expresses (*auspricht*) an idea—which is then part of the meaning of the work—music can at most provoke one (*den Anstoß geben*)—an idea which is then merely “ours,” not part of the work itself.²⁴ Weill seems to have painted himself into a corner: the thing music is forbidden to do is precisely the thing that distinguishes music from the other arts.

We will come to Weill’s solution in a moment. But we should take a minute to appreciate that any solution to Weill’s dilemma will also solve a dilemma for us. For what music does par excellence—provoke affective states in listeners—absolutely forecloses, under current conditions, the possibility of its being a medium for artworks. For any provoked effect is, under current conditions, always already a commodity—as Schwarz puts it elsewhere, “In a capitalist regime, any form of utility suffices to make anything or anyone ‘an official member of the world of commodities’ (Marx, *Das Kapital* II, 20.8).”²⁵ If “in a capitalist society, production for the market permeates the social order as a whole, then concrete forms of activity cease to have their justifications in themselves. Their end is external, their particular forms inessential.”²⁶ In other words, no commodity can plausibly produce a meaning—whose end is by definition essential—and no musical subjective effect is, under current conditions, not a commodity.²⁷ This has the unhappy consequence that the music one

likes is, insofar as its ends are bound up with effects for which one likes it, excluded from the category of art. So the question of how to produce music whose aim is not to produce effects is an urgent one.

The paradigmatic modernist solution—the purely music-immanent exploration of music as a medium—is, however, precisely what Weill seeks to overcome:

The recent development of music has been predominantly aesthetic: emancipation from the nineteenth century, struggle against extra-musical influences (program music, symbolism, realism), return to absolute music. [...] Today we are a step further. A clear separation is taking place between those musicians who... as if in a private club, work on the solution to aesthetic problems, and others who will undertake to engage any audience whatever.²⁸

Even as the moment of music-immanent development is seen as a forward step, two contrary imperatives are suggested at once: to engage an audience beyond the specialized restricted field of musicians and experts, and to produce meanings beyond those that only the restricted audience cares about, which is to say meanings that are not purely music-immanent. These two imperatives seem to be aligned, and they have a certain populism in common. In fact, as Weill is well aware, they are deeply in conflict. In a market society, the first imperative can be satisfied only by risking the market—“any audience whatever.” But the second imperative, to produce political meanings of the kind Weill is after, is one that the market is indifferent to; one which, in fact, is unmarketable, since meanings that can be sold—that is, meanings for which there is a demand—are not meanings at all, but commodities. A political meaning that satisfies a demand is not a meaning, but a purchasable point of social identification.

What is Weill’s solution? His own commentary in “On the Gestic Character of Music” and elsewhere is not particularly helpful on this score. But his practice is quite clear. The “Cannon Song” from *Threepenny Opera* is a martial variant of a barroom singalong, what might be classified generically as a barrack-room ballad. Like all good singalongs, it may well move a listener familiar with the piece to want to sing along, and the reason that it has this power might be something brain science or some other discipline can one day explain. Then again, some listeners may not be so moved, and the failure to be moved is in principle susceptible to explanation. But for Weill, this effect or its lack is irrelevant. The “barrack-room ballad”—the phrase is Kipling’s—is in Weill’s hands a gest, which is to say, a citation. *Cannon Song* frames the gesture, and in so doing creates a meaning, which is to present military camaraderie as deeply creepy.

Brecht’s text is also a citation, a pastiche of Kipling’s martial ditties like “Screw Guns”:

For you all love the screw-guns—
the screw-guns they all love you!

So when we call round with a few guns,
o' course you know what to do—hoo! hoo!

Jest send your Chief an' surrender —
it's worse if you fights or you runs:

You can go where you please,
you can skid up the trees,
but you don't get away from the guns.²⁹

In Brecht's text, racism and genocide move from (barely) subtext to text in a way that is deliberately unsubtle. On the page it falls a bit flat, but in Weill's rousing mess-hall setting it is quite spectacular:

The troops live under
The cannons' thunder
From cape to Cooch Behar.
And if it rained one day,
And they had chanced to stray
Across a different race,
Brown or pale of face,
They made them, if they liked,
Into their beefsteak tartare.³⁰

What is the source of "Cannon Song"'s creepiness? Like so many of the songs in *Threepenny*, the tempo marking is already a citation: "Foxtrot-Tempo."³¹ The basic rhythm is indeed a foxtrot (foursquare rhythm with accents on the offbeats), and the introductory trumpet part develops a jazzy motif, culminating in the ragtime cliché of bar six. But the "swing" of the initial motif is written in as a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note, and meant to be played as written, so it jerks rather than swings. The antiphonal saxophone line recalls jazz call and response—except it arrives a beat early, interrupting and disrupting the trumpet line rather than repeating and endorsing it. The introductory bars do not lead to the tonality of the verse, but rather have no obvious tonal center or direction. The angular melodic line of the introduction—as becomes clear when, in the first repetition of the initial idea, the interval of a fifth is tightened up to an augmented fourth in bar three—is not about to subordinate

itself to the business of dancing. Meanwhile, the instrumentation—in particular, the use of the lower brass—emphasizes the relationship between popular dance music and marching music, a connection which bears on the meaning of the song. When the song lands on a tonal center (bar seven), the underlying harmonic movement becomes conventional, tied to the cycle of fourths (see particularly bars 14-16), which can be intuited or arrived at analytically. But this structure is estranged by avoiding triads, and the movements they imply, almost entirely: the harmonic surface consists of paired sets of fifths juxtaposed on the on and off beats. The result is both estranging—the movements are conventional, but now robbed of any illusion of necessity—and vaguely orientaling, which is emphasized by the largely pentatonic melody. The song finally becomes diatonic and tonally centered only with the martial refrain, which, in a series of descending half notes (“cape to Cooch Behar”), spells out a minor chord (F# minor) and lands on its dominant—the first conventionally outlined chord of the song. This is the music of the beer hall—or the recruiting station. But the middle voice, a teetotaler or a pacifist, already puts this tonality in doubt. The dominant lasts disorientingly long, tightening up into a diminished chord rather than resolving. Finally, at the height of the barbarism of the lyrics, arrives a cadence that centers on another fully spelled out dominant, which occurs in bar 34, at the climax of the song (the “beefsteak” before “tartare”). But the implied cadence is doubly false, both misleading about where it is going and where it is coming from. It ought to lead to A minor, but leads to D minor instead. And while the melody at “They made them, if they liked” (measure 32) suggests that we are still essentially in F# minor, measure 33 is already in D minor. So the false cadence is not only false, but rather than lead somewhere surprising, it leads exactly nowhere. The overall effect, if one cares to look at it this closely, is to remove all sense of naturalness from the underlying conventional structures. The song hews just close enough to conventional forms—foxtrot, march, barrack-room ballad; cycle of fourths, largely *nachsingbare* melody, climactic cadence—to borrow their effects, while at the same time denaturalizing them by formal means which are not effects except inasmuch as they aim at the variously translated Brechtian “disidentification effect,” which in the terms of the present study is not strictly an effect but rather a set of techniques for forestalling or framing effects and subordinating them to interpretations. All this is simply to read as immanent to the song what it is hard to imagine any listener denying, namely that the product of these formal distortions is deeply creepy.

“Today the composer may no longer approach his text from a position of sensual enjoyment.” If one imagines setting a war anthem in a state-sanctioned patriotic film, the first thing on the composer’s mind would be producing the singalong effect, an identificatory esprit de corps, in as many people as possible. If one imagines setting one in a commercial film, the first thing on the composer’s mind would be the same, but for a different reason: to appeal to as many people as possible who already want to experience identificatory esprit de corps. Brecht’s and

Weill's version functions entirely differently, since you need not feel the force of the singalong (though you do need to understand its system of references, if not with any specificity) to understand Weill's meaning, which is to fuse the brutality of Brecht's lyric with the social cohesion of military esprit de corps, not after all so different than that of the dance hall, and in doing so to impose an interpretation.

But chances are you will feel its force: "Cannon Song" remains, all this aside, a rousing air. This is irrelevant to "Cannon Song"'s meaning as a work of art, but it is far from irrelevant to "Cannon Song"'s success as a popular entertainment. As Brecht says, "Theater remains theater, even when it is didactic theater; and so long as it is good theater, it is entertaining."³² If "Cannon Song" failed as a rousing air, that would not change its meaning; but nor would *Threepenny* have been, in the five years before the Nazis came to power, translated into eighteen languages and been performed more than 10,000 times, and nor would we be talking about it today.³³ "Up to the stable scene the audience seemed cold and apathetic, as though convinced in advance that it had come to a certain flop. Then after the *Kanon* song, an unbelievable roar went up, and from that point it was wonderfully, intoxicatingly clear that the public was with us."³⁴

"No opera here!" (245) demands Mac, in a work called an opera, a word intended as little ironically as the "threepenny" that precedes it.³⁵ The gesture is echoed (but not cited) some twenty years later, in Rio de Janeiro, by Janet de Almeida and Haroldo Barbosa:

Why Argue with Madame?

Madame says the race won't improve
That things are going downhill because of samba
Madame says samba brings sin
That samba should be put out of its misery
Madame says samba is nothing but race mixing
Color mixing and cachaça
Madame says that the democratic samba
Is cheap music with no value

Let's be done with samba
Madame doesn't like anyone to samba
All she can say is samba is shameful
Why argue with Madame?

Doo doo doo
 Doo doo doo doo
 Doo doo doo doo
 Doo doo doo

Next Carnaval, sure,
 My block from up in the 'hood will sing opera
 On the street among the press of thousands
 You'll see us all singing a concerto
 Madame has a screw loose,
 She only talks poison, my God what a shrew
 Samba, democratic, Brazilian
 To the roots, that's what has value.³⁶

The cast of characters seems straightforward: Madame; the protagonist, who lives in a working class neighborhood, belongs to a samba school, and is presumably in Madame's employ; and the samba school, a metonym for the "press of thousands" at Carnaval, itself a metonym for the Brazilian people. Digging a little deeper, one learns that "Madame" was a real person, the conservative cultural critic Magdala da Gama de Oliveira, otherwise known as "Maggy," who occupied highly visible perches on radio and in the journal *Diário de Notícias*, and whom the journalist and composer Fernando Lobo had recently apostrophized in a critical essay as "Madame."³⁷ So from a historical perspective the position of the protagonist becomes more complicated: he is still working class, but the conflict between him and Madame is only metaphorically a class conflict, since the cultural conflict it centers on takes place entirely among journalists: not only "Maggy" and Lobo but also Almeida and Barbosa were journalists as well as, in the case of the latter three, composers.

As suggestive as it is, this historical meaning is essentially a private one. It is a professional spat, not without interest, that a little research allows us to eavesdrop on. It is symptomatic of a recognizable ideological field. But no attempt is made to inscribe this historical meaning in a normative field, and as far as the meaning of the song goes, we are pretty much back where we started.

Or we would be but for the little wordless interlude before the final stanza, which is a close paraphrase of measures 20-24 of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1.³⁸ Here the historical meaning of the song—the appropriation of the political subjectivity of the working class by the progressive bourgeoisie—is inscribed directly in the musical material. Not content to be more democratic and sensible than Madame (and presumably a better dancer), the protagonist

must show himself to be more erudite as well: an advantage not available to the man from the hill neighborhoods. Without the interlude, “singing a concerto” is the approximate speech of one who doesn’t have any very precise idea of what a concerto is. After the interlude, “singing concertos” is a winking reference, in case we missed it, to what has just been accomplished. In other words, the lyrical voice identifies with the working class—but only when “Madame” is in the third person, that is when he addresses himself to the “people,” which is to say the lower orders plus the progressive bourgeoisie. But the borrowed passage from Tchaikovsky is, out of earshot from the hills, addressed only to Madame, to the bourgeoisie as such.

Much more can be said about this peculiar combination of popular identification and ironic distance, which has not disappeared from progressive Brazilian discourse, than is relevant to the argument at hand. What is important for the moment is that musical form only has meaning here as a citation, of which there are now two: the borrowing from Tchaikovsky, and what, in the light of the Tchaikovsky, appears as a borrowing of the samba form. But in neither case does musical form mean anything outside of its status as a citation: to the world of erudite music on one hand, and to the world of (idealized or real) communally organic musical form on the other. However, citation works here precisely the opposite of how it works in Brecht and Weill. In the earlier case, citation is a technique of disidentification, for freeing the dramatic work from the obligation of producing an empathic relation to the action and replacing it with a questioning one. In the later, it is a technique for producing a double identification: the first one public and universal (the identification of the lyrical voice with the people), the second private and particular (the identification of the lyrical voice with the cultural elite).

One is tempted to point out that the choice of Tchaikovsky’s first piano concerto is a particularly appropriate one, since there too a folk dance, in this case Ukrainian, is contrasted with a Romantic theme, or because its long introductory melody, from which Almeida’s and Barbosa’s quote is taken, is an easily digestible line that can be absorbed by the culture industry without difficulty.³⁹ But in the above-cited interview, where Barbosa sings a bit of the interlude, there is nothing to suggest he regards the song as anything but a *jeu d’esprit*, an unframed gesture.⁴⁰ The framed, Brechtian equivalent might involve one actor saying something quite reasonable to another while surreptitiously winking to the audience. But the unframed wink is not an idea about duplicity but rather duplicity itself.

It would have been convenient for the current discussion if João Gilberto, in rescuing the song from oblivion, had overcome this duplicity in Brechtian fashion. However, bossa nova is a resolutely anti-theatrical form (“Retrato em branco e preto,” which Gilberto performs immediately before “Pra que discutir com Madame” in a famous concert, begins with a cluster of small intervals that mimics—in Chico Buarque’s lyrics, in Tom Jobim’s composition, and

in Gilberto's interpretation—a man mumbling to himself) and has no interest in working through theatricality and coming out the other side.⁴¹ Rather, in Gilberto's performance the social conflict that Almeida's and Barbosa's lyric embodies is turned—as is the case with bossa nova generally—into a problem that musical form attempts to supersede. Though both the approach and the politics are quite different, the problem invented and confronted by the bossa nova generation is Weill's: "to create a music capable of satisfying the musical needs of broader strata of society, without giving up artistic substance."⁴² In other words, the project of the bossa nova generation is to exploit fully the real advances made possible by class segmentation, while creating a music that in principle does not depend on that segmentation for its reception. Or, in yet other words, to produce an art music that is not an elite music, a music that is samba and Tchaikovsky at once.

Compared to the work of the bossa nova composers, "Pra que discutir com Madame" is, but for the interpellated Tchaikovsky, compositionally banal. It seems likely that it was revived by Gilberto for its thematic relevance to the bossa nova project rather than any particular formal interest. However, the basic innovations of bossa nova form are, in Gilberto's performance, in place: the chord structure is highly textured with elaborations from the upper extensions; the guitar rhythm is complex, derived from samba: the thumb operating, on the pulse, independently from the other fingers, which structure the rhythm in syncopated variations that suggest (though this is an illusion) a complete improvisational freedom from repetition; the vocal line combines a vibrato- and glissando-free technique, an almost conversational vocal quality (essential to its fundamental anti-theatricality), extraordinarily precise intonation, and, most importantly, the constant suggestion of a completely unfettered relationship to both the pulse and the syncopated line. When these elements are all performed by one person, such that the relationship among the three central elements of pulse, chordal rhythm, and vocals is at every point intended, the result is a performance of exceptional musical density. An index of this density is that in concert Gilberto often repeats an entire form three or more times—and yet one never has a sense of repetitiveness, to the point of not recognizing the repeat when it comes. But bossa nova remains a popular art form: not only are the songs themselves, even when they are of substantial formal interest, accessible, but the individual elements are within the reach of anyone who wants to learn them.

Much more can be said about the aesthetic ideology of bossa nova, which is the musical exponent of a developmental populism whose central ideologeme, full of contradictory implications, is the development of productive forces unmediatedly in the interests of the entire national population. The point to emphasize at the moment, however, is that the eclipse of bossa nova is not an artistic endpoint but an historical one, as developmental populism is decisively displaced by military coup, dictatorship, and integration with North American

capital. Bossa nova itself continues to evolve after its historical relevance has faded, reaching an artistic zenith in the early 1970s with Jobim's "Águas de março."⁴³ But by the time "Águas de março" had been recorded (1972), a new movement, Tropicália, had already come and gone. Indeed, bossa nova had already become a subject for pastiche by the musicians of the Tropicália movement: Caetano Veloso's "Coração vagabundo," from 1967, is a superb bossa nova—but it is a master's thesis on Tom Jobim's compositional technique, not a development of it or out of it.⁴⁴

After the coup, the drive to modernize the Brazilian economy continues, but now severed from the drive to develop the economy more or less evenly. The new music of the dictatorship period, Tropicália, brutally reorients the dialectic of the most ambitious Brazilian music. The elements to be drawn together musically are no longer high and low—between which no identity, real or ideal, is imagined—but modern and archaic elements, which are not to be synthesized but allowed to exist in patent contradiction. In the manifesto-song "Tropicália," for example, the refrain sections are organized into paired opposites.⁴⁵ But these are organized along the lines of temporal contradiction, not class contradiction: bossa nova versus straw huts, Ipanema versus Iracema—but never straw huts versus Ipanema.⁴⁶ In another manifesto-song, "Panis et Circenses," these contradictions become a matter of form.⁴⁷ The melody is deliberately insipid—an awkward live performance from the period serves as well as a valiant effort by the great Marisa Monte to show how hard it is to make "Panis et Circenses" into a conventionally good song. This little melody, performed as flatfootedly as possible; a military fanfare; an anticlimactic perfect cadence followed by an awkward silence; a half-note accompaniment that kindergarteners could perform; all of these are buried under the weight of contemporary recording techniques, particularly tape montage—a decelerando performed by a thumb on the tape reel, desultory dinner conversation, the *Blue Danube*—under the direction of Rogério Duprat, who had trained with Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez. As Roberto Schwarz says of this Tropicalist effect, which exposes tacky content to "the white light of the ultra-modern," it is "like a family secret dragged into the street."⁴⁸

Tropicália, which has been glossed over far too quickly here, marks a pivotal moment. The brutality and rapidity of the transition from a proto-socialist to a right-wing society integrated with Northern capital having taken place practically overnight, Tropicália registers all the contradictions of what will come to be called postmodernism in a form that still marks them as monstrous. However, the mark it left on Brazilian music was probably less in the music itself, and more in the training it afforded a generation of Brazilian musicians. Indeed, already by Veloso's 1969 "white album," an entirely new project, developed from but distinct from that of Tropicália, had emerged in its full outlines.⁴⁹ The first thing one notices about *Veloso*

is the album's diversity of covers: a traditional Bahian maritime song, a cynical tango from the 1930s, an overwrought ballad from the 1940s, and a recently recorded bossa nova. Then there are pure pastiches: a march in the style of the eclectic Carnaval bands, a Portuguese fado, and a stab each at brit-pop psychedelia and album rock.⁵⁰ Only with the final two tracks on the album—one each by Veloso and by Gilberto Gil, his primary collaborator and guitarist on the album—do we approach recognizable tropicalist procedures. “Acrílico”—a portmanteau word combining “acrylic” (new and synthetic) and “lyric” (ancient and organic) and producing “bitter” between them—is a spoken concrete poem including taped sound fragments. Gil's “Alfômega,” perhaps the distillation of the gleeful antisociality of Trópicalia, cruelly builds concretist wordplay around the Portuguese word for illiteracy, and sets it within what is essentially a rock song, performed here in a way that can only be described as groovy—leaving the question open as to whether the setting is a specimen of advanced or peripherally derivative culture. But surely, in the light of what has gone before, these last two tracks are not to be understood any differently than the other ten: Tropicália is included in the miscellany, not the principle of the miscellany itself. From the standpoint of the 1969 album, the logic of Tropicália has already been superseded.

Except where to do so would deform the musical material beyond recognition, the album's material is treated uniformly throughout, so “Chuvas de verão” (a *samba-canção* by Fernando Lobo, from the same period as “Pra que discutir com Madame”) can serve to illustrate the procedure followed in the album as a whole. The orchestral embellishments and interludes in Francisco Alves's 1948 recording are dispensed with. (The flute line is alluded to in a brief whistled introduction which, unlike the original, does not deviate from the structure of the song itself). The entire rhythmic and harmonic structure—the former greatly diversified and loosened up, though aligned closely with the pulse and still, like the original, a *samba-canção*—are brought within Gil's guitar line, whose virtuosity is entirely unobtrusive. The vocals are sung without vibrato or glissando, pitched very precisely, and recorded close to the microphone, such that the vocal quality is intimate: even when the vocals sweep upward (for example at the first vocal line and particularly at “trazer uma aflição”), the dynamic range is kept narrow, so that the dramatic effect of the wide interval emphasized in the original recording is minimalized and, as it were, internalized. (Even in “Atrás do trio elétrico,” the vocals are double-tracked rather than sung loudly). In other words, though the song is not a bossa nova, the procedures followed so far follow bossa nova sensibilities. The studio production is peculiarly noteworthy. Rogério Duprat adds an orchestral part that is, on its own, a fine and tasteful accompaniment, far better than the original to which it also occasionally alludes. But the aural qualities of the orchestral line are completely different from the guitar and vocal parts: it is as though the latter were recorded in a bedroom, the former in a cathedral. The overall effect is the opposite of most studio production. Instead

of producing the illusion of a seamless performance, where “the process of fusion reaches out to the spectator, who is fused right in and now represents a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art,” the result is a “radical separation of the elements.”⁵¹ And this is for entirely Brechtian reasons. The orchestral line is far too high in the mix. Since the orchestral accompaniment is intermittent, this serves to separate it further from the guitar and vocal basis rather than drowning it out; but it also dramatizes the “great primal war” between structure and embellishment, which cannot be simply eliminated, as it is part of the popular form. Instead of being combined to produce an effect, the elements are separated to problematize a relationship.

In confirmation of all this, the orchestral parts are mixed down in just one channel, so that if one earphone is removed, or the balance is turned all the way to one side, they can be completely eliminated. (The guitar and vocal parts are mixed down in both channels, and so cannot be eliminated). The struggle between structure and embellishment is thus decided in favor of structure. This is far too easy. Like the last minute of *The Hurt Locker*, it answers the question it was supposed to be asking: totally obscured is the role embellishment plays in the structure itself. What is important to note at present, however, is that this procedure is quite different from the Tropicalist one. Whereas earlier Duprat and his collaborators had used the recording studio to ironize brutally the cultural raw materials that were brought into it, here the studio frames the musical material—which now appears as structure rather than as raw material—without assuming a position superior to it. There is, in other words, no irony in the new relation to the material.

The one possible exception makes an interesting case. The recording of Chico Buarque’s “Carolina” was received scandalously, as an ironic attack on Buarque. Without context, it is hard to see why. Buarque’s recording is dominated by an orchestral accompaniment that is by turns saccharine (strings) and tacky (muted horns), and with an embarrassingly—for a Brazilian recording, almost unbelievably—lame percussion line, played on hi-hat. Indeed the whole recording is not a bad approximation of a bad American approximation of bossa nova. Buarque himself does not do much with the vocal line except occasionally sing it out of tune. Not even Buarque himself much cared for “Carolina,” which comes out as a far more interesting piece of music in Veloso’s version.⁵² The song is stripped bare in precisely the same fashion as “Chuvas de verão” (the orchestral line does not even enter until the final fifteen seconds or so of the song), with Gil producing a marvelous distillation and revision of the rhythmic and harmonic structure on guitar, adding some color and complexity to the basically uniform pulse—a discreet rock shuffle is briefly introduced—and diatonic structure of the source material.

Nonetheless, it is hard to see Veloso's "Carolina" as other than parodic. Buarque is at that moment a hero of the large and culturally hegemonic Left, which is friendly to Marxism even where the latter is not fully incorporated conceptually. Veloso, though he emerges from this Left—one of his first musical commissions was incidental music for a production of a *Lehrstück* of Brecht's, *The Exception and the Rule*—is a figure for what looks in retrospect like an insurgent liberalism. Buarque is, meanwhile, a talented amateur but an amateur nonetheless. "Professionalism" is a privileged term in Veloso's vocabulary as it was for Brazil's first "cannibal" modernisms; it entails the market, without doubt, but it more immediately refers to the anti-imperialism of cultural import substitution, the development of a local culture industry sufficiently specialized to be able to compete with progressive first-world culture on the latter's own terms. This is the aesthetic ideology of peripheral modernists from James Joyce to Oswald de Andrade to Chinua Achebe, and it relegates amateurism to "dilettantism" (according to Júlio Medaglia, a vanguard composer and tropicalist arranger) and putatively authentic culture to "macumba for tourists" (according to Oswald de Andrade, in a phrase the tropicalists were fond of citing). When Veloso sings "Carolina" with lazy intonation—seen nowhere else on the album and virtually nowhere else in his oeuvre—it is hard not to see the gesture as deliberate. Further, the lyrics—a reminiscence of a failed seduction—lend themselves easily to a political interpretation, the cold Carolina representing the bourgeoisie that turns its back on "a blooming rose, everybody dancing, a falling star," the lyrical voice representing the revolutionary vanguard trying to show it all these things. Whether the song is taken to be purely romantic or as a political allegory, the lyrical voice paints himself in a too-flattering light. Veloso's interpretation, sung barely above a whisper, provides just enough internal distance from the lyric to turn it into a dramatic monologue, the dashing revolutionary revealing himself as a lazy lothario whom Carolina may have been wise to ignore.

In an early account, Veloso claims that the inspiration for the recording was a girl, the "antimuse of Brazil" ("antimusical" being a key word in the bossa nova manifesto-song "Desafinado," "Out of Tune") singing "Carolina" on a televised amateur talent contest.⁵³ This is scarcely credible. On the other hand, it confirms, precisely in its incredibility, everything said above. As much as the inflated sentiments of 1940s popular song, traditional maritime melodies, Carnaval marches, Portuguese fado, and so on, a robust sub-professional musical culture is a part of (a precondition of) the exceptional professional musical culture in Brazil. In other words, this account is an attempt to make "Carolina" consistent with the rest of the album, and if this is implausible, that marks a failure of "Carolina," not a misunderstanding of the aims of the album. A later account is more plausible, and more interesting still. "When I recorded 'Carolina' in an estranging way [is the Brechtian adjective intentional?]. . . [i]t was not necessary to attack Chico to affirm our position. We were certain that Chico's creation itself would benefit by its own relativization." To "relativize" without

“attacking,” indeed to turn into art by relativizing, to estrange: in other words, to frame. This is the mode of the album itself. And indeed, it is this account that finally fits the musical facts. The ambivalences of “Carolina” are highlighted, even as the musical distillation itself is nonjudgmental, even reverential.

On the procedure outlined here, and on the logic of the separation of elements it entails, all of the lyrical content of the album is radically relativized in the same way as that of “Carolina.” “Os Argonautas” may move you to a beautiful seafaring resignation (“To navigate is necessary; to live is not”); “Atrás do trio elétrico” may make you want to dance behind a massive Carnival bandstand (“Behind the electric trio, only the dead don’t go”); “Alfômega” may fill you with a properly rock euphoria entirely inappropriate to its content. Because they are good songs, they probably will; and the affective jolt they provoke is their market *raison d’être*. But whether they do or not, they are unavoidably about these affective states, which is a *raison d’être* of a completely different order.

The approach to producing meaning is quite in line with that pursued by Weill and Brecht; the meaning produced is, of course, quite different. The post-Tropicália project is, as Veloso and Gil write in a song (from the 1993 album *Tropicália 2*) about Brazilian *Cinema Novo*, “conversas sobre jeitos do Brasil,” conversations about characteristic Brazilian ways and attitudes. What emerges from the album as a whole is a musical portrait of Brazil, elaborated from a certain standpoint, necessarily incomplete, and by no means excluding foreign influences.⁵⁴ Indeed, this is the mode of Veloso’s career henceforth. *Tropicália 2* is, from the standpoint of the current argument, misnamed: it is, practically track for track (though none of the songs are repeated) a sequel not to the original *Tropicália* but rather to Veloso’s 1969 “white album.”⁵⁵ This mode has become in no small measure that of ambitious Brazilian music itself, from musicians as divergent in their tastes, approach, and level of seriousness as Lenine and Daniela Mercury.

The ideological limits of this project are obvious. In principle there is no reason these ways and attitudes cannot, as they are in Brecht and Weill, be class attitudes, professional attitudes, historical attitudes, and so on. But in that case the national frame would be relativized, and in practice the relevant categories tend to be regional, and historical in the very limited sense of being credited with having contributed to the Brazilian national character. The project sits entirely comfortably with Veloso’s liberalism (and with contemporary American, and increasingly globally hegemonic, cultural neoliberalism). A rather better son of the bourgeoisie than he imagined in 1964, Veloso’s world view is one of profound sympathy with the lower orders, who after all make most of Brazil’s music. But the sympathy does not extend to an inclination to share political or economic power with wider strata of society, and indeed

Veloso's attitude toward a real democratization of political and economic power can in the balance hardly be viewed as progressive.⁵⁶

As may have been glimpsed here and there in the above account, this attitude has its own, particularly Brazilian trajectory. But it is not unique to Brazil. A profoundly egalitarian attitude combined with a high tolerance for material inequality emerges, in Schiller, virtually with the aesthetic itself:

In the aesthetic state everything—even the tool that serves—is a free citizen, having equal rights with the noblest. [...] Here, in the realm of aesthetic appearance, the ideal of equality—which the political fanatic would fain see realized—will be fulfilled.⁵⁷

Of course, the thing that, more than any other, reorganizes material, hierarchical relationships into mere differences—classes into niches—is the market. Roberto Schwarz summarizes the tropicalist position:

[The] reconciliation of the present with itself, in all its levels, without exclusions, was the—more satirical than complacent?—imitation of or subjective assimilation to the point of view of commercial cultural programming. Radio stations and TV also cover the gamut of the public's interests, without regard to what is regressive or advanced, so long as they are profitable. A world full of differences and without antagonisms begins to look like an enormous market.⁵⁸

Schwarz is speaking here of Tropicália; if it is correct that the post-Tropicália moment subtracts the irony from the tropicalist procedure, then the satirical option disappears, and one is left only with the complacent assimilation to the market. And indeed, Veloso embraces this interpretation. In concert, before singing a song in Spanish, Veloso launches into a digression about how singing in foreign languages grants a kind of privileged access to the Other. A beat, then: "It's also good for market exposure." Veloso means both statements sincerely, but the laugh line only works because of their asymmetry: the second puts the first in doubt, but not the reverse.

A cynical position is, however, preferable to a naïve one, and Veloso recognized early on that not recognizing market considerations—"many times the only decisive ones"—was no longer an option.⁵⁹ "The important thing for us," wrote Weill in a letter to the *Musikblätter des Anbruch* in 1929, "is that here, for the first time, the breakthrough into a consumer

industry has been achieved.”⁶⁰ Both Weill and Veloso, in order to reach “broader strata of society,” skirt the edges of *Gebrauchsmusik*, music that fulfills a certain, in this case affective, need. Weill risks the market by choice. For Veloso, as we shall see, there is no choice to be made; after the dramatic foreclosure of the real possibility of a non-market society, he understands himself to be already contending with a situation in which it is unmediatedly the case that “any form of utility suffices to make anything or anyone ‘an official member of the world of commodities.’” In an 1974 interview, Veloso outlines with remarkable concision the overpowering of restricted fields by the culture industry: “On one hand, Music, violated by a new communicational process, is forced into both innovation and slavery; on the other hand, Music protected and impotent.”⁶¹ Cynicism and clear-headedness, both present, become difficult to discern.

We have arrived at least at an approximate sense of the ideological content of Veloso’s “conversation about Brazilian ways”: a liberal image of a country full of differences but without conflicts, an image that looks uncannily like the market. The practice of pastiche is directly implied by the real absorption of culture into the market, a process which Veloso both ambivalently celebrates and observes with stark clarity. The old meanings—modernist ones, bossa nova ones—are suddenly irrelevant, not because they have ceased to signify or evolve, but because the networks that found their significations and developments relevant have been overpowered by a market, which doesn’t. When bossa nova retreats into informal networks that no longer seem to have any relevance when confronted with the explosion of the Brazilian culture industry, a new set of possibilities, bound up with the relativization and appropriation of superseded styles, emerges. This relativization should be absolute; it should entail a properly postmodern irony, in which, due to the absence of meta-narrative sustained by non-market networks, the only principle of selection available is the whim of the artist, which is then necessarily placed in a position superior to the styles it subsumes. Indeed, this the case with *Tropicália*, with the advantage over paradigmatic postmodern culture that this shift is registered as intolerable: slavery or impotence. Veloso, however, overleaps this logic.

The inevitable issue from bossa nova is commercially stillborn and, culturally, insulating itself from the market, which it nonetheless needs to survive. We are trying to resume the lost trajectory.⁶²

Astoundingly, Veloso conducts this autopsy in the name of continuity, rather than of a radical break. The new set of possibilities is seen in terms of a “lost trajectory,” which is none other than the “*linha evolutiva*” or evolutionary line that Veloso has done so much both to invent

retrospectively and to introduce into Brazilian musical discourse as an unavoidable concept, but which cannot, if it is to function as a principle, be subordinated to his own taste.

It is with great difficulty that a few moments of organicity are achieved in our work; every once in a while something recognizable condenses, only to be lost in the confusion soon after; we make a samba without even thinking about it, it turns out to be so beautiful, we rejoice, believing we've realized something fine in the trajectory of this language—but there are so few musicians who are able to hear it, enrich it, understand what it can mean, learn from it or, in the course of history, re-teach it; and even those that there are have few opportunities to respond to each other.⁶³

One wonders if, despite being central to *Tropicália*, Veloso was ever a tropicalist at all: the post-tropicalist project is already expressed here, full-blown, complete with liberal-nationalist overtones, in 1965. But the important thing to note here is that the market cares about an “evolutionary line” or a “lost trajectory” about as much as it cares about second-wave protest bossa nova. Veloso writes, as usual, with remarkable precision. What is at stake is not what music means, but what it “can mean” in terms of a national musical development when framed by someone who understands it. The entities who could plausibly care about such an evolutionary line are precisely two. First, the nation, the referent of “we” and “our”—but purely in the sense of an imagined community, not a national market, because the national market is none other than the “confusion” in which the evolutionary line gets “lost.” Second, the musicians who are able to discern in their practice a matter in hand to be developed, in other words a Bourdieusian restricted field of musicians “responding to each other”—but it is precisely the lack of this field that Veloso laments. Neither of the entities to which an “evolutionary line” could plausibly matter exist. The market, however, does exist. As we saw above, music “needs” it; there is no longer any other mode of distribution equal to the culture industry. But Veloso, despite everything, is not making music for the culture industry, which is, again, the confusion in which everything worth saving is lost.

In other words, Veloso's musical practice entails a politics quite separate from his appeal to the market, which veers uneasily between realism and cynicism, and despite his liberal nationalist ideology, which veers uneasily between empathy and paternalism. He has discovered, in the market, a condition of possibility for a form of meaning that is, in principle and of necessity, autonomous from the market. One way of thinking about this is to say, a bit pathetically, that already in 1965 Veloso's work is oriented toward producing meanings for an audience that is “to come”; and at least in this sense his work represents a certain resistance to the present, however feeble. Another way is to say that in a neoliberal moment, when the

market as the horizon of all human endeavor is the strongest (but also practically the only) arrow in capital's ideological quiver, and universal valorization practically its only (but also its most socially devastating) imperative, Veloso presents a valuable model.

The one genre which Veloso has proven unable to master, though undeniably a part of the Brazilian landscape, is rock. It is easy enough to see why: "I composed the songs [on his first of three rock albums, *Cê*] and planned out the album before I had even formed the band."⁶⁴ Veloso has produced some interesting covers of rock songs, perhaps most notably Nirvana's "Come as You Are," but they are interesting because, in separating the elements and tightening up their interrelations, he uncovers the songwriting behind the rock song.⁶⁵ But as we shall see shortly, songwriting is not essential to rock—it may even be inimical to it—and it would be hard to make the case that his covers improve upon the originals. His two best rock songs, "Abraço" and "A bossa nova é foda," from his most recent album, almost manage to abjure songwriting: "I let things flow as they wanted to, the songs, because the band was already together. I present an idea, they do it, everything works out." Which is not to say that spontaneity is a musical value, but rather that spontaneity can be a useful constraint on songwriting, forcing other musical values to occupy more space.⁶⁶

The White Stripes' "Hello Operator" is about as far from songwriting as it is possible to get and still remain recognizably music.⁶⁷ Though a suggestion of private meaning seeps through, the lyrics make as little public sense as the children's rhyme "Miss Susie," from which the first two lines are borrowed.⁶⁸ They are not set to a melody, the pitch being determined by English speech patterns, as is the rhythm, which is regularized just enough to conform to a beat. The vocal quality is an assertive juvenile whine. The drum part under the lyrics consists entirely of quarter notes, on the beat, four to a measure, with the bare minimum—accented snare on beats 2 and 4—to qualify it as a rock beat. The guitar part is also minimal: two open chords, a fourth apart, each held for half a beat on the first beat of each measure. (The guitar will fill some of the empty space with simple blues lines; elsewhere, the drum part will add exactly one eighth note to the straight quarter note pattern). There is nothing in the basic structure of the verse that an able-bodied non-musician couldn't learn to play—indeed nothing that a non-musician couldn't come up with on her own—in a pair of afternoons.

The verse of "Hello Operator" is, in other words, the precise minimum organization of sound required to make a rock song—but not necessarily a rock song there would be any reason to listen to. Once the rock song has been stripped down to its minimal constituent parts, the question is what is the minimum necessary to make a compelling rock song. And the answer is stated, as clearly as a beethovenian symphonic theme, immediately following the verse, in the drum solo.⁶⁹ The phrase "drum solo" in a rock context summons the wrong

connotations, as this one is played entirely on the rim of a snare drum, is short (four bars and an introductory bar), is repeated twice, and consists in its second half entirely of quarter notes. It is also quiet, so quiet that the hum from a guitar pedal can be heard under it until the latter is muted at the beginning of the first full measure—an apparently non-musical sound that reads as accidental, but, since it could have been fixed in the studio, must be understood as intentional. The solo is, in other words, emphatically framed. It consists of two ideas. The first—two quarter notes comprising half a measure—barely counts as an idea. The second is a cliché about as old as recognizably American popular music: it is none other than the ragtime cliché from bar six of “Cannon Song,” the rhythm Debussy hammers to death in “Golliwog’s Cakewalk.”⁷⁰ What “Hello Operator” is then about, what reverberates back to the beginning and culminates in the climax of the song, is the exploration of this idea, the relationship between an absolutely minimal musical phrase, two quarter notes, and a minimal syncopation with the same duration.

After the idea is presented by the drum, the guitar displays the pattern in a different light. Leading out of the drum solo, the guitar, transposing the syncopated pattern a half beat, changes its value and its musical function: rather than beginning on a downbeat, it ends on one. The initial statement of the idea on the snare drum is quiet and tentative, beginning from nothing, wavering from the pulse; the chordal guitar line, tightly aligned with the pulse, asserts the shifted pattern at volume, landing hard on a downbeat, and a new section develops the transformed idea. The relation between the two statements is that of premise and inference. And as the transformed pattern is repeated, the guitar introduces a new chord: the subdominant, whose introduction has the expected effect of confirming the other two chords as tonic and dominant, and produces the unexpected illusion of opening up the harmonic possibilities of the song: in Lou Reed’s immortal words, three chords and you’re into jazz.

(With regard to the question of the rhythmic relationship between the drums and the guitar, this may be the place to point out that in much of the White Stripes’ music, the guitar and drums switch their usual rock functions. Keith Richards can push or drag the beat, Charlie Watts’s job is to pull him back in; but in “Hello Operator” the guitar maintains the pulse, while the drum line is allowed to waiver. That this is possible is itself part of the meaning of the song: what is essential is an element strongly tied to the pulse and an element loosely tied to the pulse, not the traditional division of labor between drums and guitar. Why this is necessary is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it may suffice to point out that common to all the musical forms emerging from the blues is a conception of musical time as produced by musical events, rather than as a homogenous medium in which musical events occur. In the later evolution of the blues, for example, the tension between adhesion to and liberty from the pulse is, as it were, professionalized and brought within individual musicians’ roles.

In a piano concerto, the failure of the soloist and the conductor to cohere rhythmically is fatal to the performance; in rock a degree of rhythmic incoherence is not only tolerable but constitutive.)⁷¹

The song is bookended by elaborations of the central idea. The first is a two-bar guitar introduction based on an impure fifth scalar tone. Since it precedes the first explicit statement of the idea, it initially reads as an improvisation. But in retrospect there can be no doubt that the introduction is composed. It sounds moderately complex, but it is assembled out of precisely four elements, which derive from the two simple ideas presented in the drum solo: straight quarter notes, the syncopated pattern (what we will first hear on its own as the drum version), the same pattern transposed half a beat (which we will first hear on its own as the chordal guitar version, but which has yet a third value here, landing on a backbeat instead of a downbeat), and straight eighth notes, a variation on the minimal straight quarter notes phrase. The break is repeated precisely halfway through the song, and also provides an ecstatic climax. What ought to be a guitar solo, essentially postponing the climax once all the ideas have been stated, is played on a heavily distorted harmonica. (As with the switch in rhythmic function between guitar and drums, the arrangement, though extremely basic, isolates musical elements in their function by changing the standard instrumentation.)⁷² To end the song, the single guitar line re-enters, in unison with the harmonica, with a third variation on the developed two-bar idea from the introduction. The unison is rough; again this could be accidental, but since another take or two would fix the problem, it must be regarded as intentional. After the rigorous separation of elements throughout the song, the climactic gesture of the convergence of guitar and harmonica is that of two lines of thought—the harmonica and guitar are mixed down into separate channels—simultaneously leading to the same conclusion. The affirmative value of these two bars is hard to exaggerate: it is a musical Q.E.D.

As if to confirm this, the name of the album on which the song appears is *De Stijl*, a movement which famously championed the abstraction, simplification, separation, exposed articulation, and balance of elements. The album title doesn't tell us anything we don't know already, but it is a useful reminder that the simplification involved in "Hello Operator" aims at abstraction rather than primitivism.⁷³ As de Stijl's foremost theoretical exponent put it: "Arms, legs, trees, and landscapes are not unequivocally painterly means. Painterly means are: colors, forms, lines, and planes."⁷⁴ The first thing one would want to say about the reading of "Hello Operator" undertaken above is that, unlike our earlier analyses of Weill and Veloso, the esoteric meaning of the song—it is about the musical potential of a rhythmic cliché, about what musical elements are necessary to rock, and why—has no obvious relationship to an exoteric meaning. The adolescent aggression of the vocal quality could almost qualify as a kind of social gesture. But the nonsense lyrics, and the fact that the development of the idea occurs

only elsewhere than the verse, are designed to undercut this possibility, though they cannot foreclose it entirely. (We shall return to this issue later.) As one of the narrators in Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* remarks, "the songs... have titles like 'Pet Rock' and 'Do the Math,' and 'Pass Me the Kool-Aid,' but when we holler them aloud in Scotty's garage the lyrics might as well be: *fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck*." ⁷⁵ Aggressivity is, tautologically, social. But as much as possible aggressivity is here reduced to a timbral quality, a tenor whine. "Hello Operator" is, in this sense, abstract: its musical idea is developed in near-complete isolation from non-musical or referential content, to which it can therefore no longer be subordinated. Simplicity then becomes a gesture of attention rather than inattention. If a country song is, in the great songwriter Harlan Howard's famous formulation, three chords and the truth, then the White Stripes' definition of a rock song is three chords and an idea.

The well-nigh neo-plasticist songs like "Hello Operator" form one of the axes of the White Stripes' project: to produce a theory of rock that is purely music-immanent. Even when these songs, as with the possibly even more successful "Fell in Love with a Girl," do not state an explicit musical thesis, the challenge they set is the same. ⁷⁶ The aim is to produce a rock song to which nothing could be usefully added and from which nothing could be taken away without harm—songs that aim at producing a rock song with the minimum necessary elements, and which are therefore necessarily about what these minimum necessary elements are. "Fell in Love with a Girl" consists of three elements: a drum pattern (with no variations), a rhythmic-harmonic pattern (two variations) and a melodic pattern (three variations). Since the variations overlap, there are essentially three total variations: two make up what are structurally verse and a third makes up what is structurally chorus, though the same ideas underlie both. But since they don't overlap perfectly—and because the first version of the rhythmic-harmonic pattern (which is repeated under the third variation of the melodic pattern that occupies the place of the chorus) implies the second—there must be a repeat. The repeat finishes and the song is over, at one minute and fifty seconds: there is nothing further the song can say. As Joss Stone's cover demonstrates, the song can hold one's interest—quite a different matter—for twice that time, at the cost of overpainting it with cherubs. ⁷⁷

The White Stripes' project continues along another axis, however, one which will probably be more obvious. White Stripes albums are larded with historical references (the B-side of the "Hello Operator" single is a cover of Dolly Parton's "Jolene"), and it is instructive to compare the function of these to Weill's and Veloso's. ⁷⁸ The most conspicuous example on *De Stijl* is a simplified but basically straight cover of Blind Willie McTell's "Your Southern Can Is Mine." An affirmative relationship to the material in Veloso's vein would be hard not to read as claiming an identity with McTell that would be difficult to defend. A negative, disidentificatory one in Weill's vein would be equally indefensible: from what perspective,

exactly, would a Piedmont Blues song be ironized? The lyrical material—a song that, at least on the surface, celebrates domestic abuse—raises the stakes along the same ethical axis, but with the polarity reversed. At the level of musical form, identification is dishonest, disidentification unthinkable; at the level of lyric, identification is unthinkable, disidentification dishonest. The performance is infused with a mischievous glee (but McTell’s is infused with a similar glee) at raising the same sets of hackles for completely contradictory reasons.

The White Stripes give up the game in the last twenty seconds of the track, but we will return to that in a moment. The riddle to the presence of “Your Southern Can Is Mine” on *De Stijl* can be solved entirely immanently. The relationship to the social material behind “Your Southern Can Is Mine” is neither affirmative nor critical, but nonexistent; it is raised only in order to be refused. The relationship is, rather, purely musical. In both McTell’s original and the White Stripes’ cover, the guitar part is built out of two elements: a quarter note pattern, accented on the offbeats (in McTell’s version, the effect is like stride piano played on guitar) and a syncopated pattern of the same length: none other than the second, shifted statement from “Hello Operator” of the ragtime rhythm we first saw in bar six of “Cannon Song.”⁷⁹ In other words, both “Your Southern Can Is Mine” and “Hello Operator” work on the same musical material. The relationship to the material is un-ironic in the sense that McTell’s music is taken absolutely seriously. But there is no identity asserted between the White Stripes and McTell, precisely because no identity is asserted of either one separately. The only identity asserted is between McTell’s musical material and the White Stripes’—a musical identity between ragtime guitar and rock—and that identity isn’t so much asserted as demonstrated.

The White Stripes simplify the song harmonically, stripping down to open fifths a couple of common turnarounds that form the harmonic bones of the song. An early rival is said to have complained of the White Stripes’ early performances that they sounded like they wanted to play the blues but didn’t know how. Of course this was meant as a critique. But “wanting to play the blues without knowing how” is not a bad description of a key moment in the historical development of rock. These relatively straight covers tend to strip adornment and abstract from the original, but leave the core of the song intact. Many of these are blues covers like “Your Southern Can is Mine,” but the cover of Bob Dylan’s “One More Cup of Coffee” would also fit in this category.⁸⁰ These ask the same question of what elements are necessary—and it is a surprise to discover that Dylan’s original includes a number of unnecessary ones—but also open up a historical element that is, nonetheless, a purely musical history.

A non-musical clip appended to the end of “Your Southern Can is Mine”—and of the album *De Stijl*—confirms all this. Without context, the clip is mysterious. One man asks another if something is wrong, why is the other acting so uncomfortable. The second man responds that he was in a traffic accident the night before, but nobody got hurt. The clip sounds old; there is a difference of power and class between the two men, but the accents are hard to place. The staginess of the first voice suggests nothing so much as a 1940s film. In fact the first man is Alan Lomax, and the second is Blind Willie McTell himself.⁸¹ The moments that precede the included clip give the context. McTell has just recorded some songs for Lomax, for inclusion in Lomax’s folk song archive for the Library of Congress, in Lomax’s hotel room in Atlanta. As Lomax apparently cannot tell, but is obvious to contemporary listeners, McTell is uncomfortable because Lomax has been trying to bully him into singing some “complainin’ songs.” By the time Lomax asks expressly for “Ain’t it Hard to be a Nigger, Nigger?” (McTell responds, cautiously: “Well... that’s not... in our time”), a modern listener will be squirming almost as badly as McTell. The clip included on *De Stijl* begins “You keep moving around, like you’re uncomfortable.” Why include this clip? Because Lomax is asking McTell to do what we tend to want McTell to do, which is to connect his music to an historical experience, as the product of an historical identity. McTell refuses, for reasons that may be philosophical or may be pure cautiousness. But the clip isn’t about McTell, it’s about Lomax; his position is an unquestionably false one, requiring someone to assert an identity that is instead being forced upon him—“Ain’t it hard to be a nigger, nigger?”—but it’s also the position we are in, as long as we take the ethical bait of “Your Southern Can is Mine.”

The straight, genealogical covers are to be distinguished from another aspect which we will not spend much time on here, namely the deformative covers: covers that turn a country song (“Jolene”), a pop song (Burt Bachrach’s “I Don’t Know What to Do with Myself”) or a camp pseudo-bolero-cum-tango (Corky Robbins’s “Conquest,” a hit for Patti Page in 1952) into a rock song.⁸² There is nothing pure about any of these aspects: a swamp-rock cover of Robert Johnson’s “Stop Breaking Down,” which takes a fleetingly brief (two-second or so) slide-guitar coda from Johnson’s recording and turns it into the principle of the new performance, is both deformative and genealogical, and very far from merely domesticating like the Rolling Stones’ version.⁸³ Nor is there, despite expectations, anything ironic about it, any position of superiority taken with regard to the material: despite the violence done to the appearance of the original, the idea at its core is preserved and taken seriously. It is not difficult to see that the idea of the deformative cover lines up with the pure rock constructions, asking the same question from a different angle: what makes some songs amenable to this treatment and not others? What constitutes, in other words, a rock musical idea?

This orientation also goes some way towards explaining the presence of a trifle like “You’re Pretty Good Looking (For a Girl)” on the album. It doesn’t take a trained ear to recognize it as Richie Valens’s “La Bamba” dressed up as punk-pop. But of course it is already a mistake to call it “Richie Valens’s ‘La Bamba,’” because “La Bamba” is itself a rock version of a traditional *son jarocho*. In the other direction, there is a long history of rock songs that are “La Bamba” dressed as something else: “Twist and Shout” (The Isley Brothers, The Beatles), “Wild Thing,” (The Troggs), “Hang on Sloopy” (The McCoys), “Louie Louie” (The Kingsmen), “Good Lovin’” (The Rascals), “Get Off My Cloud” (The Rolling Stones), “Stand” (R.E.M.), “Closer to Free” (The Bodeans)... and these are only ones that have some plausible claim to substantiality: once you start finding it in the chorus to Abba’s “Name of the Game,” you realize there’s no end in sight. The I-IV-V7-I cadence of “La Bamba,” with its strong melodic implications, is part of the DNA of rock. That is, “You’re Pretty Good Looking (For a Girl)” aligns the genealogical meaning of blues covers like “Your Southern Can Is Mine” with the formal meaning of songs like “Hello Operator.” Even though “You’re Pretty Good Looking (For a Girl)” isn’t much of an accomplishment, it has a clarifying value for us because unlike the blues, “La Bamba” is a one-off. While there is no doubt a national, regional, or ethnic mythology built around *son jarocho*, that mythology is not even plausibly part of the history of rock. Only “La Bamba” is part of the history of rock: once the trail turns ethnographic, the White Stripes’ project has nothing to say about it. Valens’s own relation to “La Bamba” is purely musical: the song was in U.S. pop circulation before his version, and the song would not have been a part of the Anglophone rocker’s musical heritage in any meaningful sense.⁸⁴ Indeed, it doesn’t matter if the genealogy suggested by “You’re Pretty Good Looking (For a Girl)” is the right one: “Louie Louie,” a more obviously recent assemblage—an amalgam of ersatz Jamaican sentiment and a Cuban riff borrowed from René Touzet—precedes “La Bamba” as a rock recording. Whether the trail ends in Veracruz or the Caribbean, and whether either one is real or imagined, doesn’t really matter. But the facts that Keith Richards and Mick Jagger (As Little Boy Blue and the Blue Boys) covered “La Bamba” before the Rolling Stones existed, that Jimmy Page famously borrowed from Valens and cites “La Bamba” as an early obsession, and that The Plugz recorded a pretty good punk version, tend to validate “La Bamba”’s centrality to the musical history of rock.⁸⁵

Spotting musical references, borrowings, and influences—real, imagined, and misunderstood—is as endemic to pop music criticism as purple ekphrasis, especially among journalists who have no vocabulary for analyzing a musical object. But the White Stripes make extensive use of pastiche proper—songs whose musical content is “This is what a Bob Dylan (Led Zeppelin, Cream, Jane’s Addiction) song sounds like.” These, together with the genre exercises—from blues shuffle to scottish reel—add up with the straight covers to a project remarkably like Veloso’s: a collection that assembles itself into an account, and

in so doing produces a meaning behind the back of the market. But once the similarity is pointed out, the difference becomes immediately clear: the meaning is of an entirely different order. Veloso's meaning is unavoidably a nationalist meaning, not in any very complex sense, though there are certainly complexities to be teased out, but in the bare sense that the unifying principle proposed by his post-Tropicália musical orientation can only be Brazil. Non-Brazilian elements are not shied away from, but they are understood as sources, and in that sense internal to Brazil after all. The unifying principle behind the White Stripes doesn't immediately appear that different, as the elements are nearly all assembled from within the U.S. But the hallmark of Veloso's nationalism, his generous musical catholicism—which has both positive and negative implications—is completely missing from the White Stripes. The genealogy they produce is a genealogy of rock, not of the United States. Music from outside the history of rock is only included if it can be reduced to an idea that can be the basis of a rock song. Non-rock music also descended from the blues—funk, R&B, soul, to say nothing of jazz—is completely excluded. As their cover of “Lord, Send Me an Angel” shows clearly enough, this has nothing to do with a fear of treading on racially sensitive territory.⁸⁶ Once the paths that lead out of the blues diverge, the White Stripes have nothing to say about the ones that don't lead to rock.⁸⁷ Indeed, even the history of rock is, given the formal restrictions imposed by the imperative toward abstraction, a limited one: missing genres, particularly those that require more expansive musical elaboration or ornamentation, are relegated to later projects and different bands.⁸⁸

Until now we have more or less ignored or derogated lyrical content, in keeping with the White Stripes' practice, which tends to suppress the importance of lyrical content by restricting it to private obscurity, nonsense, or purely generic meanings. But lyrical content cannot be ignored entirely: it can be reduced to “fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck,” but not to “darn darn darn darn darn.” Adolescent aggressivity is clearly an indispensable element. But adolescent aggressivity is framed or otherwise relativized rather than expressed. When Jack White says categorically, “I never write about myself. I'm not going to pretend like ‘Oh, I'm waitin' on a train, and my baby's comin' back,’” he's not saying anything that's not already true of every lyricist, including many who are taken to be, or let themselves be taken to be, expressing some kind of train-taking or other authenticity.⁸⁹ But the White Stripes are careful to internalize the literary frame, so that any imputation of expression is not only a categorical mistake but also a literary one. To take an almost arbitrary example, the bridge of “There's No Home for You Here,” with its perfectly simple, perfectly direct hatred of bourgeois normalcy, is distilled rock sentiment:

Waking up for breakfast
Burning matches
Talking quickly
Breaking baubles
Throwing garbage
Drinking soda
Looking happy
Taking pictures
So completely stupid
Just go away

Though in the bridge and the title the target might as easily be tourists, the song is generically a kiss-off song, so the hatred is aimed at a specific woman as well as at monogamy in general:

I'm only waiting for the proper time to tell you
That it's impossible to get along with you
It's hard to look you in the face when we are talking
So it helps to have a mirror in the room

I've not been merely looking forward to the performance
But there's my cue and there's a question on your face
Fortunately I have come across an answer
Which is go away and do not leave a trace

The situation is clear enough. But the speaker's self-regard, apparent already in the self-understanding of breaking up as a performance, is literalized in the fact that he is looking not into the girl's face but into a mirror as he delivers the coup de grace. So adolescent aggression is presented as inseparable from adolescent self-regard: hardly a novel thought, but one that serves its purpose, which is to relativize the content of generalized antisociality that is necessary to the song. The point is not to write great poetry—great poetry would not be a rock lyric—but to write a rock lyric that is minimally self-framing.

A second technique—and one which may also be at work in “There's No Home for You Here,” with its hatred of soda drinkers and picture takers—is the substitution of a private meaning for the public one that ought to be the core of the song. “Ball and Biscuit,” in the song of that title, evidently refers to an illicit sexual practice, a drug recipe, or some kind of mindblowing combination of the two:

Let's have a ball and a biscuit sugar
And take our sweet little time about it

The lyric, mostly spoken in a bullying drawl over a slow blues-rock, hovers—the vocal equivalent of Jim Morrison's image on an album cover—between sexually threatening and ridiculous:

Right now you could care less about me
But soon enough you will care, by the time I'm done
...
Go read it in the newspaper
Ask your girlfriends and see if they know
That my strength is ten-fold girl
And I'll let you see if you want to before you go

The drug-related possibility quickly loses plausibility as the song turns out to be, more than anything else, about the gestural content of guitar solos. There are three guitar solos in the song—an absurd number for anyone, much less the White Stripes who tend to avoid them or keep them short. All three are spectacular, and spectacularly hyperbolic, the middle one introduced by “I can think of one or two things to say about it”—“it” still having the same grammatical referent as “take our sweet little time about it,” namely “a ball and a biscuit”—and concluded by “Do you get the point now?” immediately before a third solo is launched into. The gestural equivalence of rock guitar solos and sexual swagger has never been lost on anyone, but again it is self-framing rather than profundity which is aimed at, and if ever a work of art managed to fuse fun as an object of inquiry and inquiry as an object of fun, this is it. However, it takes only a moment's research to discover the literal referent of “it”: “ball and biscuit” is slang for an old omnidirectional microphone formerly used by the BBC, one of which was hanging from the ceiling at the studio where the song was recorded.⁹⁰ This doesn't change the meaning of the song, which says nothing about microphones and still promises a “girl” a transcendent and dangerous sexual experience. But that experience, the lyrical core of the song, is nothing, just a suggestive piece of language: a fact which both evacuates the meaning of the lyric and heightens the meaning of the social gesture of the form itself, since the meaning insists without a literal signifier.

Why is this derogation or relativization of the lyrics necessary? To the degree that the function of a pop song (the reason there is a market for it) is to amplify, monumentalize, and universalize an experience which is of necessity (because appealing to a market) general,

which is to say trivial, then these techniques are straightforwardly Brechtian disidentification techniques. They present the “fun,” or affective charge, of adolescent antisociality (or of swaggering male sexuality), but by making themselves about the affective charge of adolescent antisociality (or of swaggering male sexuality), they wrest their autonomy from the requirement to produce that effect, which would otherwise subsume it. But one has also to remember the peculiar place that music holds in Hegel’s system: either it is, after literature, the art form closest to philosophy (that is, to the idea as such), or it is not really art at all. But these two judgments refer to two different objects: music with lyrics, and music without. Hegel had no concept of music-immanent meaning, and so misunderstood instrumental music. But song as such is still illuminated by Hegel’s understanding, in that both of his judgments are real dangers to be avoided. As long as music accompanies lyrical content, it is liable to become a matter of giving bodily amplification to a meaning that is aimed at by the lyrics, which assume primacy. (If Schumann’s “Abends am Strand” gives some sense of the possibilities this fact opens up at an earlier moment in music history, a glance at any journalistic pop review will confirm the limits imposed by it for music that confronts normativity only as the market).⁹¹ In this case, music produces an effect, which the listener suffers, rather than a meaning. The song as such tends to the kind of synthetic mush that Weill despised.

But the second judgment must equally be avoided. In the last scene of the concert film *Under Great White Northern Lights*, Meg White sits next to Jack White on a piano bench while he sings and plays their song “White Moon.”⁹² About halfway through the song, Meg White begins weeping, which continues throughout the song. Surely, the song is provoking an affective state, one that music has been known to produce even in Brechtians. But what is “White Moon” about? At first glance it appears to be nonsense; on closer inspection, it centers on Rita Hayworth, or rather images of her, in various contexts but mainly as a pinup above an army bunk during World War II. Obscurities remain, but there is nothing particularly shattering about the lyrical content. If one feels that there ought to be, this is because the song is musically a dirge. So Meg White is crying not because of the words, but in spite of them: in other words, her reaction is provoked rather than mediated through something expressed. This musical motive force might seem to be a desirable thing. But, to continue paraphrasing Hegel, the reason she is crying therefore is “merely hers,” which is to say not part of the song at all. Perhaps she has a visceral reaction to this song, but if so it is idiosyncratic. (To insist that the song is about Ida Lupino would be incorrect; but it makes no sense to say it is incorrect not to cry when listening to it.) On the other hand the film has provided Meg White with ample reasons to cry: the stress of a punishing concert schedule, performing in a ridiculously exposed context in front of thousands of people, nights spent in hotels too wired to sleep but too tired to get off the couch, with an ex-husband who seems to spend precious down-

time worrying about the next night's tempos. Relief? Exhaustion? Fury? All possible, but even more obviously these reasons are "merely hers" rather than part of the song.

Music's motive force is thematized within the song: "Oh Rita oh Rita, if you lived in Mesita, I would move you with the beat of a drum." One is immediately suspicious, not that Jack White has deliberately set up this scene, which would be sadistic, but that the White Stripes, who seem to have had a hand in making the film—presumably the matching his-and-hers red and white propeller planes were neither a logistical necessity nor the filmmaker's idea—include this scene as an allegory of the paradox of music's motive force. At any rate, the point is made. If the music is subordinate to the lyrics, then the song is a pop commodity. If one finds this line a little too direct, one can at best say that music is reduced to producing amplificatory effects. If, on the other hand, music circumvents lyrical content altogether, then it does not even pass through the illusion of meaning, instead directly producing effects that are not part of the song itself. The problem confronted is the same as that which led Weill to "approach his text from a position [other than] sensual enjoyment": In Jack White's terms, if "it's just... trying to make us feel good, [you] could just as well be making drugs or a computer game."⁹³

Two kinds of meaning are aimed at by the White Stripes. First, purely music-immanent meaning, which is to say the exploration of musical ideas in the way neo-plasticism and other abstract pictorial movements explore painterly ideas. Second, a music-immanent theory of rock, which necessarily includes social content but which, also necessarily, abstracts from it as much as possible. For both kinds of meaning, lyrical content has to be retained, but neutralized, and the logic is straightforwardly Brechtian: fun—or whatever other effect—is to be included, but an internal distance from it is required if meaning is to be plausibly asserted.

Kurt Weill, Veloso, and the White Stripes produce music under substantially different historical conditions. Nonetheless, the family resemblance of their approaches is not coincidental. All three understand musical meaning in the same way—as either music-immanent or gestural-citational—and the obstacle to it posed by the market—which nonetheless cannot be avoided—in the same way. While all three recognize the horizon of purely music-immanent meaning, it is only the White Stripes who attempt to produce it within a market-transmitted form. This is apparently paradoxical, as The White Stripes are furthest from the possibility of a modernist, medium-immanent form of meaning sustained by a restricted field—a form of meaning which is rejected by Weill for political reasons, and by Veloso for historical ones. But perhaps there is no paradox; only when the old, non-market, classically modernist horizon is all but forgotten does the attempt to assert a medium-immanent meaning within a cultural field saturated by exchange value begin to seem necessary.

This return to the ambition of music-immanent meaning is, from the perspective of the current study, conceptually the most unexpected development among the three projects. But it comes at a cost. White Stripes concerts ended with a rock version of the variously-titled “Boll Weevil Song,” best known through a Lead Belly version recorded by Alan Lomax in 1934.⁹⁴ There is a certain pedagogical force to the exercise itself, which is made explicit when the song is taught to the audience as a singalong. In a typically self-aware move, the act of teaching the song is (as it was in Lead Belly’s version) incorporated into the lyrics. But while the pedagogical element of the White Stripes’ project is not negligible, it has no ambitions beyond the purely music-immanent. Of course, if what has been said above is true, music-immanent pedagogy is the only kind of pedagogy music can be expected to accomplish. But there can be no mistaking the fact that the White Stripes’ project is, in terms of its political content, the least substantial of the three. Indeed, it is hard to imagine it having a politics at all. There is nothing that exempts political meanings from the logic of the White Stripes’ project, or indeed from the logic of the commodity form. Any political meaning must either be relativized—in which case it is a politics that is interesting only so far as it is a rock politics, and thus music-immanent after all—or immediately fall prey to a market logic where it becomes a consumable point of identification, no different than other pop identifications.

But it is the aim of the present study to show how, under present circumstances, the production of artistic meaning—that is, the production of the unvalorizable within a society that subordinates every activity to the production of value—is itself a politics. It is not merely a matter of producing a line of flight along which artists can, within a value-saturated cultural field, produce non-values, which is to say meanings—though artists may certainly experience it that way. Rather, in a neoliberal regime—whose essence is the demand that everything be valorized—the production of the unvalorizable lodges a “foreign body” at capitalism’s ideological weak point. The political effectivity of such an act is necessarily beyond the scope of this essay. We are concerned with the problem of securing meaning against the ideological horizon of a fully market-saturated society. Meanings circulate or fail to circulate, compel or fail to compel. Success in the former, which is easily quantifiable, does not guarantee success in the latter, which is not. Nonetheless, one would want to avoid repeating Schönberg’s dogmatic error that because *Threepenny* was popular, it must not have been understood.

NOTES

- ¹ Arnold Schönberg, "Neue Musik, veraltete Musik, Stil und Gedanke," in *Stil und Gedanke: Aufsätze zur Musik* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1976), 34.
- ² Roberto Schwarz, "Altos e baixos da atualidade de Brecht," *Seqüências brasileiras: ensaios* (São Paulo: Companhia das letras, 1999), 113-148. References are to "The Relevance of Brecht: High Points and Low," trans. Emilio Sauri. *Mediations* 23.1 (Fall 2007): 27-61.
- ³ Theodor W. Adorno, "Engagement," in *Noten zur Literature* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 409-430. As the German title makes clear, the terminology is Sartre's, not Adorno's.
- ⁴ Brecht, "Das moderne Theater ist das epische Theater," in *Schriften zum Theater* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1957), 16.
- ⁵ Brecht, "Das moderne Theater ist das epische Theater," 16, 14, 26.
- ⁶ Brecht, "Das moderne Theater ist das epische Theater," 18.
- ⁷ Brecht, "Literarisierung des Theaters: Anmerkungen zur Dreigroschenoper," in *Schriften zum Theater*, 29.
- ⁸ Brecht, "Das moderne Theater ist das epische Theater," 28.
- ⁹ Brecht, *Schriften zum Theater*, 60-73.
- ¹⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Ästhetik* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1976), 64.
- ¹¹ Bertolt Brecht, *Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe*, *Werke*, vol. 3, 211. The observation is taken from Schwarz, 59-61, fn. 19, a spectacular close reading which traces "Hyperions Schicksalslied" through *Saint Joan*.
- ¹² Brecht, "Das moderne Theater ist das epische Theater," 19-22.
- ¹³ *Athenäums-Fragment* 67, in *Fragmente der Frühromantik*, 28.
- ¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Napoleon*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, vol. 8 (Berlin: Dietz, 1960), 116.
- ¹⁵ Brecht, "Die Dreigroschenoper," *Werke*, vol. 2, 305.
- ¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, "Was ist das epische Theater?" [first version] in *Versuche über Brecht* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), 9.
- ¹⁷ Benjamin, "Was ist das epische Theater?" [second version] in *Versuche über Brecht*, 26-7.
- ¹⁸ Benjamin, "Studien zur Theorie des epischen Theaters" in *Versuche über Brecht*, 31.
- ¹⁹ Brecht, "Über gestische Musik," *Schriften zum Theater*, 253.
- ²⁰ Kurt Weill, "Über den gestischen Charakter der Musik," in *Kurt Weill: Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. David Drew (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 41.
- ²¹ "Über den gestischen Charakter der Musik," 40.
- ²² See Brecht, *Schriften zum Theater*, 210-212.
- ²³ There is a robust literature on "tempo entrainment." See, for example, Sylvie Nozoradan, Isabelle Peretz, and André Mouraux, "Selective Neuronal Entrainment to the Beat and Meter Embedded in a Musical Rhythm," *Journal of Neuroscience* (Dec 5, 2012), 32: 17572-81. Neuroscientific study of the arts has of course not limited itself to the effects of music. (See, for example, Alvin Goldman, "Imagination and Simulation in Audience Response to Fiction," *The Architecture of the Imagination*. ed. Shaun Nichols [Oxford UP, 2006], 41-56). But while the neurological effects of literary representation do not include the crucial act of interpretation, and therefore clearly do not account for a key feature of literature, the corporal effects of music, which brain science may eventually be equipped to understand, seem intuitively to constitute the very being of music. It is easy conceptually to subordinate, along with Brecht, "coerced empathy" (an effect whose production in literature it is part of Goldman's project to explain) to literary meaning (which is not part of Goldman's project to explain). With music, it is less obvious what the provoked effects would be subordinated to. Hegel's otherwise scandalous exclusion of instrumental music ("not yet strictly to be called an art," [G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* III (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1986), 149] from his system of the arts is, despite the absurdity of this judgment in historical perspective (Hegel and Beethoven are exact contemporaries), not capricious, as we shall see.

²⁴ Hegel, *Ästhetik III*, 146. Hegel means “idea” in his specific sense, but it is enough for our purposes to note that it does not mean a musical idea in the beethovenian sense. Hegel has no concept of a properly musical idea.

²⁵ Roberto Schwarz, “Worries of a Family Man,” trans. Nicholas Brown, *Mediations* 23.1 (Fall 2007): 25, n1.

²⁶ Schwarz, “Worries of a Family Man,” 23.

²⁷ Schwarz is referring to Kafka’s Odradek, whose status as useless but (in its own way) complete marks it as the precise other of commodity society. Schwarz’s essay highlights the directly social dimension of the allegory: Odradek is “a lumpenproletariat without hunger and without fear of the police” (24). This is surely right, especially given the tonal subtleties that Schwarz traces so brilliantly. But one should also note that an object “senseless, but in its own way complete” is a close paraphrase of Kant’s “purposiveness without purpose” — in other words, the autonomous work of art. This logic is explored at length in my ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Real Subsumption under Capital,’ published in these pages.

²⁸ Kurt Weill, “Verschiebungen in der musikalischen Produktion,” in *Kurt Weill: Musik und Theater: Gesammelte Schriften, mit einer Auswahl von Gesprächen und Interviews*, ed. Stephen Hinton and Jürgen Schebera (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1990), 45.

²⁹ Rudyard Kipling, *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses* (Leipzig: Heinemann and Balestier, 1892), 19.

³⁰ *Die Dreigroschenoper*, 251-252. The first couplet is borrowed from the Mannheim/Willet translation.

³¹ Weill and Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper* [Score] (Vienna: Universal Edition, 2008), 44-55; *Die Dreigroschenband* [Lewis Ruth-Band], *Die Dreigroschenoper: The Original 1930 Recordings* (Teldec/Warner, 1990).

³² Brecht, “Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater?” *Schriften zum Theater*, 66.

³³ Brecht, *Werke*, vol. 2, 442.

³⁴ Lotte Lenya, “That Was a Time,” *Theater Arts* (May 1956): 93.

³⁵ See for example Weill’s essay “Commitment to Opera”: “Bekenntnis zur Oper,” *Ausgewählte Schriften* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1975), 29-31.

³⁶ Janet de Almeida and Haroldo Barbosa, “Pra que discutir com madame?” (Continental, 1945):

Madame diz que a raça não melhora
Que a vida piora
Por causa do samba
Madame diz que o samba tem pecado
Que o samba coitado devia acabar
Madame diz que o samba tem cachaça
Mistura de raça, mistura de cor
Madame diz que o samba democrata
É música barata sem nenhum valor
Vamos acabar com samba
Madame não gosta que ninguém sambe
Vive dizendo que o samba é vexame
Pra que discutir com Madame
Tchu ru ru
Tchu ru ru ru
Tchu ru ru ru
Tchu ru ru
No carnaval que vem também concôro
Meu bloco de morro vai cantar ópera
E na avenida entre mil apertos
Vocês vão ver gente cantando concerto
Madame tem um parafuso a menos
Só fala veneno meu Deus que horror
O samba brasileiro, democrata
Brasileiro na batata é que tem valor

The lyrics are transcribed from João Gilberto, *João Gilberto Live in Montreux* (Elektra/Musician, 1986). Colleagues that are far more knowledgeable than I have been unable to locate a copy of the original 1945 recording, references to which suggest that its lyrics diverge only trivially from the above.

³⁷ See the interview with Haroldo Barbosa in *O Pasquim* 249 (1974) in *Antologia do Pasquim*, vol. III: 1973-1974, ed. Jaguar e Sérgio Augusto (Rio de Janeiro: Desiderata, 2009), 336. See also Tania da Costa Garcia, “Madame Existe,” *Revista da Faculdade de Comunicação da FAAP*. http://www.faap.br/revista_faap/revista_facom/artigos_madame1.htm

³⁸ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *Piano Concerto Number 1 in Bb Minor*, Op. 23, in Alexandr Goldenweiser, ed., *P.I. Tchaikovsky: Complete Collected Works*, vol. 28 (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1955).

³⁹ Four years before “Pra que discutir com Madame,” the American big band leader Freddy Martin had a hit arranging the introductory theme for dance orchestra. The label on the B-side of the 78 rpm record reads “Piano Concerto in B Flat—Fox Trot” (Bluebird, 1941). Martin built on this success by popularizing other classical themes; no doubt he is one of the targets of Adorno’s most scathing critiques of such popularization. Later, lyrics were added and released as the song “Tonight We Love.”

⁴⁰ Direct musical citations in jazz solos usually function, without the same socially signifying surplus, in the same way, as ingratiating gestures that undercut the autonomy of the procedure at hand.

⁴¹ See João Gilberto, *Live in Montreux* (Elektra/Musician, 1987). All or nearly all of the musical examples cited in this chapter are available, apparently legally, for free in usable quality on the web in the form of video clips.

⁴² Kurt Weill, “Die Oper—wohin?” in *Kurt Weill: Musik und Theater*, 68.

⁴³ Antonio Carlos Jobim, *Jobim* (MCA, 1973).

⁴⁴ Caetano Veloso and Gal Costa, *Domingo* (Polygram, 1967).

⁴⁵ *Tropicália ou Panis et Circensis* (Philips, 1968).

⁴⁶ For a much more detailed version of this argument, including close readings of some of the songs cited here, see “Postmodernism as Semiperipheral Symptom,” chapter 8 of my *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth Century Literature* (Princeton, 2005), 166-192. Readers of that chapter may note a revision of that argument in the present one. In the earlier discussion, the ideological element of Tropicália was seen to be its hypostasization of contradictions, while the Utopian element lay in the desires that the songs of Tropicália manage to fulfill. I was not satisfied with the second half of that argument at the time; in the terms of the present argument, it cannot be right, since the latter desire is registered in the market simply as demand. Neither of these earlier arguments is, however, precisely wrong. Rather, the line dividing the ideological and utopian aspects—terminology which does not orient the current discussion—of Tropicália runs not between the song and the desire it satisfies, but rather through them both. Desire, of course, far exceeds the market, which can only channelize a few desires into demand. Meanwhile, the hypostasization of contradictions is indeed ideological. But, as we shall see, even Veloso’s ideology has, when produced through musical form, an oppositional aspect which it is the burden of the present argument to bring forward.

⁴⁷ *Tropicália ou Panis et Circensis* (Philips, 1968).

⁴⁸ Roberto Schwarz, *Cultura e Política*, 74.

⁴⁹ Caetano Veloso, *Caetano Veloso* (Philips, 1969).

⁵⁰ In order of reference: “Marinheiro só” (traditional); “Chuvvas de verão,” by Fernando Lobo; “Cambalache,” by Enrique Santos Discépolo; “Carolina” by Chico Buarque; “Atrás do trio elétrico,” “Os Argonautas,” “Lost in the Paradise,” and “The Empty Boat” by Caetano Veloso.

⁵¹ Brecht, “Das moderne Theater ist das epische Theater,” 21.

⁵² Humberto Werneck, *Chico Buarque: Letra e Música* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1989), 76.

⁵³ Werneck, *Chico Buarque*, 80.

⁵⁴ I only recently came to understand that Veloso’s political songs are not inexplicably bad; they are rather attempts to include the Brazilian protest tradition, which has rather different formal requirements than a popular song, in this canon.

⁵⁵ Veloso and Gilberto Gil, *Tropicália 2* (1994, Elektra).

⁵⁶ I take Roberto Schwarz’s “Verdade tropical: Um percurso de nosso tempo,” in *Martinha versus Lucrecia* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2012) to be the definitive analysis of Veloso’s politics. The article has been controversial. Some of the commentary has been in bad faith; some simply agrees with Veloso’s politics and disagrees with Schwarz’s; some feels the need, in defending Veloso’s music, to defend his politics. For our present purposes, it is enough to note the gap between Veloso’s politics and that entailed by his musical project.

⁵⁷ Friedrich Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, in einer Reihe von Briefen* (1795), twenty-seventh letter.

⁵⁸ Roberto Schwarz, “Um percurso de nosso tempo,” 99.

⁵⁹ Veloso, *Verdade Tropical* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997), 177.

⁶⁰ Weill, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 54.

⁶¹ Augusto de Campos, “Converso com Caetano Veloso,” in *Balanço da bossa e outras bossas* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1974), 200.

⁶² Veloso, “Primeira feira do balanço,” in *Ângulos: Revista dos Alunos da Faculdade de Direito da UFBA*, 1965, in Caetano Veloso, *O mundo não é chato* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2005), 143. The punning title involves the fact that “balanço” is both a musical term for something like “swing,” and an account balance.

⁶³ Veloso, “Primeira feira do balanço,” 143.

⁶⁴ Paulo Werneck, “Veja entrevista com Caetano Veloso sobre seu novo disco ‘Abraço,’” *Folha de São Paulo*, 30-NOV-2012. <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/1193165-veja-entrevista-com-caetano-veloso-sobre-seu-novo-disco-abracaco.shtml>

⁶⁵ Veloso, *A Foreign Sound* (Universal, 2004).

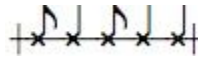
⁶⁶ Veloso, *Abraço* (Universal, 2012).

⁶⁷ The White Stripes, *De Stijl* (Sympathy for the Record Industry, 2000).

⁶⁸ Maybe the lyrics were inspired by annoyance at the phone company, but that doesn’t mean the lyrics have any meaning. See <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/song-stories/hello-operator-the-white-stripes>.

⁶⁹ Stating the essential idea in a drum solo is itself a statement about what constitutes musical necessity, as one thing everyone can agree on is that, in most rock, drum solos are definitely not a musical necessity. One of the self-imposed rules governing *White Blood Cells* was not to use guitar solos.

⁷⁰ The pattern, in Weill’s cut time, is written:



. The shifted version would be, again in cut time:



“Hello Operator” would be transcribed in 4/4 time, where it would look different, but the difference is purely customary—cut time being used for quick march-derived tempos—and has no bearing on the rhythm.

⁷¹ See Keith Richards on this question at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZYtAww_UrU

⁷² See, for example, “Dead Leaves and the Dirty Ground,” on *White Blood Cells*, where feedback produced by a guitar pedal activated on the fourth beat of a measure, leading into each iteration of the instrumental chorus, performs the function of a horn section.

⁷³ The White Stripes’ determination to use only analog recording technology, while not directly relevant to the argument at hand, might seem to suggest primitivist drive or a nostalgic one. But the preference for analog technology is purely technical. Analog technology is a victim of what Marx called “moralischer Verschleiss,” something like normative wear and tear, what happens when equipment is rendered worthless not by physical wear and tear, but by the appearance of equipment which is more efficient (which is to say, costs less per unit of value produced) but not necessarily better in any other way. “It’s not trying to sound retro. It’s just recognizing what was the pinnacle of recording technology.” (Jack White interviewed by Chris Norris, “Digging for Fire: Detroit’s Candy-Striped Wonder Twins Keep the Sound Stripped and the Tales Lively for *Elephant*,” *Spin* 19.5 [May 2003]: 78.) And another word for “worthless” is, of course, “affordable.” The famous department store guitars are also not an aesthetic decision in the usual sense, but rather part of the limiting conditions the White Stripes imposed on themselves to forestall the routinization of live performance. The attraction of the cheap guitars is not the sound, which surely disappears into the pedal board, but that they don’t stay in tune very well. And the point is not to let them go out of tune, but rather to impose an arbitrary constraint: one has to work constantly to keep them in tune.

⁷⁴ Theo van Doesburg, *Grundbegriffe der neuen gestaltenden Kunst* [1925] (Mainz: Florian Kupferberg, 1966), 32.

⁷⁵ Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 34.

⁷⁶ The White Stripes, *White Blood Cells* (Sympathy for the Record Industry, 2001).

⁷⁷ Joss Stone, *The Soul Sessions* (Relentless, 2003).

⁷⁸ The White Stripes, *Hello Operator* (Sympathy for the Record Industry, 2000).

⁷⁹ *Blind Willie McTell: Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order*, Volume 1 (Document, 1990). McTell's tempo is closer to Weill's foxtrot. Thinking in cut time: a quarter note pulse is accented on offbeats rather than backbeats, and the syncopation goes by twice as fast in relation to a quarter note as in "Hello Operator."

⁸⁰ The White Stripes, *The White Stripes* (Sympathy for the Record Industry, 1999).

⁸¹ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5n8skkVSlzs>

⁸² The White Stripes, *Hello Operator* (Sympathy for the Record Industry, 2000); The White Stripes, *Elephant* (V2, 2003); The White Stripes, *Icky Thump* (Warner Brothers, 2007).

⁸³ Robert Johnson, *Stop Breakin' Down Blues* (Vocalion, 1938); The White Stripes, *The White Stripes*; The Rolling Stones, *Exile on Main Street* (The Rolling Stones, 1972).

⁸⁴ Harry Belafonte recorded the song (in English) in 1956, two years before Valens's version. In 1947 it had appeared in the movie *La Fiesta*.

⁸⁵ The Plugz, *Electrify Me* (Restless, 1979).

⁸⁶ *Blind Willie McTell: Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order*, Volume 2 (Document, 1990); The White Stripes, *Lord, Send Me an Angel* (Sympathy for the Record Industry, 2000).

⁸⁷ Jazz, at least from the moment it ceases to be a form and becomes a self-revolutionizing field, could not be brought within the White Stripes' project in any case. An album like Oliver Nelson's *The Blues and the Abstract Truth*, which is a self-conscious attempt to explore the constraints of the blues form and rhythm changes (the chord progression underlying Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm" and, subsequently, a great number of jazz standards), very clearly partakes in 1961 of something like the music-immanent component of the White Stripes' project; of course by that time a self-revolutionizing music-immanent development in jazz, supported by a paradigmatic bourdieusian restricted field, had been long established. The historical component is apparently being undertaken by Cee-Lo Green on the terrain of the relationship between black popular musical forms and the mass music market. "Bright Lights Bigger City," a pastiche built of elements from "Eye of the Tiger" and "Everybody's Working for the Weekend," with sonic references to Michael Jackson's "Beat It" and assembled on the bones of his "Billie Jean," which is itself built over a bass line lifted from Hall and Oates's "I Can't Go for That," which is in turn a pastiche—in the straightforward, culture-industry sense—of 1960s R&B, packs about half of the pop music field circa 1982 into a single song. 1982 is, incidentally, the year the television show *Cheers*, referenced in the lyric ("where everybody knows your name") debuted. The yuppie novel *Bright Lights Big City* was published two years later. There is no musical reference that I can discern to Jimmy Reed's blues "Bright Lights Big City"—which is itself a statement about pop music circa 1982.

⁸⁸ The most interesting omission is the complete absence of any obvious reference to the Beatles. Other omissions are presumably deliberate, but it is hard to imagine a plausible history of rock that did not include the Beatles. But how do you include a self-revolutionizing project, whose essence is not in its individual moments, and which itself involves a heavy element of pastiche and self-relativization? In "My Doorbell" just one bass drum beat, sounding for all the world like John Bonham recorded by Jimmy Page, says "Led Zeppelin" long before Jack White begins his Robert Plant impersonation. But what do the Beatles sound like? To the extent that the Beatles can be reduced to their sound—which they largely can't—most of the elements you could think of can't be incorporated into the White Stripes' vocabulary; moreover, songwriting as such is abjured in favor of musical abstraction. Only with Jack White's recent solo album *Blunderbuss* (Third Man, 2012) do Beatles-like elements begin to emerge. The cleverest gesture in that direction, if I understand it right, is "I'm Shakin'." Is this simply a cover of Little Willie John's "I'm Shakin'"—or is it also a pastiche of the Beatles' cover of his "Leave My Kitten Alone"? Certainly the backup singers' parts owe more to the latter song than the former.

⁸⁹ Chris Norris, "Digging for Fire: Detroit's Candy-Striped Wonder Twins Keep the Sound Stripped and the Tales Lively for *Elephant*," *Spin* 19.5 (May 2003) 78.

⁹⁰ "Digging for Fire," 79.

⁹¹ Schumann's "Abends am Strand" (Op. 45, No. 3), a setting of Heine's "Wir saßen am Fischerhause" from *Die Heimkehr*, runs through six distinct moods in six stanzas, and returns to the first with a difference in the seventh and last. Heinrich Heine, *Buch der Lieder* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1990), 119-120; Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Christoph Eschenbach, *Robert Schumann: Lieder* (Deutsche Grammophon, 1994), disk 3.

⁹² Emmett Malloy, dir., *Under Great White Northern Lights* (Third Man Films, 2009); The White Stripes, *Get Behind Me, Satan* (V2, 2005).

⁹³ Jack White, interview with *sonic* magazine (Sweden), available in English at www.whitestripes.net/articles-show.php?id=18.

⁹⁴ *The Library of Congress Recordings: Leadbelly: The Titanic*, vol. 4 (Rounder, 1994).

Nicholas Brown is completing his current book project—*Autonomy: Culture, Capital, and the Closure of the World Market*—at the Humboldt University of Berlin. He is an Associate Professor of English and African American Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

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THE TIME OF CAPITAL: BRECHT'S *THREEPENNY NOVEL*

DEVIN FORE

Brecht's *The Threepenny Novel* (1934) sets an elaborate system of economic transactions within the seemingly outmoded causal-genetic scheme of a literary narrative. Using the same *dramatis personae* as *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), his enormously successful homage to John Gay's *Beggars Opera* (1728), *The Threepenny Novel* now transports the original characters into turn-of-the-century London at the time of the imperialist Boer War. Paradoxically, the novel is both a recapitulation of the events depicted in *The Threepenny Opera* and a continuation of the earlier work. At once simultaneous with and posterior to the *Opera*, the very conceit of the *Novel* raises questions about the serviceability of succession and lineage as analytic categories. As Walter Benjamin observed in a review of the book, multiple distinct historical moments seem to coexist simultaneously in the *Novel*.¹

Unlike the traditional industrial novel or its Soviet variant, the production novel, both of which foreground scenes of factory labor, Brecht's *Threepenny Novel* focuses exclusively on the maneuvers of finance capital, a level of commercial enterprise unadulterated by the material stuff of productive capital. It depicts abstract economic "development" in its purest metaphysical state.² The plot of the novel is organized around three overlapping financial systems: Peachum's consortium of street beggars, Coax's ship venture, and Macheath's

commercial syndicate. Having left behind his life as a street cutthroat long before the action begins, the Macheath of the *Novel* is an aspiring businessman and founder of a chain of discount retail stores called the B-Shops. In search of investment capital to finance his enterprise, he begins, as in the *Opera*, to court young Polly, daughter of the wealthy Peachum. Through a complex series of machinations and plot turns, Macheath manages over the half-year depicted in the novel to restructure and expand his enterprise, absorbing the stores of his competitors and becoming, by the end of the novel, the esteemed director of a major bank.

Brecht borrowed Macheath's business strategies for the B-Shops from the latest corporate practices, modeling this system in part after the one pioneered by the Karstadt and Epa concerns in the late 1920s; an even more important source were the tactics developed by shoe manufacturer Tomas Bat'a, the legendary "Henry Ford of Eastern Europe" who combined factory production methods with a chain of retail outlets to create one of the first vertically integrated industrial concerns.³ Thus, the setting for the novel may recall London at the turn of the twentieth century, but the capitalist strategies depicted in the 1934 book were entirely state-of-the-art. Brecht describes these economic networks and transactions in exquisite detail. He writes, as one reviewer suggested, "with the utterly grueling meticulousness of a specialist," sparing the reader none of the technical minutiae of his protagonists' financial activities (quoted in *Werke*, 16:424). A sheet of calculations made by Brecht while writing *The Threepenny Novel* attests to his meticulous attention to such details. Here he drew inspiration from the novels of British author Samuel Butler, whose "pedantry in matters of money" he found to be "extremely productive literarily" (*Werke*, 21:361).

As the consummate modern capitalist, Macheath is passionless, motivated only by a purely rational calculus. Just as he feels no carnal passion for Polly but views her merely as an opportunity to capitalize his B-Shops, Peachum similarly sees in his daughter's marriage only a potential source of financial gain. None of the novel's conflicts originate in the drama of human passion, and few of its reversals of fortune offer emotional gratification to the reader. Certainly one feat of *The Threepenny Novel*, then, is that Brecht manages to motivate narratively 400 pages of what are, in effect, financial transactions. Eschewing the "narrative desire" of the traditional dramatic novel, Brecht's book compels its reader without any recourse to emotional intensity and catharsis, capturing the reader's attention instead with the more phlegmatic and sublimated pleasures of logical analysis, riddle solving, remainderless bookkeeping, and, of course, utmost verbal wit.

The version of capitalism depicted in *The Threepenny Novel* was one that, by this historical moment, no longer corresponded to any properly human scale. As Henry Ford observation from 1923, "big business is really too big to be human."⁴ The economist Joseph Schumpeter similarly explained in 1928 that "the enterprise of the 'liberal' era was usually the enterprise

if one man, i.e. of one family,” while the contemporary corporation had exploded this anthropomorphism, substituting for it the abstract “entrepreneur function” (*Unternehmerfunktion*) that “is never purely embodied in concrete person; its essence [*Wesen*: thus also ‘its being’] must therefore always first be extrapolated analytically from a relatively complicated conglomerate.”⁵ As it incorporated ever more social functions into its integrated network of managed production and consumption, the corporation indeed began to merge with the state itself during the interwar years. Schumpeter thus explained that, from a sociological perspective, “the modern enterprise has outgrown the driving forces and human types of economic competition and, in its essence, structure and methods, has started to resemble a kind of public administrative body.”⁶ This was, of course, the decade in which the state began to assume control over the maintenance of human capital by introducing comprehensive social welfare systems, as Foucault observed in his late lectures on biopolitics; simultaneously, the state also began at this time to intervene in economic issues at the national level through policies of fiscal and monetary intervention that seem routine today but, as David Harvey points out, were unprecedented before the 1930s.⁷

Needless to say, capital’s evolution from the assembly line to the multinational corporation and, eventually, to a quasi-state did not make for a great dramatic plot. As Brecht observed, the atrophy of the human dimension under monopoly capitalism was accompanied by a certain disfiguration of the novel’s form. With a typically Brechtian reflexivity, the entrepreneur Macheath waxes nostalgic for the good old times as a street thug when everything was simpler, more straightforward, and more *human*:

All of this haggling disgusts me, a former street gangster! Here I sit and quibble about percentages. Why don’t I just take out my knife and stick it into them if they won’t give me what I want? What an undignified way of doing business, smoking cigars and signing agreements! So I’m supposed to smuggle in little propositions and make subtle intimations! Why not just say straight out: Your money or your life! ... All of this hiding behind judges and bailiffs is undignified! ... Clearly one can’t get anywhere today with the simple, straightforward and natural methods of street robbery. The latter have the same relationship to today’s business practices as sailing ships do to steam ships. But the old days were more human [*die alten Zeiten waren menschlicher*]. (*Werke*, 16:358)

Sentimentalizing the simplicity, even humanity of his former gangster life in *The Threepenny Opera*, Macheath reminisces about an era before the endlessly mediated legal machinations of finance capital, the good old days when conflict was still chiefly dramatic, not bureaucratic.

His words recall Kracauer's famous 1925 line about a celebrated Weimar murder case: "Only in a human world does a crime have a criminal."⁸ Macheath, alas, is no longer a criminal because the world is no longer properly human.

But the distinction Macheath draws here between the old and the new is not solely one between two phases in the development of capitalism. The distinction also applies meta-textually to the two phases of his life and exploits as a character in two different works, first in *The Threepenny Opera* (which takes place in 1837) and then in *The Threepenny Novel* (which takes place in the early 1900s). In other words, when he observes that "the old days were more human," the novel-character Macheath is speaking at once about an earlier historical moment of capitalism as well as his prior incarnation on the theatrical stage in *The Threepenny Opera*. Here Brecht provides a canny reflection on the status of figuration in the two *Threepenny* projects. Like the transition from "heroic" to monopoly capitalism, the transition from the 1928 play to the 1934 novel is accompanied by a loss in figural concretion and a dehumanization of the contents of the work. Indeed, because it always involves bodies on stage, theater is far more immediate and "human" than the written word. Some, such as the playwright-turned-novelist Eric Reger, argued that this ineluctable anthropomorphism disqualified theater from representing the modern corporate enterprise. The dramatic arts were simply too mimetic, sensuous, and concrete to depict the abstract metaphysics of contemporary finance capital. Writing about the modern "petroleum complex," for example, Brecht once noted that "petroleum creates new relationships," although these relationships eluded representation in contemporary art and literature: "Petroleum resists depiction in five acts; today's catastrophes do not unfold in a linear fashion, but in cycles of crisis in which each fungible 'hero' changes with the individual phases, etc." (*Werke*, 21:303).

In a statement written between the *Opera* and the *Novel* and published in Reger's journal *Der Scheinwerfer* (*The Spotlight*) in 1930, Brecht's collaborator Elisabeth Hauptmann explained the difficulties that arose in attempting to depict modern economic processes on the stage. When Brecht recently attempted to write a play about the Chicago wheat futures market,

We collected a lot of technical literature for this piece. I myself interviewed a series of specialists; and towards the end Brecht began reading texts on economics, since he found the financial practices to be extremely opaque and so he had to see how things stood with theories of money. But even before he began making discoveries about this material that were extremely important for him, he already knew that the (great) form of the drama as it was known then was just as unsuitable for representing modern processes such as the distribution of the world's wheat or the construction of railroads as it was for representing the lives of the individuals

who control our era. The traditional form of the drama was not even suitable for depicting *actions with consequences* [*Handlungen mit Folgen*]. Such things, he said, are not dramatic in our sense, and if you “poeticize” them, then they are no longer true; furthermore, there is no such thing as drama any longer, and if you see that today’s world no longer fits into the drama, well, then the drama no longer fits into today’s world.⁹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the project discussed here, Joe *Fleischhacker*, never made it to the stage, but instead shared the same fate as Sergei Eisenstein’s unrealized project in the late 1920s for a film of Marx’s *Das Kapital*. The resonances between the two projects are indeed noteworthy, as Eisenstein’s film came up against problems very similar to those faced by Brecht. As Eisenstein explained in his working notes for the unrealized film, depicting the modern capitalist enterprise presented a unique challenge, since it required the thorough “de-anecdotalization” of the source material: the “detachment from a specific place,” the division into “nonfigurative chapters,” the leap “from representation of ordinary life to abstract and generalized imagery,” and, thus, the “complete departure from the factual and anecdotal.”¹⁰ “Deanecdotalization” was effectively dedramatization. With the gradual movement away from “the factual and anecdotal,” the artwork sheds its empirical referentiality and documentary specificity.

For the same reasons as Eisenstein, Brecht developed an art form that was far more abstract and analytic than the traditional theater. His epic technique—“drama with footnotes,” as he called it—was already a step in this direction. More radical in its renunciation of the anecdotal and the mimetic, however, was *The Threepenny Novel*. For example, the book provides few vivid descriptions of the characters, giving the reader little idea of what Macheath or Coax looks like.¹¹ Equally antitheatrical is the almost complete absence of dialogue. Instead, the characters hold forth in lengthy, quasi-philosophical monologues, and at those rare moments when they do converse, their words are seldom rendered directly, in quotation marks, but are instead recounted and summarized by the narrator. Indeed, there is so little dialogue in the text that one is hard pressed to imagine that the author of *The Threepenny Novel* was one of the most important playwrights of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, for all his novel’s abstraction, Brecht insisted that sensuous perception could not be rejected entirely, that art must not be abandoned for the abstract analytic of science. What was needed, rather, was a strategy for depicting capital’s mechanisms without spurious anthropomorphizing. “Here there was much to see, much to make visible,” he wrote of his experiments in representing the capitalist system (*Werke*, 21:460). Ultimately what seemed to

offer the ideal compromise between art and science was the detective novel, a genre that appealed to him because of its particularly close kinship to logical thought. In a 1938 essay “On the Popularity of the Crime Novel,” he likened the detective story to a crossword puzzle, praising the structural rigor of a genre whose riddle is resolved through the meticulous and diligent application of the scientific method (*Werke*, 22:504-510). As if conducting an experiment, the literary detective proceeds by gathering data, eliminating hypotheses that are revealed as false, and positing causal schemes where probabilities run high. This investigative method demanded a diffuse economy of attention, which Brecht praised as superior to the emotional intensity of dramatic catharsis. In contrast to classical dramatic forms such as the bourgeois tragedy, which hones the spectator’s attention on the red thread of the plot, detective genres require an open mode of perception that proceeds inductively. To remain vigilant for possible clues, the reader cannot allow herself to be misled by the human drama of the plot. Since every trivial piece of information must be read forensically, as a potential clue to the text’s riddle, the reader must pay equal attention to every bit of detail and seemingly meaningless incident.

Of course, crime novels require murders and trials, and Brecht obligingly outfits *The Threepenny Novel* with two of each. But, significantly, in neither case is the actual culprit ever found. This is because in both cases the culpable party is a disembodied system, or collective agent. So, for example, an owner of one of the B-Shops, Mary Swayer, is driven to suicide as a result of the wolfish business practices of Macheath, who ruins his shopowners in order to gain advantage over a competing retail concern. In her case the accused is acquitted, because, under the laws of capitalism, murder through material privation is, of course, completely licit. Coax, too, is murdered, and seemingly more directly: attacked first by a member of Macheath’s gang, he stumbles away only to be finished off minutes later by someone under the charge of Peachum. Yet like Swayer’s demise, the cause of Coax’s death is *indeterminable* precisely because it is *overdetermined*, the consequence of multiple batterings delivered by two parties working independently of each other. The agent responsible for delivering the death blow is not clear. Just as Swayer’s death is not directly attributable to Macheath, who is only following good capitalist strategy when he forces her to financial ruin, Coax’s death cannot be blamed entirely on any one of his assailants, nor on the two men who commissioned the murder independently of one another. And when Coax’s alleged killer is finally found, it is the wrong man who is tried and hanged. The book ends, then, with a third collective murder. In this last case, it is society itself that commits the crime, in an act of class justice.

The overdetermined deaths of Swayer and Coax raise complex questions about the attribution of guilt and agency in cases of collective crime. Such issues were of course highly relevant at the time that Brecht wrote *The Threepenny Novel* in 1933-1934, when the victories of

European fascism prompted consideration of the relationship between collective violence and regressive social configurations. Novels about corporate crime, in particular, provide an important resource for thinking about the agency and behavior of such “aggregate persons” (*Verbandspersonen*), as Stefan Andriopoulos has demonstrated. Although on the surface *The Threepenny Novel* is a corporate crime story, the subtext of this narrative, with its focus on collective crime and guilt, is clearly that of European fascism. In strictly legal terms, corporate bodies, like the state, are not subject to the law because they lack the features of concrete personhood necessary to assume guilt for a crime.¹² And so despite the panoply of crimes in the capitalist jungle of *The Threepenny Novel*, from murder and theft to rape and extortion, in the end no responsible parties can be found for these acts. In a functionally differentiated and bureaucratized corporation that disperses agency across a number of individuals, these forms of violence are not attributable to any one person, but are, rather, shared by all. The guilty party cannot be established in Brecht’s novel because the guilty party is the capitalist system itself. Thus, while *The Threepenny Novel* engages the conventions of the traditional detective novel, it simultaneously short-circuits the method of forensic inquiry that is intrinsic to this genre. Or to borrow Benjamin’s words from his review of the book, “Brecht’s procedure consists in retaining the highly developed technique of the crime novel but neutralizing its rules” (*Schriften*, 3:447-448; *Writings*, 3:8).

In addition to the two trials that seek (and fail) to resolve Swayer’s and Coax’s murders, a third, still more significant trial takes place in *The Threepenny Novel*, which Brecht saves for the final pages. This event is nothing less than Judgment Day itself. Presiding over the trial is one of the characters in Peachum’s outfit, an invalid veteran of the Boer War named Fewkoomby. The proceedings, which take place in a dream, promise to track down all those who have ever been responsible for economic exploitation and to repay all of those who have ever been expropriated. As the “greatest arraignment of all times,” the trial promises, in other words, to discover the historical source of social inequality itself, the very foundational injustice of capitalism (*Werke*, 16:380). Needless to say, the task is not an easy one. Fewkoomby’s conservative estimate is that the proceedings will last several hundred years. The investigation will be exhausting, but Fewkoomby reasons that the only way for capital to repay all its debts is to reconstruct the labors of all expropriated generations, both past and present.

So Fewkoomby begins by subpoenaing the dead. “Everyone who had ever set foot on this earth was allowed to voice his complaints” (*Werke*, 16:381). He questions not only physical laborers such as the suicide Mary Swayer but also those who performed the ideological work that perpetuated the injustices of capitalism. So, for example, the judge interrogates a priest who, earlier in the novel, promulgated religious parables that reinforce the political quiescence of the masses. As the inquiry proceeds, however, it becomes clear to the judge

that he will never arrive at the definitive source of value. Each interrogation leads to still more interrogations. With mounting confusion, Fewkoomby begins to rave at the dead:

There is the wall of the house-where is the bricklayer? Is he ever really paid in full?
And this paper! Someone had to make it! Was he sufficiently compensated for it?
And this table here! Is there really nothing owed to the man who planed the wood
for it? The washing on the line! The line itself! And even the tree, which didn't
plant itself here. This knife here! Is everything paid for? Fully? Of course not! We
have to send around a circular asking everyone who isn't paid in full to register!
The history books and biographies won't suffice! Where are the wage lists? (*Werke*,
16:391)

With the failure of this forensic inquiry, both the dream and the novel break off abruptly. Fewkoomby's noble but misguided attempt to reconstruct the genealogy of the commodity is doomed, since each particular instantiation of dead labor is always built on more labor. In the end, the trial may not arrive at the source of inequality, but this very failure succeeds in exposing the absurdity of the physiocratic conceit that there could be a foundational or natural "origin" of value.

Althusser once observed that Brecht's work displays two distinct "forms of temporality that do not achieve any mutual integration, which have no relation to one another, which coexist and interconnect, but never meet each other, so to speak."¹³ Through this noncoincidence, Brecht's industrial novel winds up demonstrating the incongruous temporalities of capital and the human. The Judgment Day episode questions the very adequacy of a genetic framework for describing the "development" of capital. As Lukács once noted, the novel's historical emergence as an aesthetic form responded to capitalist society's "need for genetic explanations" and, for a time at least, its genealogical narratives flourished from the structural resemblance between the evolution of the business enterprise and the generational sequence of the bourgeois family. But this homology was short lived. As Brecht's Judgment Day demonstrates, the mechanisms of monopoly capital had grown too complex by the 1930s and could no longer be modeled using the traditional novel's genealogical framework. When the subjective temporality of *Bildung* yields to the abstract scheme of *Entwicklung*, when "formation" gives way to "development," the *Industrieroman* definitively parts ways with the *Familienroman*. The movement of capital, Fewkoomby discovers, does not observe the linear concatenations found in "history books" or the anthropomorphic time of "biographies." As his demand for "wage lists" suggests, mathematical languages are more adequate for depicting modern capital than narrative ones.¹⁴ Fewkoomby's attempt to reconstruct the genealogy of capitalist production, to parse the commodity out in linear time, ends up trapped in a

tautological circle, since the human mind cannot comprehend the paradoxical fact that capital seems always to presuppose itself.

It is worth pointing out here that *The Threepenny Novel* is not just a book about capital. It is also a book about *Kapital*. Brecht's commentators have amply documented *The Threepenny Novel's* numerous borrowings from Marx's opus, such as the passage describing the death of Mary Ann Walkley, which Brecht quotes virtually verbatim from Marx.¹⁵ But, beyond the content and imagery, correspondences between the two works can also be found at a deeper structural level. Indeed, far more intriguing for our inquiry are certain parallels in the construction that raise questions about the aesthetic strategies Brecht borrowed from Marx to represent capital. It was likely Karl Korsch who should be credited for leading Brecht to the insight that the textual design of *Das Kapital* was integral to understanding capital's mechanisms. In his 1932 introduction to *Das Kapital*, Brecht's initiator into Marxism wrote, for example, of the "aesthetic attraction" of "the Marxian mode of presentation."¹⁶ Marx's explication of capital's properties and logic is not purely theoretical or scientific, Korsch insisted, but relies on certain strategies of textual exposition. Because the mechanisms of capital can be grasped only within an "artistic whole," as Marx characterized his text, *Das Kapital* tries to develop a mode of presentation, or *Darstellung*, that is proper to its subject matter.¹⁷ The challenge of presenting the system of modern capital adequately had in fact precipitated Brecht's turn to Marx in the late 1920s. As he confessed to a Moscow audience in May 1935, aesthetic concerns, not revolutionary sentiment or political conviction, led the playwright to Marx. While working on *Joe Fleischhacker*, the fragment discussed in the earlier quote by Hauptmann, Brecht ran aground on the problem of how to depict the mechanisms of the wheat futures market, which seemed to him to be "inexplicable" and "incomprehensible."¹⁸ So he began to read Marx. He turned to *Das Kapital* because the structure of this "artistic whole" contained the solution to the aesthetic aporia that he had encountered in his attempt to bring the system of finance capital to the stage.

Nowhere is the structural rhyme between *The Threepenny Novel* and *Das Kapital* clearer than at the end of each book, where Fewkoomby's dream of Judgment Day mirrors *Das Kapital's* final section, "So-called Primitive Accumulation." Both chapters wrestle with a contradiction that is fundamental to the (il)logic of capital and thus a seemingly insuperable obstacle to its depiction: the impossibility of retracing the steps of accumulation back to a foundational act of expropriation, back to an original crime. This task is impossible because capital has no historical genealogy, but instead operates outside of linear time. "What Marx proved," Balibar noted, "is not the fact that capitalism has liberated the development of the productive forces once and for all, but the fact that capitalism has imposed on the productive forces a determinate type of development whose rhythm and pattern are peculiar to it, dictated by the

form of the process of capitalist accumulation.”¹⁹ Confronted with these particular rhythms and patterns, Brecht decided to stage Fewkoomby's investigation as the biblical Judgment Day, an event at the end of time that transcends the laws of historical sequence. Ultimately this investigation fails, breaking off abruptly, because Fewkoomby's forensic mode of inquiry has no purchase on the laws of capital's “development,” which elude these causal schemes.

In his introduction to *Das Kapital*, Korsch described the contradiction encountered by Marx, who, even after hundreds of pages of detailed economic analysis, still faced “an unsolved problem to be elucidated, which proves in the last analysis to be non-economic in character. This problematic residue may be expressed in the following question: what was the origin, before all capitalist production began, of the first capital, and of the first relationship between the exploiting capitalist and the exploited wage-laborer?”²⁰ After explicating the structure and mechanisms of capital, Marx must still answer the impossible question of when and how the capitalist order first appeared in the world. This, of course, is precisely the question that motivates Fewkoomby's investigation. As Marx explains, however, this moment can never be located historically since capital has no genealogy. In the absence of any historical beginning, capitalism grounds itself in the legend of “so-called primitive accumulation,” a mythical account that circulates as a justification for economic inequality. In authenticating the “naturalness” of capitalist governmentality, the myth of primitive accumulation “plays approximately the same role in political economy as original sin does in theology . . . Its origin is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote about the past. Long, long ago there were two sorts of people; one, the diligent, intelligent and above all frugal elite; the other, lay rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living . . . Such insipid childishness is every day preached to us in the defence of property.”²¹ This fairy tale—which Brecht, incidentally, lifts directly from *Das Kapital* and places in the mouth of a priest in *The Threepenny Novel*²²—envisages an origin to a set of productive relations where, in reality, no such origin exists. The cosmological myth of primitive accumulation is an ideological strategy to conceal capital's tautological structure, Marx writes: “The whole movement, seems to turn around in a never-ending circle, which we can only get out of by assuming a primitive accumulation (the ‘previous accumulation’ of Adam Smith) which precedes capitalist accumulation; an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure.”²³ Fewkoomby's inquiry attempts to return to this point of departure, but, as Brecht shows, he cannot reconstruct the different phases of commodity production from the table back to the wood back to the tree. Capital is an underivable figure. By setting this figure within the narrative framework of a novel, Brecht exposes the limitations of the latter's intrinsically genealogical structure for an analysis of the modern capitalist enterprise.

In a letter sent to Brecht the same month that he wrote the conclusion to *The Threepenny Novel*, Korsch had in fact addressed this theological aspect of capital, noting the “profound consonance between [the] Bible and *Capital*.”²⁴ Staging Fewkoomby’s inquiry in a dream of Judgment Day, in a state of absolute synchrony, posits a vantage beyond historical time from which it become possible to solve the metaphysical riddle of capital. It offers a view of the world as seen by the divine eye, a view foreclosed to human perception. As Frank Kermode argues in his famous study of narrative and apocalypse, *The Sense of an Ending*, the setting of the Judgment Day provides “what [the psychologists] call ‘temporal integration’—our way of bundling together perception of the present, memory of the past and expectation of the future, in a common organization. Within this organization that which was conceived of as simply successive becomes charged with past and future: what was *chronos* becomes *kairos*.”²⁵ Because capital’s development eludes linear modeling, because its mechanisms observe laws that are, by their nature, generic rather than genetic, understanding capital demands an ahistorical approach. Thus, on Judgment Day, Fewkoomby throws out the narratives of the “history books” and “biographies,” calling instead for “wage lists,” a precise diagram of what Marx called “the relations of capital” (*das Kapitalverhältnis*).

The impossibility of portraying capital’s development through a series of successive moments, then, is the epistemological problem upon which Brecht’s industrial novel pivots. On the one hand, capital generates in its subjects a complex architecture of time: its psychology of credit and deferred gratification establishes a horizon of futurity not found in societies whose mode of production lacks private property and techniques for amassing resources. But at the same time capital exempts itself from the very temporal rule it has created, defying the basic laws of chronological sequence that are fundamental to the mechanisms of compound investment and accumulation. At least in the era of heroic capitalism, the development of the business enterprise could still be modeled on the generational sequence of human reproduction. By the time of the consolidation of the great industrial concerns at the turn of the twentieth century, however, capital had sloughed off this human face. Not surprisingly, interest in the concept of primitive accumulation has since increased to the point where, today, in the era of global vertical integration, it has become utterly central to the Marxist analysis of capital. Recent accounts of primitive accumulation focus on the paradoxical temporality of this phenomenon, characterizing it variously as “something of an infinite regress,” an “endlessly iterated event,” or a “basic ontology of alienation.”²⁶ As structuralist Marxism demonstrated decades ago, this aporia is central to the capitalist mode of production. Étienne Balibar’s famous description of primitive accumulation as a case of “ahistorical historicism” captures the paradox succinctly: “Marx’s critical recognition (against political economy) of the historicity of capitalism—the fact that capitalist relations are neither natural nor eternal but rather the product of conditions with a determined genesis—is balanced by an incapacity to think about and analyze the

very history of capitalism.”²⁷ The emergence of *das Kapitalverhältnis*—the capitalist relations of production—is not a historical event, but rather a “conjunction” or an “encounter” (*gegenübertreten*) between owners of the means of production and the workers who sell their labor-power. Once established, this relationship “reproduces itself on a constantly extending scale.”²⁸ Thus, primitive accumulation is less an event that took place somewhere in the remote historical past than an ongoing process of continuous expropriation.²⁹

The parallax construction of *The Threepenny Novel* attempts to capture the insoluble contradiction between the historical account of capital, which unfolds genealogically in the narrative about Macheath's enterprise, and the structural account, which is presented *sub speciae aeternitatis* in Fewkoomby's dream. Ultimately these two perspectives cannot be mapped onto one another. In the body of the novel, time moves inexorably forward, and yet when the end of the story is finally reached, the steps that led to the conclusion of the narrative, paradoxically, cannot be retraced. For Fewkoomby, the crimes cannot be reconstructed. This is the case, it would seem, because the temporality of capitalism, the time of “development,” eludes mnemonic inscription. As Balibar observes, the “analysis of primitive accumulation thus brings us into the presence of the radical *absence of memory* which characterizes history (memory being only the reflection of history in certain predetermined sites—ideology or even law—and as such, anything but a faithful reflection).”³⁰ If the architecture of time and memory in any given culture is articulated by its specific mode of production, *The Threepenny Novel* demonstrates, further, that capitalism's violent expropriation of these means of production is also simultaneously an expropriation of time itself, the result of which is a generalized condition of amnesia in which history transpires without leaving a trace. Because human memory is inscribed and transmitted in symbolic languages and mechanical operational sequences that are exterior to the individual subject, every society, observes the paleoanthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan, will inevitably cultivate “false” memories in its subjects, memories that are by nature collective and transindividual.³¹ But it seems that capitalist society alone generates the very incapacity to remember.

NOTES

- ¹ In his 1935 review of *The Threepenny Novel*, Benjamin takes notes the curious historical nonsynchronicities in Brecht's text: "These Londoners have no telephones, but their police already have tanks." *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 3:440.
- ² Lyotard defines "development" as a radically inhuman temporal framework: "The striking thing about this metaphysics of development is that it needs no finality. Development is not attached to an Idea, like that of the emancipation of reason and of human freedoms. It is reproduced by accelerating and extending itself according to its internal dynamic alone." Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 7.
- ³ Bertolt Brecht, *Werke: Grosse kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. Werner Hecht et al., 30 vols. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), 16:414; hereafter referenced in text as *Werke*, followed by volume and page numbers. Karstadt and Epa were two of the first chains to introduce in 1926 a retail system for selling bulk merchandise at fixed unit prices. See Brecht, *Werke*, 24:445.
- ⁴ Henry Ford, *My Life and Work* (London: Heinemann, 1923), 263.
- ⁵ Joseph Schumpeter, "Art.: Unternehmer," in *Beiträge zur Sozialökonomik*, ed. Stephan Böhm (Vienna: Böhlau, 1987), 150.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.
- ⁷ David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 137.
- ⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, "Tat ohne Täter" (1925), in *Schriften V. Aufsätze*, ed. Karsten Witte and Inka Müller-Bach (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), 318-319; 322.
- ⁹ Elisabeth Hauptmann, "Über Bertold Brecht," *Der Scheinweifer*, no. 8-9 (1930): 17.
- ¹⁰ Sergei Eisenstein, "Notes for a Film of *Capital*," trans. Maciej Sliwowski, Jay Leyda and Annette Michelson, *October* 2 (1976): 3, 5.
- ¹¹ This antfigurative tendency continued in Brecht's next book, the historical novel *The Businesses of My Julius Caesar*. After giving his friends Walter Benjamin and Fritz Sternberg a draft of the book, Brecht was disappointed that they urged him to write a more traditional novel, one with more vivid and compelling characters: "BENJAMIN and STERNBERG, very highly qualified intellectuals, didn't understand it and urgently suggested introducing more human interest, more of the old NOVEL!" Brecht's journal, quoted in Klaus-Detlef Müller, *Brecht-Kommentar zur erzählenden Prosa* (Munich: Winkler, 1980), 237.
- ¹² The German legal system "regarded a joint-stock company as a fictional person that, although capable of engaging in economic transactions, could not commit crimes." Stefan Andriopoulos, *Possessed: Hypnotic Crimes, Corporate Fiction, and the Invention of Cinema*, trans. Peter Jansen and Stefan Andriopoulos (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 46.
- ¹³ Louis Althusser, "The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht," in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1969), 142.
- ¹⁴ Brecht began writing *The Threepenny Novel* at the peak of his fascination with logical positivism, which built heavily on the abstract symbolic languages of Frege and Leibniz. He subscribed to *Erkenntnis*, the house journal of the logical positivists, and the names of leading figures in this group (Carnap, Neurath, Russell) appear again and again in his writings during the early 1930s. This encounter with logical positivism formed the horizon for Brecht's understanding of narrative, as indicated in a set of notes "On the Aristotelian Novel" (*Werke*, 21:538), which were written in response to Rudolf Carnap's essay "The Old and the New Logic." In these notes Brecht contrasted the narrative structure of the novel with the language of formal logic described by Carnap. The contentless (*gehaltleer*) propositions of mathematical languages, or *Beziehungssätze*, as Carnap called them, are diagrams of pure relationality. Such functionalist propositions are nonlinear, reversible schemas that exist independently of the specific contents that are inserted as variables. Unlike the novel, these rigorously nonmimetic logical propositions can provide an account of society's laws at a time, Brecht famously wrote, when "reality as such has slipped away into the domain of the functional" (*Werke*, 21:469).
- ¹⁵ One section of *Das Kapital* from which Brecht borrowed directly is Chapter 10, "On the Working Day," where Marx describes the antagonism between the temporality of labor power and that of capital. Out of this chapter *The Threepenny Novel* lifts virtually verbatim the account of Mary Anne Walkley, a millner who was worked to death in 1863 and whose demise vividly illustrates the consequences of allowing capital to dominate the pattern of work rhythms without providing time for the reproduction of labor power, for the organic maintenance of life. The anecdote about Walkley shows in the plainest of terms how the time of human life does not correspond to the time of capital. Walkley's story reappears in the third book of *The Threepenny Novel*. *Werke*, 16:332-333.

¹⁶ Karl Korsch, "Introduction to *Capital*," trans. T. M. Holmes, in *Three Essays on Marxism* (New York: Pluto Press, 1971), 46-47, 55.

¹⁷ Marx, quoted in *ibid.*, 46.

¹⁸ It was not "the great films of Eisenstein" or the "theatrical events of Piscator" that led him to Marxism, Brecht confessed to a Moscow audience in May 1935. "Immunized" against such "influence from an emotional point of view," the playwright was prompted to read Marx, rather, as the result of a "work accident" (*Betriebsunfall*): while he was researching *Joe Fleischbacker*, the play mentioned by Elisabeth Hauptmann above, no one could explain to Brecht "the mechanisms of the stock market for wheat," which he concluded must be "inexplicable" and "incomprehensible." "The drama that I had planned was never written," he told his Soviet audience, "and instead I began reading Marx" (*Werke*, 22:138-139).

¹⁹ Balibar, "The Elements of the Structure and Their History," in Louis Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2009), 263.

²⁰ Korsch, "Introduction to *Capital*," 52.

²¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), 873-874.

²² Toward the end of *The Threepenny Novel* Brecht puts this exact legend in the mouth of a bishop, whom Fewkoomby then interrogates in the afterlife for perpetuating social inequality:

My friends, everywhere we go on earth we encounter inequality. Every man enters the world as a helpless tiny bundle, naked and unashamed. In this condition he differs in no way from any other suckling. But after a time, differences begin to show themselves. One man remains on a lower rung; another climbs upward. He is cleverer than his fellow man—more industrious, more thrifty, more energetic, he surpasses the other in everything he does. And he will become more prosperous, more powerful, more respected than the other. Inequality comes into being. (*Werke*, 16:370)

²³ Marx, *Capital*, 873.

²⁴ Letter of March 17, 1934, reprinted in *Jahrbuch Arbeiterbewegung*, vol. 2: *Marxistische Revolutionstheorien*, ed. Claudio Pozzoli (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1974), 123. When Gershom Scholem read the final chapter of Brecht's novel, he likewise compared it to the theological parable "Before the Law" from Kafka's *The Trial*. The resonances between Fewkoomby's dream and "Before the Law" arise from a shared temporal paradox: in each case, access to conclusive knowledge (of capital, of the law) is foreclosed by the very dimension of time which circumscribes all human endeavor.

[ft num= 25]Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 46, 52.

²⁶ These quotes are taken respectively from Jason Read, "Primitive Accumulation: The Aleatory Foundation of Capitalism," *Rethinking Marxism* 14, no. 2 (summer 2002): 26; Tony Brown, "The Time of Globalization: Rethinking Primitive Accumulation," *Rethinking Marxism* 21, no. 4 (October 2009): 571; and Jim Glassman, "Primitive Accumulation, Accumulation by Dispossession, Accumulation by 'Extra-Economic' Means," *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 5 (2006): 615. Michael Perelman presents a lucid overview of the theory of primitive accumulation in *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Accumulation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

²⁷ Balibar, "The Notion of Class Politics in Marx," 49.

²⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 874.

²⁹ On primitive accumulation as a strategy of continuous expropriation, see David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³⁰ Étienne Balibar, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism," in *Reading Capital*, 317.

³¹ "Individually constructed memory and the recording of personal behavioral programs are entirely channeled through knowledge, whose preservation and transmission in all ethnic communities is ensured by language. This creates a genuine paradox: The individual's possibilities for comparison and liberation rest upon a potential memory whose entire contents belong to society." André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, trans. Anna Bostock Berger (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 228.

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FEATURES

ANTHONY CARO'S *PARK AVENUE SERIES*

MICHAEL FRIED

Several years ago Anthony Caro was invited to propose a large-scale work for one of the central malls on Park Avenue in midtown Manhattan. This was in connection with Park Avenue Malls, an ongoing program begun more than ten years ago under the auspices of the Park Avenue Authority and in which a number of sculptors had already taken part. Typically, Caro had his own approach to the project: it mattered to him that in addition to passersby there were countless cars moving in both directions, and he began to think in terms of making a work long enough to lend itself to being viewed meaningfully from passing cars as well as by pedestrians. This involved building maquettes of the street, trying out various possible designs for the construction itself, visiting New York more than once to study the site in detail and pursue various questions on the ground, returning to London and modifying the models in accordance with his new findings, and so on.

Before long, Caro's proposal envisioned a construction fully three city blocks long, represented in his Camden Town, London, studio by a model built to 1:4 scale and erected at waist height with trees and bushes made of wire and plastic. This not only allowed Caro to have a better view of the work and its setting; it also provided the structural engineer who would be in charge of actually erecting the piece on its intended site detailed informa-

tion necessary for his calculations. In particular the model made possible the placement of load-bearing beams and such in places reflecting the structural realities of the subway running beneath Park Avenue. At this late stage of work, however, the project had to be abandoned owing to considerations of cost.



Anthony Caro, *In the Forest* (2012)



Anthony Caro, *Laughter and Crying* (2012)

By the time this happened Caro had been engaged with the project, not exclusively but nevertheless seriously, for at least two years, and his disappointment at its abandonment should have been considerable. Perhaps it was, briefly. But almost immediately (“coming from the tea room into the studio,” he says) he recognized that the segments of the overall construction raised on their struts had the makings of sculptures in their own right, and he decided on the spot to use them as starting points for individual pieces. There followed an intense campaign of work as the larger construction was divided into sections and those sections in turn were, one by one, transformed in countless ways into large, abstract, and autonomous works of art.



Anthony Caro, *Morning Shadows* (2012)



Anthony Caro, *Wandering* (2012)

In the end there turned out to be twelve such sculptures, eleven of which are on view in the present exhibition, the twelfth, *River Song*, being simultaneously on display at the Museo Correr in Venice. Eventually, I am convinced, the *Park Avenue* series will be recognized as one of the major triumphs of Caro's long and distinguished career, and in particular as a knockdown demonstration of the continued viability of high modernist abstraction in the face of the widespread assumption that no such thing is any longer even conceivable. In advance of that recognition a few points may usefully be made.



Anthony Caro, Solitude (2012)



Anthony Caro, The Brook (2012)

First, all the pieces (save one) carry a positive impetus from the original project by virtue of their strong lateral organization as well as, in many of them, an unmistakable sense of abstract speed or, perhaps better, *drive*. Again and again, lateral elements, mainly parallel to the ground though sometimes at an angle to it, in the form of long pipes (often capped at the ends), extend or run or thrust vigorously from one end of the piece to or toward the other (usually from left to right, as seen from the sculptures' "front"). Lateralness as a mode of organization has always been good to Caro, as in the Tate's *Early One Morning* (1962) and the superb *Prairie* (1966). Indeed, it quickly emerged as a significant difference between his work and that of his American predecessor in welded steel, David Smith, in whose sculptures, as Clement Greenberg once noted, the uprightness of the human figure continually reasserted itself. But the *Park Avenue* sculptures do something new with lateralness by virtue of their all but diagrammatic clarity, as if the tubes and other lateral elements are to be seen as so many vectors given material expression, material form, before our eyes. (The lone exception to the lateral norm is the last work to be completed, *Tempest*, which in effect brings the series to a full stop.)



Anthony Caro, *Clouds* (2012)

Anthony Caro, *Horizon* (2012)

At the same time, a second point, all the sculptures make a certain show of their materiality – there is no seeming weightlessness as in the breakthrough pieces, no “opticality” as in *Prairie* and related works, in short no mitigation in any respect of the ontological bareness, meaning by that not just the weight but also so to speak the unwieldiness, as well as the surface qualities, of industrial steel. More precisely, all the sculptures foreground the material specificity of the miscellaneous elements that went into their making, which for the most part are of a dozen or so basic types: pipes (capped and uncapped, as I have said, also straight and curving; a new ingredient in Caro’s work), lengths of flat steel, lengths of girder, I-beam segments, frames, disks and disk segments of various sizes and thicknesses, flats of various dimensions, other flats bent convex/concave (I don’t know how else to describe them), ploughshares, heavy steel “extrusions” (the first “cuts” to have emerged from between massive rollers in the steel mill), right angles (in *Horizon*), boilers (in the remarkable *Clouds*), and in a few pieces, notably *Solitude* and *The Brook*, expanses of folded or crumpled steel. Also foregrounded, laid bare with emphasis, are the connections among these. Frequently in Caro’s earlier work elements seemed scarcely to touch one another; the relations among them, to use a term of Karen Wilkin’s, was one of “poise”; that was part of his sculpture’s originality, its distinctive syntax. But in the *Park Avenue* pieces all the relations are frankly physical in that the viewer apprehends *exactly* how the various elements have been thrust or leaned against or

simply laid on top of one another, fitted together or run or slotted into each other, stacked or framed or suspended from the same or different pipes or girders, in the end not just seemingly juxtaposed but welded, bolted, and screwed together in the most direct and openly acknowledged manner imaginable. (None of this precludes a conspicuous elegance: again and again welds are intermittent, setting up an internal rhythm of their own; acute attention has been paid to joins and connections of every sort; bolts and screws have been chosen with care for their scale relative to the piece as a whole; here and there cunningly sited smaller elements appear to have a strictly esthetic justification; the very surface qualities of the different steel components seem at once to tell against and to harmonize with one another; and so on.) Compositionally, sculptures such as *Morning Shadows* and *Wandering*, two of the grandest in the group, contrast built-up units of strongly profiled components with pipes and other lateral elements running between them while also establishing different levels of activity starting on the ground. Other works proceed differently, but the fact that all the sculptures derive from the same initial project gives the series as a whole tremendous coherence at the same time as each sculpture on its own seems the product of a distinct originating inspiration – not quite a contradiction but almost. In *Clouds*, perhaps the most monumental piece of all, upright beams end short of the ground only to have I-beam segments inserted so as to support them from below (though the effect is rather of “extending” the sculpture downward, so to speak). Elsewhere, as in *Towards Morning* and *Dawn of Day*, elements are laid directly on the ground; this is also true, in a sense, of the dented concave steel sheet in the marvelous *Solitude*, which rests on the ground at its lowest point. Indeed, throughout the series the ground is given unfamiliar weight, if I may so put it. And yet this simple-seeming fact turns out to be as exhilarating in its way as the evocation of weightlessness in *Midday* and other sculptures of the early 1960s.



Anthony Caro, *River Song* (2011-2012)



Anthony Caro, *Towards Morning* (2012)

The result, point number three, is an extraordinary impression of clarity of an almost demonstrative kind even as the “imagery” of individual sculptures such as *Towards Morning*, *River Song*, and *Torrents of Spring* is as rich and strange as anything in Caro’s oeuvre (the last of those in particular, with its trio of rectilinear bars bending toward the ground from up high and its paired heavy oval steel “feet” that one might think would rest flat on the ground but don’t, has a positively exotic or Matissean feel). Caro’s abstract work has almost never made a secret of its manufacture, but, again, there is something uniquely compelling about the sheer lucidity both of the relationships the *Park Avenue* pieces comprise and of the evidence and implication of the process of making that they place before one, especially in view of their scale and complexity. For one thing, all the works are conspicuously open — as if their having been pulled apart from some larger construction has left them exposed to view in a new way. Among the aspects so revealed is, as in *Horizon*, *Towards Morning*, and *Morning Shadows*, the role of axes at an angle to the dominant lateral thrust of the sculpture as a whole; again, the interplay of lateralness versus angled axes is not without precedent in Caro’s work but throughout the *Park Avenue* series it functions as a basic organizing principle, the secondary axis or axes interpenetrating with the primary one without throwing the latter off course. (In *Tempest* we see different axes all but canceling each other out, which largely accounts for its “stopping” character.) Something else worth mentioning is that although all the sculptures imply a dominant, “frontal” view, they have also been made with great attention to other possible approaches, and in fact from some of those the form of a given work appears, not transformed exactly, but unexpectedly developed, even explicated. (The disposition of the sculptures in the present show allows that feature of the series to emerge with particular force.)



Anthony Caro, *Torrents of Spring* (2012)



Anthony Caro, *Tempest* (2012)

Finally, I just wrote of the overall effect of the sculptures as being as being something like intellectual clarity, but it would be no less accurate to call it musical — the individual lines of force, articulated by elements that are at once standard (pipes, girders, beams, long flats, right angles, and the like) and highly specific (*this* pipe, of just this length and diameter, running straight across or thrusting or indeed bent upward or downward, capped in just this way, etc.) being in effect different “voices” that one follows in their various permutations even as one also grasps the ensemble, in each sculpture in turn, as a simultaneous whole.¹ The interpenetration of axes, also, might be described as musical in its very abstractness, as if it were the equivalent of a shift of key, a modulation of some sort. And behind each sculpture’s unique blend of lyricism and power, determining every esthetic choice, every cut, weld, join, addition, and inflection, every large or small, strategic or detailed, cumulatively near-heroic act of mastery of this most resistant of artistic mediums: the eighty-nine year-old perfectionist artist’s indefatigable *will*. This, too, has perhaps never before been acknowledged by Caro with such utter nakedness.

* * * * *

Postscript, August 2013: The above first appeared as a catalogue introduction to an exhibition of eleven of Caro’s *Park Avenue* sculptures at the Gagosian Gallery on Britannia Street, London (June 6-August 23, 2013). I wrote it almost exactly as it appears here before actually visiting the exhibition, on the strength of having followed the making of the sculptures in Caro’s studio over several years. (After that visit I made several slight revisions to the text.) Now that I’ve seen the finished pieces gathered together, displayed in three large rooms plus an entrance space, I want to add that the exhibition itself is beyond praise – my only regret, a huge one, is that it will come down in just a few weeks instead of staying open forever as a monument to Caro’s genius, to high modernism, to abstraction, to the sculptural medium of welded steel. Walking through those rooms I couldn’t help recalling my first encounter with *Midday* in Caro’s Hampstead courtyard in the fall of 1961, and the almost instantaneous conviction it inspired in me that it was the work of an artist of the highest imaginable gifts, ambition, and originality. Now just short of fifty-two years later that conviction has been validated – not for the first time — in the most overwhelming terms.

My thanks to Mark Francis and Gagosian Gallery for allowing the republication of my essay on nonsite as well as for making available the images of Caro’s sculptures accompanying it.

NOTES

¹ In fact I asked Caro about the titles for these pieces, which I found surprising in their nature references, and he said that all of them came in one way or another from Schubert songs; this struck me as apt, though my own impulse had been to think of late Beethoven, the great quartets or the *Diabelli Variations* — purely personal associations, needless to say.

Michael Fried is J. R. Herbert Boone Professor of Humanities and the History of Art, Johns Hopkins University. His many books of art criticism, art history, literary criticism, and poetry include *Absorption and Theatricality*; *Courbet's Realism*; *Manet's Modernism*; *Art and Objecthood*; *Menzel's Realism*; *Why Photography Matters as Never Before*; *The Moment of Caravaggio*; and, most recently, *Four Honest Outlaws: Sala, Ray, Marioni, Gordon*.

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WHEN EXCLUSION REPLACES EXPLOITATION:

THE CONDITION OF THE SURPLUS-POPULATION UNDER NEOLIBERALISM

DANIEL ZAMORA

Introduction

In 1992, 13 years after Margaret Thatcher's "neoliberal revolution," the Iron Lady's chief economic advisor, Alan Budd, declared that he had his doubts that "the 1980's policies of attacking inflation by squeezing the economy and public spending" had ever really been taken seriously by those at the helm of government. Rather, he wondered if they weren't really a "cover to bash the workers. Raising unemployment," he pointed out, "was a very desirable way of reducing the strength of the working class. What was engineered—in Marxist terms—was a crisis of capitalism which re-created a reserve army of labor, and has allowed the capitalists to make high profits ever since."¹ The interest of this anecdote is in its implicit suggestion of a link between the socio-political destabilization and fragmentation of the wage-earning working class (the intensification, in other words, of the difference between the working army of labour and the unemployed reserve) and the politics pursued during the decades following the rise of neoliberalism. The central problem with which we are confronted today, in other words, may be less the conflict between labor and capital,

and more, as Margaret Thatcher put it, the antagonism between a privileged “underclass” with its “dependency culture” and an “active” proletariat whose taxes pay for a system of “entitlements” and “handouts.”²

During this same period, in France, André Gorz published his *Farewell to the Working Class*—a book in which he argued that the “society of unemployment” would henceforth be divided into two camps: “a growing mass of the permanently unemployed” on one side, “an aristocracy of tenured workers” on the other, and, lodged between the two, “a proletariat of temporary workers.”³ Far from constituting the very motor of social change, the “traditional working class” had become little more than a “privileged minority.”⁴ From now on, the vanguard of the class struggle would be a “non-class” made up of the “unemployed” and “the temporary workers” for whom work would never be a “source of individual flourishing.” Gorz’s idea was that, in today’s world, class conflict is no longer between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, but rather, between the lumpenproletariat and a working class no longer at odds with the class system.

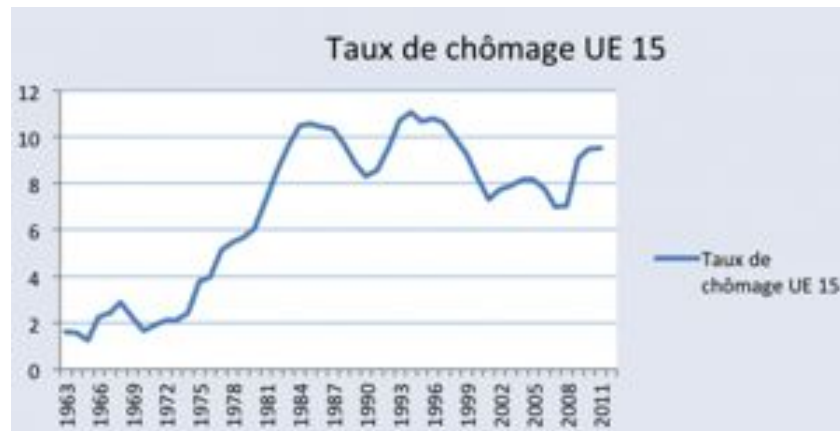
The fact that this logic—redefining the social question as a conflict between two factions of the proletariat rather than between capital and labor—can today be found on the left as well as the right, raises a number of question. On one side, it aims at limiting the social rights of the “surplus population”⁵ by pitting “active” workers against them; on the other side, it aims at mobilizing the “surplus population” against the privilege of the “actives.” In the end, both sides end up accepting, to the detriment of all “workers,” the centrality of the category of the “excluded.”

This simultaneously semantic and ideological evolution in some sense reproduces the changes that have taken place in the salariat over the last forty years. Increasing unemployment that is also increasingly concentrated (both socially and geographically) and the consequent emergence of a vast stratum of (what Marx called) the “surplus population” thus figure as key elements for understanding the structural reconfiguration of the salariat in the whole of the industrialized world. It has pushed to center stage a set of political debates about “unemployed youth left adrift,” “the beggars and the homeless” and “postcolonial immigrants without documents or support.” These new protagonists of the urban proletariat now become, as Loic Wacquant pointed out, “the living and threatening incarnation” of the instability generated by “the erosion of stable and homogenous wage work” and “the decomposition of the solidarities of class and culture it underpinned within a clearly circumscribed national framework.”⁶ This same evolution becomes the condition of possibility both of the various conservative political strategies aimed at limiting access to the Welfare State and of the declining “centrality of the working class question”⁷ among

authors and critics on the left. Now the “exploited” are redefined “by their exclusion,” by their increasingly precarious relationship to work (*précarisation*).⁸ In their new invisibility, they constitute a symbol of the reconfiguration of class (as well as ethnic and gender) relations in a society where the explosion of inequality and economic instability has profoundly dismantled the working class. Indeed, their invisibility is a kind of image of neoliberalism, of the replacement of class struggle by unorganized uprisings and class consciousness by the fragmented identitarianism of a deeply fissured salariat. Although this problematic gets articulated differently in different countries, the question of the “surplus population” in all its declensions (the unemployed, the impoverished, immigrants, the excluded, the underclass, the insecurely employed, etc.) finds itself at the heart of both public and expert debate on the economy, on the left and on the right in the decades following the 1980s. The transformations of the period go beyond the issue of how the economy is organized to the issue of how the social question will be asked in the future. Indeed, in debates that are as much intellectual as political, the new centrality of the “excluded” or the “underclass” not only changes the terms of the problem but also of what can count as a solution.

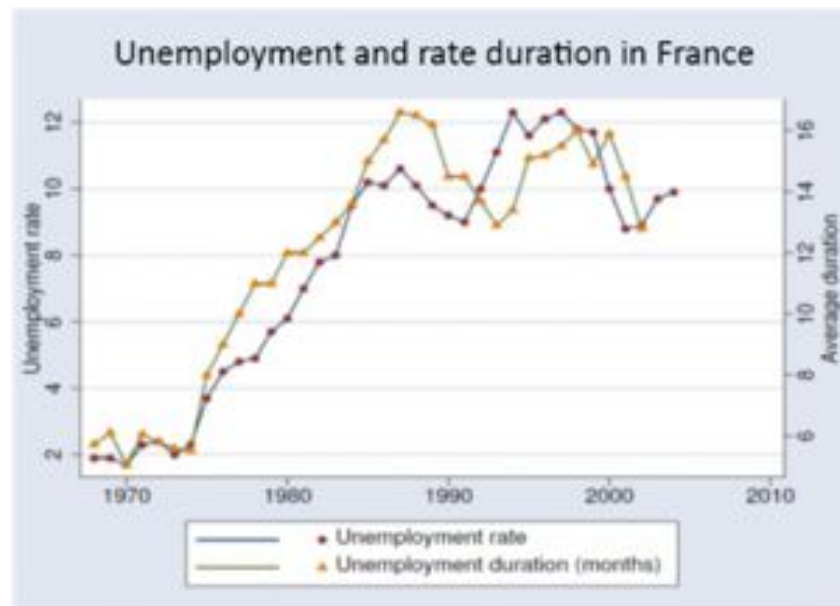
A New Problem Arises...

Between 1963 and 1983, unemployment rates skyrocketed from under 2% to at least 10% in every main industrialized European country. This transformation, as much of the structure of the wage-system as of work itself was perhaps one of the most important of the post-war period, profoundly altering the terms of political and economic discussion. Unemployment had remained relatively low in the post-War period but the following years marked the end of the “30 glorious” years of European post-war peace and prosperity. If the old objective had been “full employment,” the new one was just less unemployment, i.e. “reducing [an] unemployment” rate which had somehow managed to settle in “for good.” A new consensus had begun to emerge: unemployment was not “just a conjunctural phenomenon,” but appeared to be caused by structural factors.⁹



Source: OCED

To this explosion of unemployment were added two relatively new considerations: its increasing duration and its concentration within the workforce. What was thus established was a deep correlation between, on one hand, the increase of unemployment rates and, on the other, the length of time spent unemployed.



Source: O. Blanchard 2005

What this means is that the rise in unemployment hit a relatively small group very hard while sparing the rest. In Germany, for instance, between 1975 and 2004, 70% of all periods of unemployment were localized in barely 10% of the population.¹⁰ In this regard—and in this regard alone—the new segment of the workforce (the poor, the unemployed, immigrants) did indeed become relatively isolated from other active wage-earners. And although the

United States in this period saw a less significant rise in unemployment, the 1970s and '80s nonetheless did see an increase both in the numbers and in the length of unemployment. Furthermore, insofar as unemployment and poverty also became increasingly concentrated geographically—as is suggested by the evolution of African-American ghettos in the United-States—the debate over the “underclass” became increasingly prominent.



Source: Federal Reserve Economic Data

It is this widening inequality that would come to constitute a crucial condition of possibility for the political and economic division of the workforce, a division that in the following decades would seriously reconfigure the terms in which the social question would be posed. It would be not so much the question of unemployment as such as the question of its unequal distribution that figured at the center of the debate. And this focus would produce as its corollary both a social and an identitarian fragmentation of the working class. The serious over-representation of certain segments of the workforce (women, immigrants, African-Americans) now put the problem of discrimination at the center of analysis. Where the conflict between capital and labor had structured the analysis of the post-War years, the focus was now on the new crisis of unemployment and in particular on the unequal effects of that crisis.

The Unemployed as “the Other”

This shift rests on the assumption that the unemployed and the employed constitute different populations. But if today, with respect to public policy, it seems natural to separate them, it hasn't always been that way. Marx, for example, thought of them both as belonging to the “proletariat.” Michael Denning notes that in *Capital* and the 1844 manuscripts, Marx refers to the “not-busy” (*die Unbeschäftigten*) rather than to the contemporary category of the

“unemployed” (*die Arbeitslosen*).¹¹ The distinction in Marx’s time was not between two distinct segments of the population as much as it was within a population that was “now absorbed, now set free”¹² from the ranks of active labor. In other words, it is not as though there were “two kinds of workers, employed and unemployed, or two sectors of the economy, formal and informal; rather, there is a process in which greater attraction of workers by capital is accompanied by their greater repulsion . . . the workers are sometimes repelled, sometimes attracted again in greater masses.”¹³ It is in this sense that Marx described a fluctuating population, periodically finding itself without work, surviving as best it could while waiting to be reabsorbed by an industrial production that alternated between drawing them in and pushing them out: “laborers are sometimes repelled, sometimes attracted again in greater masses.”¹⁴ In this configuration, the increase of unemployment does not generate a split (*une dualisation*) within the proletariat—it essentially increases the periods of non-employment for every worker.

The current situation, however, has changed. Unemployment obviously existed in Marx’s day, but its structure was different, the crucial change being not so much the increase in unemployment as the form it begins to take. The post-War social welfare state—normalizing work for some and thus normalizing “non-work” for others, helping some to stable, life-long employment while simultaneously allowing others to settle into years of unemployment or social assistance—made the distinction between “active” workers and the unemployed possible. It’s from this perspective that the category of the unemployed as a matter of concern for public policy, in conjunction with the concentration of unemployment, helped to produce, both in theory and practice, a group truly isolated from that of the “salaried population.”¹⁵ As long as we were in a situation of full employment and unemployment was relatively low, the new protections made available to workers posed few problems. Workers continued to have lifestyles and trajectories that were fairly homogeneous, thus facilitating a sense of cohesion and collective organization. Yet, as soon as unemployment began ticking upward and became “structural,” welfare protections benefiting both workers and the unemployed tended to differentiate between the two and thus fracture the working class into two segments: those with work and those without.

Such a situation would have been impossible in Marx’s day, or even as recently as the 1930s, as we can see by casting even a passing glance at Dorothea Lange’s or Walker Evans’s famous photographs in which the figures and faces of workers intermingle with those of migrants and the unemployed, each occupying in turn the other positions. In these faces, it’s difficult to tell the difference between someone who’s got a job and someone who hasn’t. Or think of John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, where the main characters are migrants and workers, employed and unemployed, simultaneously or by turn. Today, unlike when Marx wrote or the

1930s, the experiences of unemployment, poverty, or even of precarious labor are much more heterogeneous and distinct, precisely because of welfare programs (*catégories publiques*) and the concentration of unemployment in certain sectors of the proletariat. Far from defining a single “proletariat” passing from one status to the other according to the vagaries of the moment, our contemporary societies generate an excess population relatively separate from the “classical” model of the wage-earner/salariat: a population fragmented along ethnic or gender lines, alternating between periods of unemployment, odd-jobs, poverty, etc. It is therefore not so surprising that, once separated from the question of their labor, the categories of “the unemployed,” “the poor,” or the “precarious,” are swiftly disconnected from being understood in terms of the exploitation at the heart of capitalist economic relations, and find themselves and their situation apprehended in terms of relative (monetary, social, or psychological) deprivation, filed under the general rubrics of “exclusion,” “discrimination,” or forms of “domination.”

This evolution is marked by the new importance, for the left and the right, of the “excluded,” and of the idea that henceforth a “post-industrial” society is divided between those who have access to the labor market and those who, in varying degrees, do not. The focus of the world of labor is thus displaced, shifting towards questions of “exclusion, poverty, and unemployment,”¹⁶ and the intellectual world largely goes along with, and re-enforces, this dynamic. As the sociologists Stéphane Beaud and Michel Pailoux have noted, this displacement indirectly puts workers “on the *inside*, on the side of those who have a job (on the side of the ‘privileged,’ and of those with ‘acquired advantages’).”¹⁷ What’s foregrounded is no longer the general problem of inequality but instead its distribution, its disproportionate effect on the excluded—the unemployed, the young people in the “banlieues,” immigrants.

Furthermore, seen through the lens of this excess population, the representation of the salariat is increasingly ethnicized. Indeed, the overrepresentation of groups (often descendants of immigrants or immigrants themselves) among the ranks of the “surplus population” reinforces the ethnicization of the social question. The declining relevance of the category of class antagonism or, to quote Xavier Vigna, its “increasingly inoperant symbolic and political character,” thus seems to coincide quite clearly with “the activation of identitarian divides founded on the basis of nationality.”¹⁸ The issue here is no longer unemployment as such, but its overrepresentation among certain groups and hence the discrimination to which they have clearly been subjected.

From the “Proletariat” to the “Excluded”...

Alongside this symbolic and political decline of the problem of the working class, one finds the development of new social movements and a radical critique of classical Marxism. In a conference given in Japan in 1978, Michel Foucault asked whether we weren't beginning to witness "in this period of the end of the 20th century, something like the end of the age of Revolution." By this, as Michael C. Behrent astutely points out, he meant not an "end of the revolution" resembling the one imagined by François Furet, but "rather [an age] of the proliferation of struggles, the aim of which is to redistribute the power differential in society."¹⁹ Such a reconfiguration of struggles announced the end of the centrality of the working class and the intensification of the kinds of actions—for the "excluded," the "marginal," and the other "subalterns"—dear to Foucault. And it was this increasing importance of occupying buildings for the homeless, distributing food to African immigrants, or demonstrating for prisoners' rights, etc. that led Sartre to understand this as a transition towards a "moral Marxism" and to see these actions as essentially "moral gestures,"²⁰ the moral dimension residing precisely in the increasing displacement of questions of exploitation by concerns about "minorities," the "marginal," and the "excluded"—in short, by questions of domination and discrimination.

This well-known displacement in Western Marxism compelled many thinkers and movements to redefine their sense of the "social agents who could play the role of the revolutionary subject, as understudies who might replace an indisposed working class: Third World peasants, students, intellectuals, the excluded."²¹ It was along these same lines, for example, that the Marxist theoretician Herbert Marcuse defended the position that the traditional working class had been thoroughly "integrated" into the capitalist system, and that only "active minorities" and the "young, middle-class intelligentsia" were henceforth capable of radical political action.²² For Marcuse, these "under-privileged" groups, "humiliated, frustrated, oppressed, victims of segregation"²³ might now, allied with students, constitute a decisive element in the unleashing of social revolts. The epicenter of social shocks to come was not to be found in the classical proletariat, but among the "unemployed," the "blacks in the ghettos," and other marginalized "ethnic" groups. For Marcuse, it was thus self-evident that "modifications in the structure of capitalism alter the basis for the development and organization of potentially revolutionary forces,"²⁴ a view that would be similarly consecrated by André Gorz's defense of the idea that the classical worker had disappeared, taking with him "the class able to take charge of the socialist project and translate it into reality."²⁵ For Gorz, today, "the majority of the population now belong to the post-industrial neo-proletariat which, with no job security or definite class identity, fills the area of probationary, contracted, casual, temporary and part-time employment."²⁶ Unlike Marx's proletariat, this subject no longer defines itself "with respect to its position in the process of social production," but

rather by the fact that it appears to belong to no class, by the very exclusion from society that is the source of its radical potential and its potential radicality. As a “non-class,” it doesn’t seek emancipation from within labor, but rather more generally *from* labor. Gorz thus offers a fundamental critique not only of Marxism, but of the idea of progress and of the “meaning of History.” It is no longer possible to imagine a highly industrialized society beneficial to all like the one Marx dreamed of. At best, we might be able to conceive, parallel to such a society, of increasing “*areas of autonomy*” freed from labor.²⁷ At which point, it’s no longer a question of seizing “power,” but of constructing, on its margins, other forms of agency, other organizational forms.

It was for this reason that Gorz and Marcuse both saw in the Black Panthers a kind of living incarnation of their theories. Some of Eldridge Cleaver’s ideas in particular seemed to them perfect expressions of their own, as when Cleaver described the central problem of our era as the new contradiction between the lumpenproletariat on one side and an alliance between the working class and the bourgeoisie, on the other. For Cleaver, the working class had thus “turned their jobs into property, which they possessed as a right,” *de facto* excluding those without work from any part in the production and distribution of wealth.²⁸ The end product is a “miserly, stingy bourgeoisie with a greedy working class lickspittling its boots, standing there with the money bags, tossing out small change like tossing corn to the chickens.”²⁹ The socialization of the means of production that we find in Cleaver’s writings is very different from the one we find in Marx. The *lumpen* will have to struggle to seize physical control of the instruments of production, snatch them out “of the hands of the bourgeoisie, and the working class.”³⁰ Today, far from being a revolutionary force, the working class “has become as much a part of the system that has to be destroyed as the capitalists themselves. They are the second line of resistance, after the cops.”³¹ This working class is no more than a “parasite on the human race,” bought off and corrupted by the lure of safe, secure jobs.³²

This position, despite the fact that for the Panthers it was more a theoretical façade than actual political practice, would find itself echoed in many intellectual contexts and, in fact, could be said to emblemize the theoretical displacements characteristic of the 1970s and after.

Indeed, it is a version of this perspective that—in different degrees—remains central to contemporary leftist Marxist thinkers like Antonio Negri, David Harvey, Slavoj Žižek, Nancy Fraser or Alain Badiou. Negri, who may be the most obvious example of this tendency, argues that in our era, the major agent of social transformation is the “multitude”—composed of a vague “conglomeration of those with unstable employment, youth, women, part-time workers, the unemployed, but also workers, students and immigrants”³³—that replaces that old conception of the “proletariat” and its traditional forms of mobilization. For David

Harvey, the whole perspective of urban struggles is elaborated precisely according to the postulate that the traditional workers' movement based on the workplace has been problematized by the developments of the last 30 years. The very idea of a "right to the city" was first articulated by Henri Lefebvre as a consequence of the fact that in our age the "territorial implantation" of the working class apparently has "as much importance" as "work itself, the space and conditions of labor."³⁴ Harvey thus insists on the fact that "in much of the advanced capitalist world the factories have either disappeared or been so diminished as to decimate the classical industrial working class."³⁵ In his view, "the so-called 'precariat' has displaced the traditional 'proletariat'" and "if there is to be any revolutionary movement in our times, at least in our part of the world...the problematic and disorganized 'precariat' must be reckoned with."³⁶ Alain Badiou says essentially the same thing when he declares that the *sans-culottes* of the coming revolution will be composed of "part of the youth, intellectuals, lower middle-class French wage-earners, and then of course those who are always the first to be persecuted—that is, foreigners and the unemployed."³⁷ Social change will thus depend on an alliance of the "new proletarians who have come from Africa and elsewhere and the intellectuals who are the heirs to the political battles of recent decades."³⁸

Analyzing the difference between the crisis of the 1930s and today, Nancy Fraser also estimates that "the class division between labor and capital ceases to appear self-evident, becoming obfuscated by the seemingly more salient divide between the thinning ranks of the stably employed, on one hand, and the swelling precariat on the other." In such a situation, it strikes her as evident that "organized labor does not speak for society as such. In the eyes of some, it defends the privileges of a minority that enjoys a modicum of social security against the far greater number who do not."³⁹ Even Slavoj Žižek, while observing the way in which "this focus on the walls that separate the Excluded from the Included may easily be misunderstood as a clandestine return to the liberal tolerant-multicultural topic of 'openness' ('no one should be left out, all minority groups, lifestyles, etc., should be allowed in'),"⁴⁰ nevertheless thinks that there exists today an "antagonism between the 'Included' and the 'Excluded.'"⁴¹ And if he recognizes that this type of thinking can come "at the expense of a properly Marxist vision of social antagonism," he still argues that "the creation of new forms of apartheid, new Walls and slums" deepens the yawning chasm already separating the "Included from the Excluded"⁴² and is one of the principle antagonisms of contemporary capitalism. In his analysis, we must accept and integrate into our symbolic universe the end of the old conception of the proletariat and forge a "more radical notion of the proletarian subject." Today, he thinks, "only the reference to the 'Excluded' justifies the term communism."⁴³ Which is, in essence, the same idea advanced by Jacques Rancière when he centers his philosophical discourse around the question of the "part of the partless" (*la*

part des sans-part), or by Ulrich Beck, who argues more recently that class as the central fault-line of the social has been replaced by the opposition between “a growing minority of the unemployed, those without steady employment, or those excluded from the labor force and the majority of active, full-time workers.”⁴⁴ And ever since the appearance of William Julius Wilson’s *The Truly Disadvantaged* in 1987, the “underclass” has played a parallel role in the United States, precisely because Wilson’s focus on poverty and unemployment in the “inner city” displaces the question of poverty and unemployment (not to mention inequality) as such.

We can begin to see some of the problems of this schema, however, when we see it deployed not only by left intellectuals but also by politicians and political figures not at all on the left, and whose aim is essentially to limit access to social benefits. Indeed, we might wonder if, when Margaret Thatcher set the “privileged and protected welfare underclass” against the British “who work for a living,” she wasn’t simply articulating something like an inverted form of Eldridge Cleaver’s argument. And when Nicolas Sarkozy prides himself on his refusal to tolerate “those who don’t want to do anything, who don’t want to work [to] live off the backs of those get up early and who work hard,”⁴⁵ is he not enlisting the same terms as André Gorz? The conservative right’s neoliberal doxa essentially seeks, as Serge Halimi argues, to “redefine the social question in such a way that the line of social division is no longer one that opposes the rich and the poor, capital and labor, but rather runs between two fractions of the ‘proletariat’—between those who ‘have given up enough, lost enough, and have had enough’ and those who are in the ‘welfare republic.’”⁴⁶ Neoliberal attacks thus target this new, urban proletariat with unsteady employment prospects in the same way that, in the U.S. well before it ever spread to Europe, policies cutting the social safety-net were carried out in the name of curing a “culture of dependency” rife among an “underclass” (generally associated with African-American communities). The central thesis of neoliberal thought and authors is that the poverty and unemployment of this “underclass” is the product of their backward-looking cultural horizon and behavior. Or, as ultra-conservative commentator Charles Murray puts it, “they are usually poor, but poverty is a less important indicator than personal behavior destructive to themselves and to their communities.”⁴⁷ When protests or uprisings do indeed occur, explanations such as personal “vice” or indeed “laziness” get trotted out as explanations for these subjects’ poverty and, more generally, their antisocial behavior. The vast majority of the most radically inegalitarian policies, then, “could be traced to the ‘nonworking poor.’”⁴⁸ In this discursive and political configuration, it’s not workers who are “privileged.” On the contrary, it’s the poor who live off a welfare system that encourages their refusal to work. Indeed, this very argument was at the heart of the private speech that Mitt Romney gave to wealthy donors during the 2012 presidential election. In his view, the election was going to be tight for any republican in a country where, according to him, 47% of Americans “pay no income tax” and are “dependent upon government.” Such voters “believe

that they are victims, [they] believe the government has a responsibility to care for them,” were bound to vote for Obama. His goal, then, was “not to worry about *those* people,”⁴⁹ but rather to court the votes of “honest,” hard-working Americans. Like the intellectuals on the left, he is committed to the fundamental difference between the supposedly new precariat and the supposedly old working class.

The economic crisis of 2008 has helped to spread this discourse in Europe. In a lengthy interview with *De Standaard*, the Flemish nationalist leader, Bart De Wever, declared for instance that the contradiction between capital and labor was a thing of the past—henceforth, the new line of demarcation was situated between the “productive” and the “unproductive” members of society. For him, “the State is a money-breathing monster. And where does it get the money? From those who create value. And who consumes this money? The unproductive—they’re so electorally important that this policy just keeps being perpetuated.” In France, Jacques Bompard, a far-right deputy in the French parliament’s lower house, proposed a law that would require people receiving unemployment benefits to work for free. Far from being new, this very idea was part of Nicolas Sarkozy’s platform during his first bid for the presidency. In 2007, he proposed that “those who benefit from social aid perform some service in the public interest—this will incentivize them to take a job rather than live off welfare.” In England, David Cameron justified his party’s social reforms, limiting the amount of monetary aid to the unemployed, by declaring that the system of social solidarity “has become a lifestyle choice for some.”⁵⁰ The changes advocated by these politicians are thus presented as a way of re-establishing a sense of “fairness” in a system that punishes those who “work hard” and rewards those who are content to live a life of “dependency.” This discourse has become a hegemonic view, incarnating a general tendency on the continent to celebrate those “productive members of society” who “get up early” and to disparage the unproductive ne’er-do-wells “on the dole” (*les assistés*) every time a politician or intellectual needs to legitimate austerity reforms or the increase in inequality.

Obviously, the political content of such proclamations on the right differs radically from those of Marxist critics and intellectuals at the end of the 1970s. What they share, however, is the assumption that it’s the *surplus population* who, depending on one’s position, are either the problem or the solution to the problem. One way or another, both see the surplus population rather than the working class, as the central political agent/subject. How indeed can we fail to notice the paradoxical relation between André Gorz’s “non-class” and the “underclass” so dear to Charles Murray? For Gorz, as for neoliberalism, the problem is the relation to labor, not the fact that labor is exploited. Gorz sees in the surplus population a relationship “freed” from work where Thatcher sees the “vice” of idleness that needs to be stamped-out. One raises Paul Lafargue’s “right to laziness” to a virtue where the other sees

in it an injustice that must be combatted. But, fundamentally, both follow the same logic. On the left as much as on the right, they're happy to have the surplus population be the problem precisely because it displaces the old outmoded and dogmatic idea that the crucial problem was actually exploitation. This transition plays a role, then, in "eclipsing the critique of exploitation by focusing attention on the victim whose rights have been denied—prisoners, homosexuals, refugees, etc."⁵¹ Both sides, right and left, are happy to oppose two segments of the proletariat who, thanks to the neoliberal evolution of the global economy, can be organized around a destructive cycle of competition with one another.

...and from Exploitation to Discrimination

The fundamental problem with this approach is that it replaces abstract analysis (i.e., of exploitation) with a more immediate analysis of the global economic logic of capitalism (i.e., of discrimination) seeking, above all, to denounce status differences within the proletariat. Indeed, the distinction between the unemployed and the employed worker is not a class difference, but solely one of intra-class status. The theoretical and political importance bestowed upon the "subaltern" factions of the proletariat is then justified on the basis of the various forms of discrimination within the proletariat. What counts most is that these factions are "isolated," "humiliated," "frustrated," "victims of segregation," "suffering," or "ethnically marginalized." Similarly, the rejection of the capital/labor antagonism is defended on the basis that workers nowadays are "reactionary," "racists" benefiting from "white privilege," "consumerist," "bourgeoisified," and generally "part of capitalist ideology." The differences underscored by these descriptions essentially articulate the types of oppression and discrimination of which each group is the victim. Some (the surplus population) are "the most oppressed" and others become "the privileged" whose stable, safe existence has ultimately transformed them into individualist consumers whose revolutionary potential has been shattered. At the structural heart of this type of analysis is the process that distributes the effects of inequality rather than those which produce it in the first place. Forms of discrimination, stigmatization, and exclusion from the labor market structure the organization of class, but produce neither unemployment nor unstable employment (*le travail précaire*). As Ken Kawashima notes, "the contemporary proliferation, reproduction, and exploitation of contingent work ought not blind us to the fact that this type of labor, along with the inexorable contingency of the commodification of labor power, are endemic traits of the capitalist market economies and have been since the development of industrial capitalism."⁵² From this point of view, what we see emerge in the discourse of the surplus population is a desire to substitute a *difference in the way people are treated* (i.e., the different forms that belonging to the proletariat can take) for the *class difference* that generates the very structures of capitalism and exploitation, which is to say, the proletariat itself.

The problem with the turn that numerous authors and thinkers on the left have taken is not that they're wrong about the reality of this ever-growing "reserve army of labor" and its immiseration; it's that they've replaced the abstract analysis of the structures that produced it with an all-too-often subjective adjudication of who is "the most" dominated, discriminated against, or excluded. By affirming that the major contradiction of our time is between the "included" and the "excluded," between the *lumpen* on the one hand and the organized working class on the other, they have replaced a *structural difference* (inherent in the mode of organization of capitalist economies) with a *contingent difference* (the product of a certain stage of economic development). The main effect of this approach, which necessarily ends up pitting different segments of the wage-earning working class against each other (on the basis of their different identities), is that it makes it difficult to think abstractly about the forces that produce inequality within the proletariat and leaves us stranded at the level of their immediate forms. In effect, for these two types of *differences*, it gives us two types of identities.

The first is *generic* and refers back to the notion of the proletariat. Founded on capitalism's basic organization of social relations, the proletarian *qua* concept consists of the ensemble of agents who are constrained to sell their labor power in order to live, and comprises in equal parts those who are employed and those who are not. After all, the *word* proletariat initially designated a Roman citizen whose only wealth was his children (*proles*). Exceedingly poor, the proletariat constituted the least respected class in Roman society, having only its labor power—and those of its children—as potential source of income. So it is worth underscoring that "proletariat" was not a synonym for "wage-earning worker" (*travailleur salarié*) but for something like "dispossession, expropriation and radical dependence on the market." In sum, "you don't need a job to be a proletarian."⁵³ More than (or rather than) an identity, the idea of proletarian constituted a category, derived from the general processes of exploitation and inequality. The proletarian is a function of the economic organization of capitalism.

The second type of identity is more *prescriptive*, based on the immediate form (which is obvious) that the proletariat inhabits in the real economic process, and much less general. Here, one might well distinguish the wage-earner from the poor, the poor from the unemployed, the unemployed from the undocumented, and indeed the "white" worker from "black."⁵⁴ The deployment of these categories and their political efficacy—both derived from the workings of global capital—tend to emphasize the identitarian dimension of inequality rather than its more impersonal dimension (which is less obvious): i.e., *the accumulation of capital* and the subsequent, or parallel, creation of the reserve army of labor. The status differences separating the *surnuméraires* from workers do not refer, then, to a structural difference within capitalism. They are instead a function of the forms of domination to which these differences are subject(ed), and which in turn fashion the sorts of identities that proletarians may adopt

in the social structure (e.g., unemployed, worker, employee, part-timer/temp, undocumented, immigrant, racialized, etc.). All in all, we can detect in this sort of approach a variation on the liberal themes of diversity and multiculturalism, the end result of which is the transformation of class conflict into ethnic or, more generally, identity conflicts.

Indeed, despite the substantial differences between these two modes of representing social inequalities (one based essentially on “respect” and the other is still preoccupied with the question of “inequality”), the fact remains that both take as their principal concern or adversary the *form* that inequality takes rather than the phenomenon itself. Now, if it is clear that being employed is better than being unemployed (unlike cultural or racial identities, none of which is “better” than any other), what the two logics have functionally in common is a disavowal of the category of exploitation. Both simply reject the centrality of exploitation, and, with it, the contradiction between capital and labor, because their way of conceptualizing the problem isolates the groups they identify from the very relations of exploitation that produce them *qua* group. The problem is therefore not so much inequality as seen through the lens of exploitation, but rather the way in which effects of inequality get distributed throughout society (with certain groups comparatively sheltered from them, and others not). But, of course, a society in which everyone were equally exposed to inequality would hardly be more desirable than the currently existing one in which some segments are disproportionately subjected to it. If unemployment were not concentrated in specific sectors of the population, but distributed more randomly the salariat might of course be less fragmented along identitarian lines, but the global level of unemployment and inequality would not meaningfully diminish. From this standpoint, the problem is not just the political and economic developments since the ’70s but the logic of the argument itself. That is, as different as post-industrial society may be from what preceded it, the focus on the “excluded” nevertheless leaves the fact of inequality as such untouched, and the fact that the post-’70s change in the structure of inequality has been accompanied by this change in efforts to combat it has only instead served to reinforce it. On the one hand, it’s obviously true that none of the leftist (or in the U.S., liberal) authors cited above understand themselves as supporting a society in which inequality is more equally distributed but absolutely undiminished. On the other hand, it’s difficult to deny that the effect of, say, William J. Wilson’s work on the concentration of poverty was anything other than, as Kenneth Warren remarks, to “create the reform context”⁵⁵ in which it was possible for the Clinton administration to commit itself to dispersing poverty rather than dispelling it. More generally, attacking the form inequality took rather than the mechanism that produced it in the first place could only, from the standpoint of social critique, amount to a regression.

From this standpoint, it's easy to follow Fredric Jameson when he maintains that putting the emphasis on the "excluded" is an "essentially moral or ethical gesture, which leads to punctual revolts and acts of resistance rather than the transformation of the mode of production as such."⁵⁶ The notion of exploitation leads us, then, to the very heart of the production of inequality, whereas forms of discrimination or, in Jameson's terms, domination, only bring us back to its mode of *reproduction*. In this sense, the relations that each perspective, that of exploitation or that of domination/discrimination, maintains with respect to the question of inequality are very different. It thus seems clear that "the outcome of an emphasis on exploitation is a socialist program, while that of an emphasis on domination is a democratic one, a program and a language only too easily and often coopted by the capitalist state."⁵⁷ And this is precisely, as Walter Benn Michaels has pointed out, one of the principle ideological effects of neoliberalism—i.e., changing the subject from "differences between what people own (class) to the differences between what people are (identity)."⁵⁸ One's position in the (class) relation capital/labor is no longer the object of a fundamental contradiction. Rather, what takes center stage is what/where one *is* (one's identity) in the relations of domination within one's own class (unemployed, underemployed, immigrant, etc.).

The "Virtually Poor" Worker and Abstraction as Method

In his short essay on the "Soul of Man under Socialism," Oscar Wilde wrote "it is much more easy to have sympathy with suffering than it is to have sympathy with thought."⁵⁹ "[F]ind[ing] themselves surrounded by hideous poverty" men are naturally affected by it and generally tend to develop a sort of spontaneous empathy for the poor; human emotions, Wilde says, are "stirred more quickly than man's intelligence."⁶⁰ And yet, despite its best intentions, such empathy tends to hinder rather than enhance our capacity for critical reflection on the sources of poverty in the first place. It focuses our attention on the immediate identity of the poor and not on the social conditions of his or her production *qua* impoverished subject. The problem is not so much that we feel emotions but that we make a politics out of them. Thus for Wilde, the truly socialist gesture is one that takes man's "intelligence" as its point of origin, replacing affective response to poverty with abstract reflection on the structures that produce it. The observation that poverty, and the poor, exist doesn't bother the author. What bothers Wilde is the mode of analysis and comprehension by which one grasps the question of poverty. Is the pauper fundamentally different from the worker moved to pity by the former's condition, or is this difference itself but skin deep?

Here we come back to the two types of identities and differences we evoked earlier. On a superficial glance, it may indeed seem that the poor person's "identity" is different from the worker's. One does not work (or works only intermittently), and the other has a job and a reliable salary. On the immediate or empirical level then, these two positions are

fundamentally different, indeed opposite. But take a closer look—one appealing to what Wilde called “intelligence” and thus paying attention to the relations as such rather than to the identity of specific groups—and these differences go up in smoke. Of course the wage-earning worker is less poor than someone who is unemployed, but both are the products of the same antagonism with capital and the same struggle over exploitation. The real gap between the poor and workers or between the unemployed and the employed should not blind us to the fact that the argument and position that the left has to adopt and defend is one that demystifies rather than reinforces the ideological smoke-screen put between the two. This task can only be accomplished, as Jameson affirms, by “a return to abstract categories”⁶¹—a methodological principle at the heart of Marx’s work. Marx himself says that we always have to start from the “concrete real” (the world as it presents itself to our understanding and the evidence of experience). Yet, such experiences, such evidence, are themselves products, outcomes. The concrete “real” appears, for Marx, “in reasoning as a summing-up, a result, and not as the starting point.”⁶² If the concrete real presents itself to our experience as it is, this is not because the real has always been thus, but rather because it is the “synthesis of many determinations” that we have to reconstruct at the level of “concrete (of) thought/an interpretation of the concrete.” The abstraction to which Marx proceeds in order to think the “concrete real” will then include a consideration of “the way in which things arrive at what they are”—that is, the history of their development.⁶³ Marx seeks, then, to assimilate to every concrete determination (the unemployed or the worker, for instance), its “transient nature not less than its momentary existence.”⁶⁴ So, in order to go beyond or negate the illusion that the subject of poverty is “other” than or “different” from me, we must free ourselves from immediate perceptual categories and conceptualize the conditions of both work and non-work as evolving forms of exploitation in the neoliberal economy. What from one point of view is an opposition (between unemployment and unemployment) is at a higher level of abstraction just the difference between a worker who has got a job and one who does not. The level of analysis is different but the social and historical process that produced here is the same.

It is this level and this identity that are grasped by the Marxist categories of the “surplus population” and of the wage-earner as a “virtual pauper.” The first category is essentially laid out in chapter 25 of the first volume of *Capital*, in the course of Marx’s discussion of the “general law of capitalist accumulation” and his development of the idea of an “industrial reserve army, that belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost.”⁶⁵ This army, he says, is the “pivot” on which “the law of demand and supply of labor works.”⁶⁶ In Marx’s view, “the general movements of wages are exclusively regulated by the expansion and contraction of the industrial reserve army.”⁶⁷ In other words, he never

separates the production of the “surplus population” (the floating population, the reserve army of labor, etc.) from the production of “workers.” In the course of its development, capitalism proletarianizes increasingly larger portions of society while simultaneously producing an excess labor population condemned to suffer the “hell of pauperism.” In the 1857-58 manuscripts (more generally referred to as the *Grundrisse*), Marx draws emphatic attention to the dialectical link between what he calls the category of “free workers” and poverty. Here, Marx in effect defines the worker as a “virtual pauper.” As he puts it in the *Grundrisse*, “it is already contained in the concept of the *free laborer* that he is a pauper: virtual pauper.”⁶⁸ Beyond immediate appearances, then, Marx’s analysis allows us to comprehend poverty not as a state, but as a process, and see the notion of poverty as always already wrapped up in that of the worker. Simply put, for Marx the pauper is “latent in free labor,”⁶⁹ pauperism is an integral, virtual dimension of free labor. Yet we have to proceed cautiously with this idea, for the risks of drawing the wrong conclusions from it are considerable. If Marx defends and proclaims the importance of thinking both aspects of labor simultaneously and in relation to one another, he does not go so far as to say that the proletariat *is* a pauper. He rejects this division at an abstract level, but not at the level of concrete determinations, where the difference in their material situations matters. His point is rather than under capitalism, the conditions in which work is performed are conditions in which the worker cannot help but create the possibility of his own pauperization.

Thus the worker is a worker, but in working he negates his status *qua* worker by destroying the very conditions of his reproduction as worker—he *metamorphoses* into a pauper. Thus paid labor makes its own contribution to the “the misery of constantly extending strata of the active army of labor.”⁷⁰ The double figures of the free worker and the pauper are the common and contradictory product of a single social process (the accumulation of capital), and not two different states stemming from opposed social processes. Taking this premise as his point of departure, Fredric Jameson aligns himself with Marx’s assertion that we need to “think of unemployment as a category of exploitation,”⁷¹ and not just as a precarious “status” or a separate situation in relation to the exploitation of the salariat. For Jameson, we cannot isolate the “excluded” from the “structural necessity for capitalism to create a reserve army of the unemployed and to exclude whole sections of society (or here, in globalization, whole sections of the world population).”⁷²

Common Ground: Organizing Co-operation

To return to the abstract process, and the process of abstraction, in the way that Marx understood and deployed it is thus a radical political gesture that may just permit us to demystify the supposed differences within the salariat and the identitarian positions that are imagined to result from them. By adopting an identitarian approach, method, or reading of

the problem, opposing the “unemployed” to “active workers,” “immigrants” to “whites,” “the undocumented” to the “native born,” the left has succeeded in doing little more than play into the hands of the political hegemony of neoliberal “common sense” discourse. The conservative right’s work consists, then, in simply reproducing and inverting the very positions of the “Marxist” left, adding a formal dimension supported by appeals to common sense. Indeed, if the idea that workers today are a “privileged” group that needs to be brought down seems more than a little counter-intuitive, the claim that our social problems are the fruits of a culture of dependency (often associated with the figure of an immigrant other) has been reproduced and diffused in the mass media for decades. It is just this “common sense” that imbued Thatcher’s arguments with a kind of power, and which leads André Gorz down a discursive dead-end. Thus, although the right’s moralism (educate the poor through work) and its appeals to ethnocentrism may be nothing new, the support it receives from the double abandonment by the left of the working classes and of a discourse grounded in the struggle against exploitation is; and it is in this support that the right’s current ideological hegemony is anchored. It would seem self-evident that any discourse that aggravates the division between the “surplus population” and the “active population” can do nothing to help the exploited. The strategy adopted by the left since the 1970s, that of turning its (discursive and political) attention to the “excluded,” the “poor” and the “underemployed” or “discrimination” seems in the final analysis to engender a defeat on two fronts simultaneously, leaving open an economic and ideological breach that the right has triumphantly filled. In other words, the proponents of the critique of classical Marxism have ultimately been “supplying the right with just the kind of left it wants.”⁷³ As Stephano Azzara puts it, “the victory of neoliberalism can be measured by the degree to which it has been able—sometimes explicitly but more often without anyone realizing it—to penetrate and restructure the vision of its opponents.”⁷⁴

Today, more than ever, the success or failure of the struggles to come depends on the capacity of political and class organizations (e.g., unions) to draw attention to the socio-economic stakes represented by the “surplus population,” and to convince the so-called “stable” working class that their fates are intertwined. Indeed, at the very dawn of the industrial era, Marx had already posited that a decisive stage in the development of the class struggle would be the moment when workers “discover that the degree of intensity of the competition among themselves depends wholly on the pressure of the relative surplus population” and thus on their being able “to organize a regular co-operation between employed and unemployed in order to destroy or to weaken the ruinous effects of this natural law of capitalistic production on their class.”⁷⁵

Translated by Robert St. Clair, The College of William and Mary.

NOTES

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Daniel Zamora is a PhD student in sociology at the Free University of Brussels (ULB) specializing in Welfare policies under neo-liberalism. He works at the Group for research on Ethnic Relations, Migration & Equality (GERME). His doctoral dissertation concerns unemployment and poverty in Europe since the 1970s. He is also the co-editor of the journal *Radical*.

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THE TANK

WRITING AGAINST TIME

MICHAEL W. CLUNE

Michael Clune

Is art different than life? According to an emerging consensus, our experience of a description of a house, person, or landscape in a novel or poem, and our experience of an actual house, person, or landscape, are not essentially different. Critics and philosophers have drawn on recent neuroscientific research to argue that the brain processes the images prompted by literature in much the same way as it processes any other image. Thus Alvin Goldman describes a study in which subjects responded to a verbal description of a beach by robustly enacting vision, manifesting eye movements and neural signals as if they were examining the real thing (42). Blakey Vermeule and others have argued that we relate to literary characters using the same mechanisms deployed in our negotiation of actual social situations.¹ Timothy Schroeder and Carl Matheson, in a summary of the past two decades' work on aesthetics, write: "Insofar as the imagination causes the same feelings as the real, it does so by using the same structures in the brain as those used by the real world" (30). An event causes sensory stimulation; various mental representations are formed; signals are sent to affective centers. Whether the event is a thunderstorm or a description of a thunderstorm does not appear to make any fundamental difference. Thus "fictional stimuli entrain neural consequences similar to nonfictional stimuli" (28).

To say that our brains process fictional images in much the same way as they process actual images is not, however, to say that there are no differences. Three are particularly salient. First, the experience of a novelistic description of a thunderstorm, unlike the experience of an actual thunderstorm, requires interpretation. The reader draws on various linguistic and cultural competences and assumptions in order to turn the marks on the page into the image he understands the author to intend to project.² The second obvious difference between real and literary experiences is that the latter do not typically entail the same kinds of actions as the former. I will not run even from Shirley Jackson's ghosts. This may be, as some speculate, because my belief that an image is fictional severs it from action consequences—running for my life—but not from affective consequences—I shiver, my hair stands on edge.³ Or my failure to run may be due to the third difference between life and literature: literary images are less vivid than actual images.

This is Elaine Scarry's assumption in her classic study *Dreaming by the Book*, and recent neuroscience supports this intuition by suggesting that the impulses triggered by fictional images are similar, but less robust, than those triggered by actual images.⁴ Scarry describes works of literature as containing "sets of instructions" for creating images (244). Beset by what Aristotle calls "the feebleness of images," writers struggle to copy those dynamics of actual perception muted by imaginary perception (4). This "counterfictional" drive gives rise to ingenious techniques designed to give literary images something of the vivacity of the flowers, skies, and faces we encounter in everyday life. Scarry illustrates some of these techniques by quoting a passage from Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, where Marcel, describing the effect of the magic lantern on his bedroom wall, exclaims that "the anaesthetic effects of habit were destroyed" (11). Scarry comments: "But more fundamental than Proust's philosophical speculation on habit is what he does not openly remark on: the perceptual mimesis of the solidity of the room brought about by the impalpable iridescence" of the magic lantern on the walls (11). A weakly imagined wall combined with the equally weak, dream-like image of magic lantern light, combines to create an image of surprising solidity. Proust's "philosophical" ruminations about habit are merely a "distraction," something to draw our attention away from the trick by which two feeble images are folded on top of one another to give the effect of solidity.

Writers want to create vivid images. But is philosophy really so extrinsic to this work? I want to call this assumption into question by first questioning another of Scarry's assumptions. Is it true that everyday perception is vivid? The color of the sky on my way to work, the flowers in my neighbors' yard, my neighbors' faces—is this really what writers seeking vivacity seek to imitate?

I don't notice the sky on my way to work. I couldn't say what colors my neighbors' flowers are. In fact, I'm not even sure that they have flowers. I will shortly present evidence that the feebleness of everyday perception is not my private tragedy. But if, as Scarry argues, the flowers in books are in constant danger of dying for want of the solidity of real flowers, then what is killing the real flowers? And what is the medicine? The analysts of literary effects from Edmund Burke through Viktor Shklovsky, from Scarry to the latest cognitive critics, have been distracted by formal features, structures, and techniques. The sickness of literary flowers may be a problem for literary technique. The sickness of living flowers is a problem for philosophy. And this philosophy, as I will argue, has been the constant practice of a literature that doesn't want to imitate life, but to transform it.

*

Time poisons perception. No existing technique has proven effective at inoculating images against time. The problem is familiar. The more we see something, the duller and feebler our experience of it becomes. In a review of recent neuroscientific studies, David Eagleman describes strong evidence for a process that will be intuitively obvious to all readers. The first time we encounter an image, our perceptual experience tends to be richly vivid. Repeated exposure leads to a dramatic drop-off in vivacity. "With repeated presentations of a stimulus, a sharpened representation or a more efficient encoding is achieved in the neural network that codes for the object" (132).⁵ Once the brain has learned to recognize the image, it no longer requires the high "metabolic costs" of intense sensory engagement.

This efficiency has clear evolutionary advantages, but it means that we are subject to an incessant erasure of perceptual life. No sooner do we catch a glimpse of the shining colors of the world, than they begin to darken. Time's threat to perception may seem less pressing than the death and aging with which time menaces the organism. But from the first reflections on experience, writers have been consumed with how time poisons even the brief life we possess.

Sixteen centuries ago Augustine, in the first phenomenology of human time, describes time as introducing a fatal distortion into experience. Man is "stretched" between past and future; temporal succession means that we are denied the fullness of the present moment. "A person singing or listening to a song he knows well suffers a distension or stretching in feeling and in sense perception from the expectation of future sounds and the memory of past sound" (245).⁶ The familiar object has become a cognitive whole practically sealed off from direct perceptual contact. Familiarity thins out sensory engagement nearly to the point of evaporation. The "stretching" of memory and anticipation replaces listening, seeing, touching. We are buried alive in time. "Who can lay hold of the heart and give it fixity," Augustine cries, "so that for some little moment it may be stable, and for a fraction of time may grasp

the splendor of a constant eternity?” (228) Augustine does not long for the inorganic eternity of the statue or pyramid. He prays for the splendor of a heart stopped but not dead, for a “fraction of time” lifted out of succession.

But if humans lack the power to stop time, we can slow it. Time seems to slow when we perceive something for the first time. The moment of perception swells; the “fraction of time” expands. “Subjective duration,” writes Eagleton, “mirrors the amount of neural energy used to encode a stimulus” (132). The “first appearance” of an image seems to last out of all proportion to chronological time; a gap opens between the time of the clock and neurobiological time. “These dilations of perceived duration have been called a subjective expansion of time” (132). In such moments we get a glimpse of the splendor of eternal life, of unfading color, uneraser sensation. But these dilations don’t last. What if they could?

In his sonnet “Bright Star” Keats expresses the desire for the complete arrest of neurobiological time with the paradox its illogic demands.

Bright Star! Would I were steadfast as thou art!
 Not in lone splendor hung aloft the night;
 Not watching, with eternal lids apart,
 Like nature’s devout, sleepless eremite [...]
 No;—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
 Pillow’d upon my fair love’s ripening breast,
 To feel for ever its soft swell and fall,
 Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
 Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
 And so live ever—or else swoon to death— (338)

The poem’s stark fusion of geologic and organic time scarcely mitigates the unimaginability of the desired state. How can one even imagine the stasis of the star fused with the beating of a living heart? The “soft swell and fall” of breath, the rhythm of circulation, the tingle of sensation: life is intertwined with time. To try to imagine disentangling them, to try to imagine introducing the stillness of the star into a living heart, is like trying to imagine a melody of one note.

Like Augustine’s image of a hand laying hold of a heart, Keats’ desired state is supernatural not just because its achievement seems beyond any technology known to him or to us. It is supernatural because it seems to require some greater mental force to make what is desired comprehensible. How can a heart be stopped without killing it? The beat is life itself. How can a heart be stopped without stopping? Such a state is unimaginable at every level. How

can you even want to “feel for ever” the “soft swell and fall” of your lover’s breast? Wouldn’t your neck start to ache? Wouldn’t you get bored? Wouldn’t you soon simply stop noticing that regular rise and fall and start to daydream?

I doubt anyone reading this will claim never to have thought of some experience, “I wish this would last forever.” But we seem to know instinctively this is a desire that does not bear reflection. If a genie suddenly appeared, ready to grant our wish, we would be wise, remembering the fate of the oracle, not to wish this. Would anyone really want any moment to last forever? But then what do we wish for when we wish it?

In the absence of clarity about what is wanted, Keats’ wish for endless life collapses at the touch of a thought. But the desire for immortality is by no means condemned to the difficulties it faces in this sonnet. The history of religion shows the concept of a kind of consciousness that might slip free of the body to be a great help in fashioning comprehensible and attractive images of immortality. But Keats rigorously identifies consciousness with bodily sensation. To be “awake” is to “feel” and to “hear.” Life is perception.

Keats wants a sensation that is exactly like the sensation of resting his head upon his lover’s rising, falling breast. This ideal sensation is just like the actual sensation in every way but one: It is timeless. It is static. It is “unchangeable.” What does this ideal sensation look like? The poem has no answer. The star and heart are not ultimately fused; they break up against each other. There is no object of desire here, no image for what is wanted. The poem ends in despair. Despair of life: What I most want I cannot have. And despair of thought and of language: I cannot even say what it is I want. This is the problem time represents for writing. Technique is powerless to solve it.

But perhaps this is going too far. Surely not all writers frame the problem of time in the extreme terms of this sonnet. In fact, we can’t even take the paradoxes of this sonnet as representative of Keats’ poetry. Several of the “Odes,” for example, express confidence in the power of art to renew, prolong, and intensify life. Perhaps “Bright Star,” like “When I Have Fears that I May Cease to Be,” is emblematic less of art’s relation to time than of the dying Keats’ mental state. No one can deny that some art successfully changes life and defeats time. What about Shakespeare?

“So long as men can breathe or eyes can see/ So long lives this, and this gives life to thee” (19). Shakespeare’s Sonnet 18, expressive of an abundantly justified confidence in the power of artistic form over time, is the antithesis of Keats’ sonnet, and represents a tradition of artistic immortality that runs counter to the romantic tradition explored by this book. As Aaron Kunin has shown, Shakespeare’s sonnets are the central examples in English literature of the ancient tradition of the artwork as technology for defeating time. The poet creates a

beautiful form. Its beauty is the hook that attracts generations of breathing, seeing readers, and the poem passes through them like a virus, its immortality parasitic on the mortal taste for beauty.

But what exactly is preserved in Sonnet 18? Not Shakespeare's life, nor the life of his subject.⁷ Only that part of living bodies that can withstand translation into an unliving object survives. Simple logic animates this tradition. "That which is only living," as Eliot puts it, "can only die" (19). Therefore only that which can't die can be preserved. This tradition, which I will call the classical, is older than the one I explore, and it depends on three assumptions that the writers I study reject. The first is that the most valuable aspect of a person is the object that the person becomes in the public eye. That one's name shall be remembered, that one's deeds shall be celebrated: this is the ambition of ancient heroes and poets. Sensation is not subject to preservation. Hannah Arendt is perhaps the most powerful modern theorist of this tradition. "Nothing," she writes, "is less common and less communicable, and therefore more securely shielded against the visibility and audibility of the public realm, than what goes on within the confines of the body" (*The Human Condition*, 113). The evanescence of sensation is the source of its low value in the tradition. What lasts is valuable.

The second assumption is that lastingness is procured only at the cost of a sacrifice of life. The glorious death of Achilles is the western prototype of a tradition that has not disappeared from our literature. A modernist example, Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium," gladly exchanges the sensual rhythms of life for "monuments of unaging intellect" (80). "Once out of nature I shall never take/ My bodily form from any natural thing." The speaker envisions a golden bird as emblem of an artwork that preserves a version of the self purged of what "Byzantium" calls "the fury and the mire of human veins."⁸

Roberto Bolano's fiction is a particularly compelling recent example of and meditation on this tradition. At the end of *By Night in Chile*, the narrator, surveying the human wreckage strewn across his story of Chilean literature during the Pinochet regime, exclaims: "That is how literature is made, that is how the great works of western literature are made. You better get used to it" (128). When Bolano associates the violence that nurtures literature with "time's giant meat-grinder" he makes explicit a dark secret implicit in Arendt (127). The immortality of art is not opposed to time at all. Time is not defeated. Art simply fashions human experience into a lasting form by performing time's work beforehand. Everything that goes on within the confines of the body is cut out. The action survives, the name, the durable form, the bone beneath the flesh. All else is burned out.

The refining violence that the work performs on human bodies is simply the violence of time itself. Earlier in the novel, the narrator relates the parable of the shoemaker who spends his life and fortune constructing an elaborate shrine for the heroes of the empire. Decades later, the soldiers who prize open the shrine's padlocked gate find the shoemaker's skeleton inside, "his jaw hanging open, as if he were still laughing after having glimpsed immortality" (48). Bolano's sense that art is a tomb that preserves a *dead* body finds pointed expression in a joke from the same novel. French Archeologists visit the pope in Rome, saying they have good news and bad news. "The good news is that they have discovered the Holy Sepulcher...The pope is moved to tears. What's the bad news? He asks, drying his eyes. Well, inside the Holy Sepulcher we found the body of Christ. The pope passes out" (79).

Bolano's ambivalence about literary immortality in no way signals its rejection. We find the same ambivalence in the *Illiad*, in Achilles' hesitation at the prospect of exchanging life for immortality. The preservation art effects is tragic. It is always difficult to say whether the ultimate victor is the being whose name, words, or actions are preserved, or time, which takes everything else. Yeats' golden bird, after all, survives only as a plaything for "lords and ladies of Byzantium." Is it better to be an undying toy or a living, breathing, dying animal?

The third assumption of this classical tradition is that the beneficiary of the immortality conferred by art is the author or subject, not the audience. When the audience is visible at all, as in Sonnet 18, it is as the mortal engine that powers the work's immortality device. The eyes and lips wear out and are replaced; the name they pass on endures. In contrast, the romantic tradition that "Bright Star" represents is concerned with renewing and preserving sensation, and this effort is often described in terms of the effect the work produces on an audience. Nietzsche, for example, writes that "art is...an excitation of the animal functions through the images and desires of intensified life;—an enhancement of the feeling of life, a stimulant to it" (802).

We have now passed over into consideration of the romantic tradition, but note that Nietzsche's statement has none of the doubt that tortures Keats' sonnet. Art produces excitation, enhancement, stimulant. Art serves a different end than in the classical tradition; these writers reject the effort to ensure the "survival" of a thing across gulfs of chronological time. For Nietzsche, art aims not to preserve an object but to enhance and prolong life. As Georges Poulet writes, in the romantic vision "eternity is not endlessness." It is a "full and perfect possession of interminable life" (*Romanticism and Timelessness*, 6). Yet Nietzsche and Poulet share Shakespeare's confidence in art's power to achieve its end. And they are hardly alone in their testimony of art's power to awaken sleeping senses. In "Richard Wagner and Tannhauser in Paris," Baudelaire exclaims, "From that very moment, at that first concert...I had—or at least it seemed to me I had—undergone a spiritual operation, a revelation. My

thrill of pleasure had been so powerful and terrible that I could not prevent myself from ceaselessly wanting to return to it” (117).

For Baudelaire, the first encounter with Wagner produces a feeling of intensified life. The richness and vividness of the first experience figures prominently in the romantic tradition. This tradition seeks to counter experiential time, and thus becomes involved in the paradoxes which Keats articulates with such painful clarity. By comparison to the relatively straightforward classical concern with lastingness, the desire to counter time’s negative effects on ineluctably time-bound human experience creates deep conceptual and practical problems. There can be no question of simply cutting life free of time altogether. Rather, in Schiller’s phrase, art’s problem involves “annulling time within time” (97).

Romantic and postromantic writers discover in the peculiar temporal structure of first impressions a strategy for pursuing this paradoxical goal. Thus the effort to counter neurobiological time typically finds expression in an effort to achieve two experientially related but conceptually distinct states. The first is the felt slowing or stopping of time that accompanies an intensely vivid perception. The second is the persistence of this perceptual intensity across chronological time. Since in everyday life the most vivid perception of a thing tends to be the first impression, the persistence of the qualities of the first impression across the second, tenth, and hundredth impressions signals a countering of time’s effect on the feeling of life. And in fact, as we shall see, a central criteria for artistic success within this tradition is the extent to which a work produces and preserves the effect of a first impression.

By inventing structures to prolong the first impression, the artists I study attempt to arrest the flow of neurobiological time, the tendency of the brain to reduce sensory engagement with repeated exposure. “Our failure is to form habits,” Pater writes. “To burn always with a hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life” (152). Shelley claims that “poetry makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar” (642). Coleridge argues that Wordsworth’s poetic aim is “to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us” (313).

The theorists of this tradition typically associate the successful arrest of neurobiological time with specific techniques that, in Shklovsky’s famous term, “defamiliarize,” restore our perception of things to the vitality of the first sight. The founder of materialist aesthetics, Edmund Burke, invents the template for subsequent criticism. Aesthetic experience for Burke does not simply illustrate the natural workings of the brain, but consists in the effort to suspend or override neural tendencies in pursuit of something unnatural.

“Knowledge and acquaintance make the most striking causes affect but little,” Burke writes (56). “When we accustom our eyes” to an image, it ceases to affect us. And we become accustomed more rapidly to more clearly delineated images: “A great clearness is an enemy to all enthusiasms whatsoever” (56). The introduction of fuzziness, vagueness, or shadow forestalls the familiarization that reduces impact. Thus verbal images are more effective for Burke because they are more obscure. As an ideal description of the encounter with an obscure image, Burke quotes the *Book of Job*: “It stood still, but I couldst not discern the form thereof, an image was before mine eyes” (58).

Vagueness and indefinition thus operate to separate the image’s affective impact from that aspect of the image—clear delineation of visual shape—that enables familiarity. Burke’s aesthetic identifies an aspect of perception abundantly confirmed by recent research—the tendency of the brain to automatize the processing of familiar images—with a view to overcoming this tendency. He then identifies a particular artistic technique—obscurity—which forestalls familiarization and prolongs intense perceptual experience.⁹ Subsequent materialist critics have added to the repertoire of habit-defeating techniques. Shklovsky, for example, alternately points to Tolstoy’s use of the perspective of a horse to estrange familiar objects, and to the complexity of futurist poems that prolong and intensify the experience of reading itself (1-14).

But now, given Burke’s, Coleridge’s, and Shklovsky’s confidence in the capacity of the artwork to renew our constantly decaying perceptual life, Keats’ sonnet looks like an outlier. Is Keats’ sense of the impossibility of freeing feeling from time simply an overly pessimistic, even hysterical view of the problem? Shakespeare promised the survival of an object; the object survives. But can art “lay hold of the heart and give it fixity?” Can art reliably return us to the intense duration of the first impression? This question transfixes Proust, and his reflections will help us decide whether to credit Coleridge’s confidence or Keats’ despair. Here is Proust’s description of Swann’s most profound experience of art.

The year before, at an evening party, he had heard a piece of music played on the piano and violin. At first he had appreciated only the material quality of the sounds which those instruments secreted. And it had been a source of keen pleasure when, below the delicate line of the violin-part, slender but robust, compact and commanding, he had suddenly become aware of the mass of the piano-part beginning to emerge in a sort of liquid rippling of sound, multiform but indivisible, smooth yet restless, like the deep blue tumult of the sea, silvered and charmed into a minor key by the moonlight. But then at a certain moment, without being able to distinguish any clear outline, or to give a name to what was pleasing him, suddenly enraptured, he had tried to grasp the phrase or harmony—he did not know which—that had just been played and that had opened and expanded his soul... Perhaps it was owing

to his ignorance of music that he had received so confused an impression, one of those that are none the less the only purely musical impressions....an impression of this order, vanishing in an instant, is, so to speak, *sine materia*...impossible to describe, to recollect, to name, ineffable—did not our memory, like a laborer who toils at the laying down of firm foundations beneath the tumult of the waves, by fashioning for us facsimiles of those fugitive phrases, enable us to compare and to contrast them with those that follow...When that same impression suddenly returned, it was no longer impossible to grasp. He could picture to himself its extent, its symmetrical arrangement, its notation, its expressive value; he had before him something that was no longer pure music, but rather design, architecture, thought, and which allowed the actual music to be recalled. (204)

The phrase recurs a third time, “bringing him, indeed, a pleasure less profound.” This artwork seems constructed according to the exacting technical specifications of Burke and Shklovsky: it is both obscure and difficult. And at first it does indeed “enrapture” Swann. Yet the work stops working almost at once. As the phrase becomes more familiar, he gradually discovers in it “some disenchantment” (214).¹⁰ At a certain moment, “a phrase or harmony—he did not know which” took ecstatic possession of his senses, of his being. But as the form of the work becomes clear, the magic dies.

Swann has discovered something quite simple: repeated exposure to a work of art operates just like repeated exposure to anything else. The achievement of cognitive mastery over form, the ability to recognize the object, simultaneously causes a precipitous drop-off in sensory intensity. The experience of art is not immune to the relentless erosive force of neurobiological time, but is simply another instance of it. Eventually Swann’s sensory engagement with the phrase drains utterly away; it becomes a “token of his love” for Odette, a love which has the same structure as his experience of art: an initial, mysterious, formless beauty, followed by disenchantment. The phrase stands for Odette, who stands for the decay of life and love. Art has become mere meaning. Music has become writing. It has died.

Music, as we shall see, occupies a special place in the tradition that concerns us. But for Proust it is simply the most striking instance of a phenomenon that corrodes all artistic objects, as it corrodes all other objects. Consider, for example, the narrator’s reflections on how the works of his favorite writer, Bergotte, have lost their magic. After long familiarity, Bergotte’s “sentences stood out as clearly before my eyes as my own thoughts, the furniture in my room, and the carriages in the street. All the details were easily visible, not perhaps precisely as one has always seen them, but at any rate as one was accustomed to see them now... From then onwards I felt less admiration for Bergotte” (603).

Of course not everyone feels as Proust does; not everyone prefers the first time listening to a symphony or reading a poem to the result of further acquaintance, when experience is illuminated by understanding. In fact, one way of determining whether a writer belongs to the particular romantic tradition considered by this book is to ask how he evaluates the initial experience of a work of art. Contrast the following statement by Winckelmann from 1764 with the passages from Proust above. “The first view of beautiful statues is...like the first glance over the open sea; we gaze on it bewildered, and with undistinguishing eyes, but after we have contemplated it repeatedly the soul becomes more tranquil and the eye more quiet, and capable of separating the whole into its particulars.”¹¹

Interestingly, Proust and Winckelmann do not disagree about the phenomenology of the initial exposure to the work of art; they both compare it to the formless dynamism of the ocean. (To Swann the music is “multiform but indivisible, smooth yet restless, like the deep blue tumult of the sea.”) But where Winckelmann values the knowledge of form, the “quiet” eye that accompanies the ability to grasp structure is for Proust precisely the symptom of perception’s sickness that art must counter.

The juxtaposition of Proust and Winckelmann might suggest that the tradition I am describing is roughly coextensive with a period: traditional romanticism, extended into the modern. But things aren’t so simple. Consider the contemporary philosopher Alva Noe’s description of the phenomenology of music.

You play a record through. The music is unfamiliar, strange; the album exhibits a kind of opacity. As you become familiar with the music, you begin more fully to experience it. Your experience becomes richer. Where the songs were thin and meaningless before, they are now structured, complex, and motivated....Without acquaintance with the music itself, you were, in effect, unable to hear it. (31)¹²

For Noe, as for Winckelmann, the richness of aesthetic experience is bound up with the ability to decipher the relations of the work’s parts. To hear music, for Noe, is to know it. But to say that Noe and Winckelmann value the understanding of the art object while Swann values raw sensation would be wrong. Proust shows Swann straining to understand the “phrase or melody.” Indeed, as the studies surveyed by Eagleman suggest, this straining is precisely what produces the heightened sensory intensity. Winckelmann and Proust pick out two points on a continuum as the ne plus ultra of aesthetic experience, but it is the same continuum, and the points are related as before and after. Proust’s ideal listener is inexorably becoming Winckelmann’s ideal listener.

And yet, with only a little inventiveness, Swann could surely expose himself to a music or noise so utterly devoid of pattern that it would completely frustrate his effort to make sense of it. The absurdity of this suggestion to anyone familiar with *In Search of Lost Time* shows how little the desired experience consists of raw sensation. Proust's listeners, viewers, and readers seek out recognizable forms in which novelty is in tension with a familiarity that provides some foothold for understanding. No one in this tradition is drawn to cacophony, and they tend not be drawn to the overwhelming alieirity of the objects associated with the sublime.¹³ Without seeing how Proust's listener strains toward understanding we will miss the tragic paradox of his conception of artistic experience. The effort to grasp the work's form triggers the intense sensory engagement that its success destroys.

If the romantic listener is always being carried from enrapturing intensity towards quiet Winckelmannian comprehension, then all that distinguishes him is the desire, fast turning into nostalgia, for the former state over the latter. And yet even this desire betrays him. Baudelaire, in the passage on Wagner I quoted earlier, supplies an instance. After describing his ecstasy at the first time he hears Tannenhauer, he writes: "The experience that I had had doubtless contained much of what Weber and Beethoven had already taught me, but there was also something new which I was incapable of defining, and this incapacity caused me a rage and a curiosity mingled with a strange delight....I resolved...to transform my pleasure into knowledge" (117). Possessed by this raging curiosity, he roams Paris looking for anyone who will play him some Wagner.

There are two ways of reading this passage. We might say that for Baudelaire the knowledge of the music's form is the antidote to an experience the intensity of which he finds intolerable. The disturbing ecstasy brings a longing for tranquility, and knowledge is the tranquilizer. This sentiment is not hard to sympathize with. Imagine you are suddenly struck with a feeling of intense pleasure. It is likely that a desperate anxiety to know why—did I just have a stroke? did someone slip me something?—would snuff the desire to remain in the mysteriously pleasurable state.

On this reading, Baudelaire's intense joy inspires a longing for soothing knowledge. But there is another interpretation. The passage suggests that Baudelaire's "rage and curiosity" are in fact identical with the "strange delight" the new music inspires. Perhaps the desire for knowledge doesn't succeed the pleasure; perhaps to feel the delight just is to be driven to understand the form. *Intensity of perception is what desire for knowledge feels like.* The prospect of prolonging this intensity introduces another form of Keats' paradox, pitched now in the key of desire. How can one want the feeling of wanting knowledge without wanting knowledge? How can one even imagine arresting a process that is essentially teleological without destroying what it is?

John Dewey, whose *Art as Experience* remains the most sophisticated account of experiential aesthetics, believes that one cannot, and one should not, arrest this process. In terms very like Proust's, Dewey describes how in the encounter with art "the total overwhelming impression comes first...the effect upon us of entrance into a cathedral when dim light, incense, stained glass, and majestic proportion fuse in one indistinguishable whole....There is an impact that precedes all definite recognition of what it is about" (145). Quoting Delacroix on first seeing a painting, he writes, "Before knowing what the picture represents you are seized by its magical accord" (145).

And yet Dewey warns us not to be seduced by the magic. "Not only, however, is it impossible to prolong this stage of aesthetic experience indefinitely, but it is not desirable to do so." The "impact" is only the first step in the temporal unfolding of the work's form. To wish to prolong it is alien to art, and belongs rather to "such things as narcotics, sexual orgasms, and gambling indulged in for the sake of immediate excitement of sensation." In artistic experience, as in everyday experience, "a sensory quality is related to other qualities in such a way as to define an object" (126). We want to understand the object, to grasp its parts and their interrelations. This understanding "takes time" (55). He is insistent on this point, writing that some readers may think that he "exaggerates the temporal aspect of perception....but in no case can there be perception of an object except in a process developing in time. Mere excitations, yes" (175).

Yet the dismissal of "mere excitation" conceals an ambiguity in Dewey's account. After all, he writes with feeling and longing of the first impression. Maybe an element of psychological self-protection enters into his theory. Perhaps his belief that prolonging the magical moment of perception is impossible dictates his belief that such a prolongation is also undesirable. As we shall see, other writers will not shrink from an impossible desire, nor will they hesitate to send art to the school of "narcotics, sexual orgasms, and gambling" in hope of achieving it.

But to return to the problem of periodization, the contrast between Noe/Dewey/Winckelmann and Proust/Keats suggests that the period in question is rather small. It is a question of preferring the beginning or the end of a process of aesthetic attention that seems to have neurobiological, rather than historical, determinants. The "classical" writer prefers the end, when knowledge of the enduring form has been achieved; the "romantic" prefers the beginning, when subjective time swells and slows, and the senses are enraptured. As support for this view, one might point to the example of a contemporary writer like Bolano, who clearly sees himself extending the classical tradition of literary immortality as the persistence of form across time. At the other end, Arendt's picture of classical antiquity as indifferent to inner experience has been complicated by the work of Pierre Hadot, who has written persuasively of the effort to intensify the experience of the present moment

in ancient philosophy (217-237), and Martha Nussbaum, who has excavated the complex attitudes towards mortality in the Epicurean tradition (192-239). Finally, in *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* Andrew Bennet has shown the extent to which the classical concern with the immortality of the text persists in Keats and Shelley, suggesting that both impulses might be found within a single authorship.¹⁴

Perhaps, then, it is better to think of the opposition “classical” and “romantic,” as I have been referring to these two distinct efforts to defeat time, as attitudes equally present in all periods, roughly analogous to Nietzsche’s “Apollonian” and “Dionysian” dyad. But this would be to distort both the contents of this book—which draws all of its examples from after 1800, and most from after 1945—as well as the tradition it analyzes. I do not think it can be denied that artistic efforts to stop experiential time multiply exponentially around the dawn of what has been traditionally identified as the romantic era, even as they expand into the modern and postmodern. But these efforts are by no means definitive of any of these periods. Many, and perhaps most, nineteenth and twentieth century writers are unconcerned with the obsessions of the tradition I delineate here.

Nevertheless, the clustering of examples after 1800 undoubtedly has historical causes. Scholars looking for such causes might start with the consolidation of consumer capitalism, the rise of medical science, or the waning of traditional religion in the intellectual classes along with the version of eternal life it promised.¹⁵ But this book is concerned to describe the key features of the romantic quest to defeat time, in the hope that its most powerful examples can teach us something new about art and life. While the chapters that follow attend to social, political, and economic contexts when necessary to make sense of a given work’s dynamics, this is not a historicist study, and I make no attempt to enumerate and analyze the historical causes of the impulses animating the tradition as a whole. Nor, for the pragmatic reasons I elaborate in my conclusion, do I think such an investigation is especially urgent. At this moment in the history of the disciplines, literary criticism’s best opportunity for creating new knowledge lies not in the description of art’s embeddedness in contexts recognizable to historians or sociologists, but in the description of the forces by which art attempts to free itself of such contexts and such recognitions.

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We have begun to see how art is not immune to the temporality of perceptual experience. What do we make, then, of the confidence expressed by Nietzsche, Shklovsky, Shelley, or Coleridge? These writers celebrate the techniques by which poets, painters, and composers renew our fading senses. But they are not ignorant of the process described by Proust, whereby the perceptual vitality of the first encounter with the work quickly cools into

understanding. In fact the proponents of art's efficacy at renewing and transforming our experience are acutely aware of this problem. The solutions they propose fall into two general categories: reasonable and unreasonable. While I will be primarily interested in the latter, we must first survey the reasonable response to art's entanglement with time.

Proust's unreasonable solution will in part serve as the subject of my first chapter, but he can also be reasonable. Immediately following the passage in which the narrator reflects on his disenchantment with Bergotte, he describes the new writer who has succeeded Bergotte in his admiration. This writer "had begun to publish work in which the relations between things were so different from those that connected them for me that I could understand hardly anything of what he wrote....only I felt that it was not the sentence that was badly constructed but I myself that lacked the strength and agility necessary to reach the end. I would start afresh, striving tooth and nail to reach the point from which I would see the new relationship between things" (603). Through the process of struggling with the new writer, he discovers "a charm similar to those which I had found long ago in reading Bergotte" (604).

Marcel concludes these reflections by declaring that "Art is like science" (604). He shifts the burden of renewing our senses from the individual artwork to the history of art, which tirelessly discovers new forms. Even the most powerful works become old. We might discover new significance in our twentieth reading of Macbeth, our thirtieth examination of "View of Delft," but the "magic accord" of the early encounter will have fled. So from Shakespeare we proceed to Ibsen and Beckett, from Vermeer to Monet and Matisse, from Beethoven to Wagner and Debussy. "Art is like science" in its constant invention of new techniques. But art runs to stand still. It is simply the case that to keep our perceptual clock at first sight requires continual innovation. A narrower and more precise analogy might be to the project of countering the tendency of bacteria to develop immunity to antibiotics. Like artists, chemists search for new formulas that will produce the effect the old formulas no longer can.

Many of the strongest theorists of art's experiential value reproduce Marcel's logic. Shklovsky's "Art as Device," for example, also deploys the scientific metaphor, and envisions ceaseless formal innovation as necessary to the project of defamiliarization. Michael Fried, who in "Art and Objecthood" famously praises the "grace" of "presentness" achieved in the viewer's absorption by great art (168), in the trilogy that begins with *Absorption and Theatricality* describes the history of french painting as driven by the inevitable decay of the techniques that produce this absorption. What works for Chardin will no longer work for Courbet, and so the artist must try something new. Even Dewey, who, as we have seen, is more ambivalent about the value of presentness, has a version of the reasonable solution. "Advances in technique occur," he writes, "in connection with efforts to solve problems that are not technical but that grow out of the need for new modes of experience" (141).

These solutions are reasonable because they accept that perceptual vitality, the subjective expansion of the present moment, is a consequence of the mind's attempt to grasp form, and vanishes at the conclusion of that process. So one has two sensible choices. The first option is to seek art's value in understanding rather than in experience. This has the great advantage of preserving the shelf life of old works, since, as is well known, there is no limit to the new *ideas* one can get from Shakespeare. If, however, you are committed to art as a technology for the renewal of human life, then you are condemned to read new books, see new paintings, listen to new music. Once you have understood one work, you must start over with a new artifact in which the interplay between novelty and familiarity will once again strike the senses with the "magic accord."

All reasonable criticism holds the tacit belief that the experience of art is subject to the same limits as all other experience. Art is not different than life. Recent work in experiential aesthetics has tended to rely on models drawn from the cognitive sciences to specify these limits. In their different ways, critics like Mark Turner, Lisa Zunshine, Gabrielle Starr, and Blakey Vermeule apply scientific models of everyday cognition and perception to describe literature and literary experience.¹⁶ Science tells us what the brain can do, and the critics show how literature does it. Here reasonableness shades into disciplinary modesty. Literary scholars take models from the sciences, but have little to give back. Zunshine, for instance, describes this new work as the "appl[ication of] insights from cognitive science to cultural representations" (*Introduction to Cultural Studies*, 1).

One problem with some of this criticism, as both the critic Jonathan Kramick and the scientist Paul Bloom have recently pointed out, is that the science applied by these critics is often dated and inaccurate, and the critics represent models as authoritative without acknowledging the scientific debates. But for my immediate purposes a more serious problem is that this critical approach lacks the capacity to describe literature's unreasonable efforts to do something the brain can't do. And yet, as I will attempt to show, it is by attending to this effort that a truly interdisciplinary relation between literature and science becomes possible.

This book examines the unreasonable approach to the problem of stopping time. The reasonable romantics respect the temporal constraints of perception. They transfer the desire to enhance life through art from the individual work to the historical succession of forms. The unreasonable romantics seek the creation of a work that will permanently arrest perception at the moment of the first encounter.

By now we have some sense of the scale of this problem, enough at least to know that Scarry's attempt to explain the literary effort to achieve vivacity by cordoning off philosophical speculation from technical innovation is untenable. To even imagine what a life undimmed

by time would look like requires no ordinary philosophy. Literary form can do many things, but it can't do this.¹⁷ The writers I examine invent virtual techniques, imaginary forms for arresting neurobiological time by overcoming the brain's stubborn boundaries.¹⁸ The mode is ekphrastic. These writers create images of more powerful images; they fashion techniques for imagining better techniques. Poems by Keats and Ashbery, novels by Proust, Orwell, and Nabokov are not works so much as workshops in which the shape of an ideal artwork is pieced together from blueprints and models. Fragments of the real world are brought inside and scrutinized for any hint, any insight. Like an airplane designer examining a bird's wing, the artist studies life to overcome its limits.

My hope is that this study, by reading central works of the past two centuries in the light of their shared ambition, will produce a revisionary understanding of some of our most important writing. But I have another aim. These writers, voracious in their appetite for any knowledge that will further their goal, find help in unlikely places. Totalitarian regimes, obsessive compulsive disorder, and global commodity exchange furnish them with tools and models. By attending to the thinking animated and distorted by literature's extreme ambition, literary criticism might fulfill its ambition to produce new knowledge of its own.

NOTES

¹ Vermeule argues, “The reasons why we care about literary characters are finally not much different from the question of why we care about other people” (xiii).

² In addition, the reader brackets those parts of his immediate experience—the sound of cars driving by outside, the color of the sunlight on the page—that he understands not to be relevant to this projected experience. Theo Davis cogently argues that this bracketing does not distinguish literary from non-literary experience (9-30). To focus on what’s relevant and to bracket what’s irrelevant is simply what it means to pay attention to something. Walter Benn Michaels has identified a tradition of postwar American art and writing that does seek to make the audience’s total experience relevant, as in John Cage’s famous 4’33”. But the canner representatives of this tradition understand that this kind of unfiltered experience is quite different than everyday experience. (Cage, for instance, consistently compares the effect of his work to Buddhist meditative practice.) Of course, to claim that the brain processes real and fictional images similarly does not mean that we recognize a flower in a poem and a flower in life *as* images in the same way. But given the emphasis placed on the role of interpretation in perception by the phenomenological tradition, we might not want to draw too firm a boundary between the real and the fictional here either.

³ See Schroder and Matheson, 33. For the classic treatment of this issue see Kendall Walton’s discussion of “quasi-fear” (195-204).

⁴ See Goldman, 48.

⁵ While I take up the question of the relation of science to literature below, given the passions aroused by the introduction of brain research into literary studies, it might be best to briefly characterize my approach at the outset. Like other critics, I have been dissatisfied with the often reductive way scientific models have been applied to texts, the simplification of scientific debates that this application typically entails, and the absence of a meaningful effort to bring literary insights to bear on scientific problems. But to reject the findings of new brain sciences wholesale seems to me to be undesirable both intellectually and in terms of the long-term health of the discipline. In my view, recognition of the problems of what one might call “cognitive studies 1.0” clears the way for a more balanced and genuinely interdisciplinary sense of the place and value of scientific research for humanistic scholarship. This involves discriminating among those literary problems science can genuinely help illuminate, and those problems it can’t. In its scientifically-informed sections, *Writing Against Time* seeks to model a new kind of relation between literary studies and science by tracking literary projects whose romantic ambition forces us to move between registering how science can specify certain cognitive limits, and how literature, in seeking to burst those limits, casts an unexpected light back on scientific problems.

My engagement with science in this book reflects my sense of it as an important, though inevitably minor, addition to the critic’s traditional intellectual tools. Substantial parts of the second chapter have been written in collaboration and consultation with neuroscientists, psychologists, and historians of science, and elements of that chapter’s argument have appeared in a prominent neuroscience journal. (See Clune, Sarnecki, Traynor). Readers primarily interested in the relation of the humanities and sciences may wish to turn to that chapter, although smaller portions of this introduction and the first chapter also make use of scientific material.

⁶ See Ricouer for a rich interpretation of Augustine’s vision of time with particular reference to narrative problems.

⁷ See Bennet for a penetrating look at the 18th century debate over Shakespearean immortality (34-36).

⁸ I do not want to elide the important differences between these two poems. If “Sailing to Byzantium’s” bird of beaten gold represents a commitment to enduring inorganic form, “Byzantium” at moments expresses an almost Keatsian effort to imagine “life-in-death.” See Daniel Albright’s *Quantum Poetics* for an acute discussion of the liquid “wave-form” characteristic of the latter type of Yeatsian image.

⁹ For a brilliant recent meditation on obscurity in poetry, see Daniel Tiffany’s *Infidel Poetics*. For a good discussion of the new resonance of Burke’s materialist aesthetics for criticism inspired by developments in cognitive science, see Alan Richardson’s *The Neural Sublime*.

¹⁰ See Jean-Jacques Nattiez for the most extensive critical treatment of Swann’s musical experience. Nattiez is particularly good at teasing out the interpretive issues which underlie the critical effort to identify the sources of the sonata. I disagree with his reading of the passage in question on one fundamental point. While Nattiez attends to Proust’s representation of the process by which Swann understands the phrase, he fails to register this “disenchantment” which accompanies knowledge here. Perhaps this oversight is due to his interest in seeing Proustian music in terms of truth—a perspective, as we shall see in the next chapter, more appropriate to the narrator’s experience of the septet than of Swann’s experience of the sonata.

¹¹ Cited by Nehamas, 16.

¹² Noe, who comes out of the phenomenological tradition, here exemplifies a tendency of that tradition that accounts for its near absence from much of what follows. Husserl and Heidegger, though in different ways, emphasize the way our encounters with things are shaped by a temporal horizon consisting of the memory of past encounters and the anticipation of future uses or significances. (See Dreyfus for a lucid discussion.) This emphasis on time's constitutive role in perception becomes so marked that, as Noe shows, the prospect of a truly novel encounter becomes almost inconceivable within this tradition. See my *American Literature and the Free Market* for an extended treatment of this issue with particular reference to Heidegger. Phenomenology's very antipathy to novelty gives it a central role in the fourth chapter of this book, where it will be found to play a surprising role.

¹³ I want to distinguish the dynamic I focus on from the structure of sublime experience, in which it is partially embedded for some critics. Weiskel's three stage model of the romantic sublime, for instance, consists of: a) a habituated state, b) the traumatic shattering of habit by alterity, and c) sublimation in a feeling of enhanced subjective power (Stonum 68-70). The tradition I focus on places less emphasis on the final stage, the discovery of blocked powers of mind most fully articulated in Kant's discussion of the mathematical sublime. Rather, the writers I study tend to associate pleasurable intensity with the second stage. An intense feeling of life replaces the expansive cognitive powers seen by Kant and others as the payoff of the sublime. Kant's account of the beautiful is more relevant to the problems associated with this tradition, and I take it up at length in my first chapter.

¹⁴ Other relevant studies include Harold Bloom's exploration of the fraught relations the survival of past poets presents for the living, and Leo Bersani's critical analysis of the impulse to look to posterity as a remedy for death.

¹⁵ See Niklaus Largier for an interesting reading of the impact of contemporary transformations of religious life on aesthetics in this period; see Martin Jay for a useful history of the concept of "experience." Karl Polanyi offers a particularly powerful economic history relevant to aesthetic questions. Alan Richardson develops a useful account of the medical and scientific context (*British Romanticism and the Science of Mind*).

¹⁶ Lisa Zunshine, in *Why We Read Fiction* describes the pleasure of reading in terms of the exercise of cognitive faculties for negotiating interpersonal relations as presented in cognitive science. Mark Turner has drawn on cognitive science to describe metaphor as what he calls "conceptual blending." Gabrielle Starr in "Multisensory Imagery," shows how art capitalizes on the way the brain processes different sensory modalities to orchestrate combinations of modalities that produce a richer mental image.

¹⁷ By harping on the limits of form with regard to the problem explored by this book, I certainly do not mean to dismiss the commitment to form that vitalizes some of our most powerful criticism. Two particularly interesting recent examples are Frances Ferguson's *Pornography, The Theory*, which examines the relation of form and action, and Aaron Kunin's "Character's Lounge," which undertakes a formal analysis of the work of character.

¹⁸ This virtuality in part motivates my description of the tradition I study as 'romantic,' since critics from D. G. James to Simon Jarvis have seen a lack of fit between ambition and realized form as a central feature of romanticism. James writes, "We observe [romanticism] casting around, perhaps desperately, for expressive form; and we also observe it failing to obtain what it wants" (xi). Jarvis explores the romantic ambivalence about achieved form in terms of the tension between "idolatry" and iconoclastic "imagination" in Wordsworth.

Joshua Kotin

“A striking new object arrives, you get used to it, and then you hardly ever see it” (26). This is what Michael Clune describes as art’s hard problem: how to remain vital for a single spectator—how to resist “the deadening effects of habit on perceptual vivacity” (35).

Clune describes two approaches to the problem. The “reasonable” approach, championed by Viktor Shklovsky and Michael Fried, among others, recommends constant stylistic innovation to “ameliorat[e] the limited ability of individual works to make time swell and stop” (27). This approach drives the history of art, but does little to protect individual artworks from time’s influence. “Time’s poison attacks our senses,” Clune remarks in a discussion of Proust; “switching styles is just switching deck chairs on the *Titanic*” (27).

The “unreasonable” approach, by contrast, attempts to maintain the vivacity of individual artworks. The approach is unreasonable, Clune argues, because its effects are “virtual.” “I use *virtual*,” he explains, “to refer to the tendency of artworks to project blueprints for a kind of conscious experience that we can’t yet actualize” (35). Chapters on Keats and Proust, Nabokov, Orwell, and Ashbery describe these blueprints, which often present plans for fictional artworks. “The writers I examine,” Clune writes, “invent virtual techniques, imaginary forms for arresting neurobiological time by overcoming the brain’s stubborn boundaries. The mode is ekphrastic. The writers create images of more powerful images; they fashion techniques for imagining better techniques” (20).

In *Writing against Time*, Clune presents brilliant readings of texts from two continents, spanning two hundred years of literary history. The chapter on Keats and Proust examines depictions of “imaginary music.” (Proust imagines a septet that allows him to “see the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to see the hundred universes that each of them sees...” (28).) The chapter on Nabokov describes his desire to captivate readers in the same way that nymphets captivate Humbert Humbert. The chapter on Orwell, which is the strongest in the book, reads Big Brother as a work of art:

In Oceania, Orwell shows us what a world organized by Shklovsky’s radical redefinition of art in terms of function might look like. Particular methods don’t stop time for very long; the endless *work* of the regime keeps it stopped. This work makes the hardness of rocks and the wetness of water the kind of news that, in Oceania, stays news. This ceaseless activity accounts for the fact that Winston drinks the same gin every day for years and never gets used to it. (108)

Finally, the chapter on Ashbery details “the poet’s painstaking, cunning, and obsessive labors in attempting to *familiarize* the unfamiliar object” (116). The result: a “blueprint of an image that will forever solicit the invigorating desire to know, and forever defer pacifying knowledge” (130). Clune ends the book with a brief discussion of contemporary literary criticism and the value of explicating such unreasonable literary inventions.

Writing against Time is a book about an important topic in romanticism. (Clune contrasts the romantic desire to stop time with the classical desire for literary immortality.) It is also a book about utopianism—about the desire for a perfect, yet impractical state of affairs. (“Quixotic” is a synonym for Clune’s “unreasonable.”) Many of its most compelling arguments tackle a defining feature of utopian literature: the tension between figure and ground—between a writer’s political context and his or her political ideal.

This is why the chapter on Orwell is so good: it interrogates the tension between Orwell’s actual artwork (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*) and his conception of an ideal artwork (Big Brother). Clune points to a troubling connection: “Artistic mastery is the preserving agent for Orwell the writer and reader, while totalitarian control serves the same function for Winston the party member” (101). Should this connection cause us to reassess art’s social significance? Should we be grateful for art’s limited efficacy? The answer, for Orwell, is yes. According to Clune, “Orwell suggests that it is acceptable for art to aim at timelessness only because we know art isn’t strong enough to achieve it” (112).

The book’s less compelling chapters ignore this tension between figure and ground, and treat complex novels and poems as instruments for solving art’s hard problem. For example, Clune reads Ashbery as a science fiction writer whose main achievement is to depict “fantastic commodities” (137). There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this approach, and Clune presents some excellent readings—including an ingenious defense of the homogeneity of Ashbery’s late poetry. But the approach often overlooks the meaning and texture of individual poems. A case in point: Clune’s reading of Ashbery’s “Outside My Window the Japanese...” Clune cites the poem’s “Japanese driving range” as one of the poet’s fantastic commodities. But what’s so fantastic about a Japanese driving range? The poem begins:

Outside my window the Japanese driving range
shivers in its mesh veils, skinny bride
of soon-to-be-spring, ravenous, rapturous. Why is it here?
A puzzle. And what was it doing before, then? An earlier
puzzle. I like how it wraps itself

in not-quite wind—

sure enough,

the time is up.¹

A speaker looks out his window (perhaps from a hotel in Japan) and sees a driving range (perhaps like this one). The mesh netting reminds him of a bridal veil, which suggests the image of “skinny bride.” “Why is it here?” he asks himself, half in jest, mocking his predilection for metaphysical questions. The poem is funny and smart. But it would probably work just as well with a different setting (Chile) or a different object (a batting cage). The Japanese driving range is one of the poem’s least fantastic features. Yet even when Clune gets it right (pointing to the oddness of Ashbery’s “thigh-bone guitar” and “money fish”) he rarely discusses literary form—the tension between the poem and the objects it represents (120). In *Writing against Time*, poems are delivery systems for ideas about aesthetic objects—not aesthetic objects themselves.

Writing against Time has other weaknesses. Its summaries of philosophical texts are often superficial. (A long discussion of the *Critique of Judgment* quotes mainly from Henry Allison’s *Kant’s Theory of Taste*.) Its claims are often needlessly polemical. (Frederic Jameson is a favorite target.) More significantly, it does not adequately address a number of questions related to its central concerns. Why do artworks by Keats, Proust, Nabokov, Orwell, and Ashbery remain vital (or at least somewhat vital) on repeated readings? Why do we read and reread Keats and not, say, Robert Southey? Does time’s poison attack everyone’s senses equally? Might some writers and readers resist (or learn to resist) time’s influence more successfully than others? “Reality is a very subjective affair,” Nabokov once remarked in response to a question about his inexhaustible interest in butterflies. “You can get nearer and nearer, so to speak, to reality; but you never get near enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable.”² Is the desire to create an endlessly interesting artwork a manifestation of the desire to create a natural object?

Writing against Time concludes with a powerful critique of contemporary literary criticism. Clune asks: How can literary critics influence disciplines outside the humanities? How can literary criticism create new knowledge? By explicating extravagant literary projects, he suggests: “The virtual work of art is a kind of thinking, a kind of tinkering, a kind of engineering. [...] The critic’s work is to give this free thought a form by which it can be brought into contact with the disciplined thinking of the research institution” (140). Literary criticism, in other words, can offer practical insights by explicating impractical literary experiments. “At this moment in the history of the disciplines,” Clune argues, “literary criticism’s best opportunity for creating new knowledge lies not in the description of art’s

embeddedness in contexts recognizable to historians or sociologists, but in the description of the forces by which art attempts to free itself of such contexts and such recognitions” (17).

This program (which I endorse, but which Clune needlessly opposes to historical and sociological analysis) has a long and prestigious history. Sidney believed that poets alone have the ability to make “things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature.”³ Shelley believed that only poets behold “the future in the present.”⁴ Pound believed that artists provide the best “data for ethics” by revealing what individuals “actually desire.”⁵ For these writers, the artistic imagination is central to intellectual inquiry—to life itself. Art renovates the possible—that is why it matters. *Writing against Time*, at its core, is a defense of this position, and a convincing and vital account of why literary critics (and research universities) should take extravagant, quixotic literary projects seriously.

- ^{1.} John Ashbery, *Wakefulness* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 46.
- ^{2.} Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage, 1993): 10–11.
- ^{3.} Sir Philip Sidney, *The Broadview Anthology of Sixteenth Century Poetry and Prose*, edited by Marie Loughlin, Sandra J. Bell, and Patricia Brace (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2012), 718.
- ^{4.} Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 513.
- ^{5.} Ezra Pound, "The Serious Artist," in *Early Writing: Poems and Prose*, edited by Ira B. Nadel (New York: Penguin, 2005), 235.

Jonathan Kramnick

Shklovsky Forever!

Michael Clune's exquisite new book asks how literature might arrest time's erosion of perceptual vivacity. Ordinary perceptual experience dulls with familiarity. At first glance, maple leaves curling against the wind are astonishing: such slender green films, so thick a tone. But habit takes the edge off what I see and hear. Only art, Clune tells us, can "prolong the first impression" or return its "intense duration" (11). *Writing Against Time* pays some eloquent attention to works that consider such prolongation, and it does so to advance some surprising, revisionary claims. For one, Clune would like literary studies to contribute to interdisciplinary conversations about the mind with resources drawn from the study of literature rather than those taken from other fields. For another, he wants to move beyond the historicist orthodoxy that has so dominated literary study for the past twenty years and ask big questions about a range of authors from Keats to the present. I'm in broad agreement with both goals, and I applaud the stylish, lapidary prose in which they are pursued. Most of all, I applaud Clune's commitment to a Shklovskian version of the Romantic Imagination, on which view literature always strives to make and keep something new. I'm going to root around in some of this, but not before registering this general approbation.

Probably the nearest book in the vicinity to *Writing Against Time* is Elaine Scarry's *Dreaming by the Book*. Both look closely at how writers use silent black marks on flat white pages to ponder three-dimensional objects in vivid sound and color. There is however an important difference between the two. Scarry asks how works of verbal art achieve the vivacity of genuine perceptual objects. Her focus is on the mimesis of our "freely practiced" acts of seeing or hearing or touching. Clune says in contrast that real sensory perception becomes less vivid or even noticed over time; so he is after works that try to sustain the novelty of seeing the world as something new. The verbal arts on this view are or aspire to be something other or more than descriptive; they "seek the creation of a work that will permanently arrest perception at the moment of the first encounter" (19).

For this reason, the unlikely hero of *Writing Against Time*—referenced in every chapter—turns out to be the great Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky. "Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war." Art exists so that "one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony." That's Shklovsky intoning the twin morals of *Writing Against Time*. Experience dims by the minute; art returns the luminosity to things. "Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important." Clune helpfully clarifies that such "defamiliarization" is not one

of meaning, as Jameson, Perloff and others argued, but rather experience. Art scrubs the habit off perception, not signification. And it is a great virtue of Clune's book that in elucidating this point it makes Shklovsky relevant again to our critical moment, with its preference for the naïve over the suspicious, the aesthetic over its debunking. In fact Clune goes one further. Some works of verbal art he says want "artfulness" to last for all time; they want the vivid never to become familiar, for stones always to be stony. So Clune writes not of an historical procession of strategies designed to make experience strange for as long as possible, as Shklovsky did, but of the philosophical work done by texts that aspire always to be so vivid. Once again, this work should not be understood as semantic. Intended or deconstructed meanings are beside the point. Art might allow us to hear the call of the loon at night always for the first time. And that is more than enough.

For Clune, the literary form of perpetual novelty is ekphrasis, a written representation of an impossible perceptual image. The fascinating prominence of ekphrasis in the book, however, raised for me the nagging question of Shklovsky's formalism. For reasons that elude me, Clune wants to distance his practice from the so-called "fetishism" of form, and he declines to align his study with formalisms either old or new (33). This is a real puzzle. Where else is time stopped—or imagined to stop—but in the formal features of the poems and novels to which Clune attends? There are strange intimations that such imagined stopping is going on in "hallucinated" places outside of the words on the page (33-34; 146-147). This intermittent mysticism is a bit of a distraction, however, and I sense the presence here of some unarticulated commitments cutting against the grain of the (Russian) formalism to which the study really is or ought to be devoted.

A related question concerns the state of academic play Clune describes. Clune presents two alternatives for interdisciplinary work today, "at what is perhaps the lowest point of [literary study's] postwar prestige" (139). The first is to take on board research done elsewhere—like, say, in the cognitive neurosciences—and apply it to the interpretation of literary works. Clune has little interest in this sort of practice. The second is to focus on what cannot be seen from the third-person, objective view of science, namely, what it is like to be the subject of this or that experience. A professor of geophysics can tell me about the mineral composition of the rocks that line the lake outside my window, but her telling me this won't say anything about what they feel like at the end of my fingers. Even a complete account of the creation of rocks from stardust doesn't provide the stoniness of stones. For that you need to look to the humanities. So on this picture literary study adds phenomenal facts to the physical facts provided by science. This alternative is closer to Clune's heart (and mine, for what its worth), but it is still not sufficient for his purposes. For one, Clune is something of an eliminativist when it comes to phenomenal consciousness. Most of the time, he thinks, we

run on automatic pilot, and don't really perceive much of anything. It's only at first blush and then (maybe) in the presence of artworks that "experience remains alive" (59). So it can't be right that literature or the other arts provide access to the phenomenal, experiential facts left out by the physical facts since, strictly speaking, most of experience isn't *really* experienced. For another, phenomenal facts might simply ride along with the physical and not have much of a causal relation to anything anyhow. Clune wants the humanities to touch on questions of genuine human behavior, not simply describe functionless qualia. So in the chapter most directly engaged with this goal he turns to the study of addiction to show how, contra to scientific wisdom, literature reveals addiction not to be a compulsive following of one's drives in spite of how they feel, but rather an excess of consciousness, the dream that the filter in your lips will always be so rich, so heavy.

I admire this stance, and I value all that comes with Clune's sinuous case for the knowledge that literary reading might bring. But to make his argument stick, Clune has to redefine consciousness in the functional terms of attention (he looks to Baars for this and then in the footnotes to Prinz). This is a familiar move, to which there is a familiar response: why does attention have to come with an attached experience? By wanting the study of literature to touch on behavior, Clune has to bracket and put aside some of the famously "hard" perplexities of consciousness. I won't belabor this point—neither of us are professional philosophers after all—but I do think it bears on the place of our discipline in the division of knowledge. If the literature of addiction or anything else provides knowledge, it seems to me that that it is of the phenomenal sort: the facts about what it is like for a smoker to smoke or a stone to be stony. Cut out the literary humanities and you arguably lose knowledge of these facts.

That is how I read Shklovsky at least, and that is also why I think you can't get past the Russian's formalism. Form makes experience less familiar on Shklovsky's account and thus allows us to see it as experience. So it could be that we are conscious more often than Clune thinks, but that literature provides an account of what that entails or feels like, and it could be that it is able to do so because it has a form. If that is true, we might have something to contribute, in our own terms, to larger discussions of mind after all. And if *that* is true, it would be by means of books as critically innovative as *Writing Against Time*.

Jesse Matz

What I admire most about this fantastic book is its admiration for literature's "unreasonable approach to stopping time" (19). The term "unreasonable" sets up a distinction between time in literature and time in the mind—or, rather, between the literary theorization of timeless perception and that which a cognitive theorist might advance. Clune has discovered what is essentially unsatisfying about the cognitive approach to literary study so popular just now: it "lacks the capacity to describe literature's unreasonable efforts to do something the brain can't do" (19). Cognitive theorists tend to presume that literary texts give us insight into how the brain works. But Clune knows that they are more important and more interesting for what they do when the brain fails to work. Some cognitive theorists have in fact taken this approach, as Clune notes. Those who study "gaps in nature" have tried to explain how and with what effect works of the imagination attempt to fill those gaps. But for Clune this attempt is not simply some para-cognitive measure. Works of the imagination are not secondary for their non-actuality, but valuable precisely for their "virtual techniques," their "imaginary forms" for "overcoming the brain's stubborn boundaries" (20). If these forms are unreasonable, they are not therefore irrational or groundless; indeed they improve upon the brain, making up better minds.

Eager for this result I find myself wondering how—and how far—we ought to pursue it. What might Clune recommend for the actualization of these virtual techniques? He writes that people wanting to know how to stop time should "come to us" (to literary criticism) and though "we won't be able to stop it for them" we will send them back to the relevant disciplines (psychology, biology, economics) with "new motives, and a new sense of what is imaginable" (140). But can there be no more immediate benefit to the work Clune has done, if his virtual techniques are literary forms themselves?

In any case Clune has certainly charted a very welcome new direction for literary criticism. He is surely right to note that our current moment calls for a shift from vulgar historicism ("the description of art's embeddedness in contexts recognizable to historians or sociologists") to the approach he has taken to the problem of literature's virtuality for stopping time. We do need to describe what art does to "free itself" of recognizable contexts, not only to return valid attention to the thing itself, but because literature's efforts to overcome cognitive boundaries are actually the best focus for historicism of a better kind. Clune does not himself make this last claim—he more soundly keeps to his assertion that his is "not a historicist study," just one that amounts to a critique of historicism—but his study could have the further advantage of revitalizing a historicism of another kind. When writers invent virtual techniques to supplement the brain, their inventions have historical status, as Clune's

marvelous analyses of Nabokov, Orwell, Proust, and other writers amply attest. If they draw our attention, they become our mental properties, and time itself does change, and history along with it. Clune doesn't have much use for the theoretical tradition that has tried to account for this circularity; he rightly doesn't engage with narrative theorists including Paul Ricoeur for whom literature and "human time" dialectically enhance each other. But I see in Clune's work an exciting chance to reframe that tradition by locating the actual occasions upon which the arts react to temporal opportunity.

Ricoeur's *aporias* are so theoretical. Clune's versions of them are practical in the best sense: they get involved in the real praxis by which artistic minds improve upon our brains in such a way as to make a difference to how our brains might work. But isn't that difference a historical one? Surely the necessary improvements change over time, and surely the uses for stopping time are also specific to the moment—unless Clune believes that human beings always have the same regret about the temporality of perception and the same uses for stopped time? For good reasons, Clune characterizes literature's historicity as an indexical relationship to the times ("literature as an index of actual social, political, cultural, and historical forces" (139)). But his work seems to indicate another option: historicity as defined by what would provoke a text's virtuality and, more importantly, the difference it would make. Not entirely unlike New Historicism's deconstruction of the difference between historical background and literary foreground, this other option would allow the virtual to be historical. It could actually ascribe greatest historicity to the virtual. "How the literary object differs from the actual" (146) might be the measure of its historical significance. Couldn't *Writing Against Time* help us innovate or reenergize this non-indexical historicism?

Gabrielle Starr

Art can be wish fulfillment. But art can also be so much more. Art and aesthetic experience may teach us not just to live *in art*—in a state of transport, immersion, and enrapturement—but art can teach us to live in and beyond art as well. Exploring what life in and through art might mean—what aesthetic experience is, how it happens, when it happens, and what makes it different from the everyday flow and color of life—is one of the best ends that can come of the study of aesthetics. I think, however, that in pursuing these questions the study of aesthetics can be something yet more; it can give us purchase on a huge swath of human life and human consciousness; it can teach us about our motivations and our values; and it can help us understand the ways we make sense of the world beyond what is purely or primarily aesthetic. And when it comes down to it, I think that such goals rank not just among the ultimate aims of humanist thinking—the reasons that humanist thought might be said to matter and matter deeply—but I also think that humanist goals like these can be furthered by scientific method. Indeed, I have also found that these humanist goals can further scientific inquiry and scientific understanding.

The question of the province of the humanities in the modern disciplinary landscape haunts Michael Clune's *Writing Against Time*, as it does the conversations of faculty members across the country (as well as budget offices and state legislatures). Clune is a gifted critic, and it is a pleasure to watch his mind at work, even when you disagree with him. He argues that humanist criticism is too often “parasitic” on other discourses—especially for him, the discourse and research of cognitive science—and he seeks to offer a way out of that relation: “When literary critics describe actual states of affairs, our claims are necessarily parasitic on the methods and models of other disciplines” (139). In essence he suggests that because the literary is the province of the imaginary or the virtual, literature and literary study offer us access to the virtual in a way that the study of the real (in science or social science) cannot. He claims “the radical autonomy of literary thinking” (140):

If someone wants to know how humans experience time, they will probably consult a psychologist, if they want to know how people have measured time, they will consult a historian of science. If they want to know how people value time, they will consult an economist or sociologist. But if they want to know how to stop time, then they will come to us. We won't be able to stop it for them. But we will send them back to psychology, biology, and economics with new eyes, new motives, and a new sense of what is imaginable. (140)

This sounds a compelling story about what literary thinking might offer; it sounds a compelling story about of what the philosophy of art, literature, the aesthetic, or consciousness might offer, too.

I don't think it is a case for the radical autonomy of literary study. Before defending this claim with more precision around the linkage between the aesthetic and the everyday (these terms are not ideal, as I will describe), I want to move outward from the case for an autonomy of literary study to the question of the humanities more generally. I don't believe that the humanities themselves are anything approaching a natural kind; indeed, I suspect that only the sciences can be understood in terms of their inherent relation to one another. The idea of the humanities as a distinguishable group of related fields (and the social sciences, too) is largely the result of the continued evolution of the university as an educational construct. "The humanities," thus, are radically contingent, not radically autonomous.

Contingency is radically human. Let me be clear. By calling the humanities radically contingent I am not suggesting that they have little value. Indeed the term "contingent" applies to just about all of the knowledge human beings produce. I would go so far as to say that, to take one example, while there is a class of pure mathematical knowledge—that of topology, for example—that is universally true and autonomous in that Kantian sense (and there are logical truths that are autonomous in the same way), just about everything else we've got, from statistical inference onward, is contingent. We still know: Descartes was right! And while we know some things with as much certainty as is available to humanity, some things that are scientific—evolution is real; we know the big bang happened, and when; we know the age of the earth (approximately 5 billion years old)—some that are humanistic—poems stir the imagination; beauty is subject to decay; the emergence of the modern disciplines of knowledge profoundly changed the ways humans encounter the world—but none of what we know with certainty gives the humanities or any piece of them radical autonomy. And that shouldn't be what we strive to achieve.

This becomes particularly clear for me in the case of aesthetics. I think, in fact, that aesthetic life is a key point of contact between the imaginary and the real, to take the terms that seem operative in Clune's book, and we lose a lot if we forget that. The book takes as its premise that aesthetic power fades. For Clune, this is a struggle of beauty against time. This is a common intuition, but it is a complicated one. From the earliest moments of the tradition of the Sister Arts in classical antiquity, writers have theorized that there is a different time course of appreciation for the arts than there is for other sensory experience: take Horace, for example, "A poem is like a picture: one strikes your fancy more, the nearer you stand; another the farther away. . . . This pleased but once; that, though ten times called for, will always please."¹ The idea that the pleasures of art may be transcendent is

one root of the concept of aesthetic value, as putatively durable and transhistorical. But we don't need the critique mounted by postmodernism to remind us that the experience of beauty is not stably transcendent: tastes change; pleasures fade, and so do beauty, sublimity, delight, and every other aesthetic experience. Just pick up Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, (as does Clune) and follow the young Marcel as he seeks to maintain the power of a work of art or of a beloved face against the force of time's passing; or see, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, how the very mutability of beauty becomes the premise for not just the endless of pursuit of the beautiful but the very transmutation of form as the lovers of beauty—men, gods, women, nymphs—seek, continually, something that can belong with them forever. We can never attain this kind of stable, continuous, durable and intense aesthetic experience, because no matter how much aesthetics pervades everyday life—and indeed it does, from our experience of the cute, sweet, pretty or grotesque to that of the beautiful, sublime, awful, and inspiring—as emotional, perceptual and imaginative experiences, aesthetic responses are events. And most events have a beginning, middle, and end.

Clune argues, however, that there is a vein of authors, most notably Keats and Proust, who see literature as a way to offer an imaginary aesthetic object capable of defeating this temporal structure. His exploration of aesthetics and of individual texts is fascinating; but I don't think he's entirely right (and who is, anyway?), when he makes the provocative claims I cited above, namely, that some literary works seek to model in imagination something that is impossible in reality—to stop time in the moment of aesthetic intensity—and that radically autonomous criticism can help us to see the inner workings of this enterprise.

Clune faults criticism that he sees as parasitic, especially criticism employing cognitive neuroscience, because it explores imagery in reference to the everyday, not specifically to the aesthetic. However, there is a complex story here. First, there certainly is work in the neuroscience of aesthetics that explores imagery and begins with music, visual art, and fictional narratives, rather than everyday perception, though to date much of the work on narrative remains relatively rudimentary, while work on music and visual art is much more developed.² There is a lot to be done, but that does not mean it isn't doable; and critically engaging in dialogue with a field in which there are new discoveries that drive an evolving understanding of human experience can be exhilarating, even if risky. The world of knowledge changes, and we should seek to engage it and shape it.

As we do so, we must go with eyes open. It is not clear, thus, that work on imagery, emotion, and perception that isn't specifically focused on artwork should be dismissed, as Clune does, when the goal is to explore the peculiarity of art (19). For example, the study of imagery by psychologists and neuroscientists has shown us the degree to which imagery influences "actual" perception; we now also can measure both the way that individuals differ in their

abilities to construct imagery but also how they approach and interact with the images they create.³ Understanding individual differences in imaginative strategies seems important to consider in making claims that a “simple [introspective] experiment will decide the issue” of whether “the creation of imaginary music really count[s] as an achievement,” for example (23). And understanding the relationship between imagery and perception can help us begin to understand how layering imagery and perception in aesthetic experience might have surprisingly powerful effects, as I will describe below.⁴ More than this, a range of research has shown not only that there are both connections and subtle differences between aesthetic and everyday emotions, but we are now able to model some of those differences in ways that could help us understand emotion more broadly and to understand how the arts change our emotional landscape.⁵ Neuroscientific investigation has also shown intense aesthetic experience is not only categorically different in some ways from mere liking, but there is a remarkable neural substrate that helps us to differentiate it. The default mode network, a distributed set of brain regions that is involved in imagery, internally focused thought, and the conceptualization of both the self and its relation to others is also selectively activated in intense aesthetic experience, as I and my colleagues discovered.⁶ I argue elsewhere that understanding the neuroscience of imagery and of aesthetics as we are now able to do can lead us to understand why imagery may grant privileged access to powerful aesthetic experience, and why the *blending* of perception and imagery in aesthetic experience may be the hallmark of aesthetic power in music, visual art, and poetry.⁷ And far from believing that such a mixture of neuroscience, aesthetics, and criticism is a sign of a parasitic discourse, or more strongly, a lack of faith in the humanities, for me it is the sign of the power of the kinds of questions humanists want to ask—for questions I brought to my collaborators helped begin our forays into the neural intricacies of why art moves us, and as we came to a meeting of the minds, we learned about each others fields, we shaped one another’s views and helped test each other’s intuitions. They questioned me, too, and have taught (and continue to teach) me now.

Ultimately, if the humanities or literary study needs “saving,” salvation is not going to come by way of an “outside.” What will keep the humanities and literary study thriving is interest; it will be our ability to engage and to provoke conversations. It will be our ability to make claims that resonate beyond our own walls. It will be when we cannot just provoke conversation, but prolong it. In that register, Clune’s book is a great success. Let’s keep the conversation going.

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- ¹ ll. 361-65. Horace, "Ars Poetica," in *Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
- ² On visual art and music see: Fortunato Battaglia, Sarah H. Lisanby, and David Freedberg, "Corticomotor excitability during observation and imagination of a work of art," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 5(2011); David Freedberg and Vincent Gallese, "Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience," *Trends in Cognitive Science* 11, no. 5 (2007); Maria Alessandra Umiltà et al., "Abstract Art and Cortical Motor Activation: an EEG study," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 6(2012); Andrea R. Halpern and Robert J. Zatorre, "When That Tune Runs Through Your Head: A P.E.T. Investigation of Auditory Imagery for Familiar Melodies," *Cerebral Cortex* 9, no. 7 (1999). On fictional narratives see Raymond A. Mar, "The neuropsychology of narrative: story comprehension, story production and their interrelation," *Neuropsychologia* 42, no. 10 (2004).
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- ⁴ The phenomenon of disinhibition shows one way that this layering can produce powerful hedonic effects: G. Gabrielle Starr, "Poetic Subjects and Grecian Urns: Close Reading and the Tools of Cognitive Science," *Modern Philology* 105, no. 1 (2007).
- ⁵ Marcel Zentner, Didier Grandjean, and Klaus R. Scherer, "Emotions Evoked by the Sound of Music: Characterization, Classification, and Measurement," *Emotion* 8, no. 4 (2008); Edward A Vessel, G. Gabrielle Starr, and Nava Rubin, "The Brain on Art: Intense Aesthetic Experience Activates the Default Mode Network," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 6(2012); G. Gabrielle Starr, *Feeling Beauty: The Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, forthcoming 2013).
- ⁶ Vessel, Starr, and Rubin, "The Brain on Art."
- ⁷ Starr, *Feeling Beauty: The Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience*.

Blakely Vermeule

The Unreasonable

Where I live—Northern California—the phrase “monkey mind” is often bandied about. Monkey mind refers to the highly distracted gibbering tweeting jumping flubber-like fizz-bomb that can apparently be settled by yoga, mindfulness exercises, and long slow breathing. Or so I’ve heard. My own monkey mind is a bit incorrigible. He (she?) isn’t the sort of sober animal who gets together with his fellows and sits in a room typing up the plays of Shakespeare. Instead the little rotter seems to have hooked himself up to an IV-drip of Red Bull and teleported to a 1980’s-era arcade where he plays Space Invaders on an infinite loop. Still, my monkey mind is not yet too far gone to appreciate a bittersweet historical irony. The very same part of the world that now bats around the phrase “monkey mind” was, in the 1960’s and 70’s, most highly receptive to eastern mind-calming techniques. Yet since the 1980’s, Silicon Valley has spawned an industry that is waging total war on the human attention span. No Yin without its go-to Yang. Or as a friend of mine likes to say: Namaste, motherfucker.

Michael Clune’s book is about how artists have found ways to stop the mind in its tracks, to suspend it in a state of ongoing presence (the word has Heideggerian resonances but Clune takes pains to distinguish his approach from phenomenology). There are many shoots to his argument, but at its core is a romantic, optimistic, even brave commitment to the power and danger of aesthetic forms. In Clune’s telling, the mind thirsts for outrageous stimulation not because it has been trained to check its Twitter feed every few seconds but because of its own evolved architecture. The sensations we hold in short-term memory fade rather quickly. Vividness is a fleeting affair. And we can’t easily get the experience back. The more often we are exposed to a stimulus the more quickly we process it—an effect called priming. Priming can have two opposite effects. Either we more easily detect instances of that stimulus later on or we become somewhat immune to it as the novelty wears off.

Clune is interested in the immunity problem. He describes it powerfully and precisely: “Time poisons perception....[W]e are subject to an incessant erasure of perceptual life. No sooner do we catch a glimpse of the shining colors of the world, than they begin to darken. Time’s threat to perception may seem less pressing than the death and aging with which time menaces the organism. But from the first reflections on experience, writers have been consumed with how time poisons even the brief life we possess” (3). The all-too brief life of our vivid perceptions is thus made tragic, a story of loss and falling off. But the tragedy can be healed or at least recast. Writers and artists, especially in the Romantic tradition, grasping that

we lose our battle with time the poisoner, fashion art to slow time and stop the slippage: “[b]y defeating the habit that turns us into machines, by defamiliarizing, literature creates a vivid phenomenal experience where none exists. Writing’s operation is fundamentally transformative, not descriptive.” (59)

Let me just pause here to note that Clune’s argument, which I love, has a familiar and satisfying cognitivist shape. Our brains have some feature—in this case, sense impressions lose their vividness over time. Artists are struck by that feature and look for ways to counter it. One of the first names to appear in Clune’s book is the neuroscientist David Eagleman, whose lab runs experiments on time perception and synesthesia. Eagleman, says Clune, “describes strong evidence for a process that will be intuitively obvious to all readers. The first time we encounter an image, our perceptual experience tends to be richly vivid. Repeated exposure leads to a dramatic drop-off in vivacity. ‘With repeated presentations of a stimulus, a sharpened representation or a more efficient encoding is achieved in the neural network coding for the object.’ Once the brain has learned to recognize the image, it no longer requires the high ‘metabolic costs’ of intense sensory engagement” (3). This seems to me a straightforward appeal to neuroscience to illuminate some feature of aesthetic practice. I mention this only because Clune takes such pains to position himself against what he calls “cognitive approaches 1.0” and to introduce his alternative, which “clears the way for a more balanced and genuinely interdisciplinary sense of the place and value of scientific research for humanistic scholarship” (151-2). He has some valid criticisms of the early research, including my own. While taking his (and Jonathan Kramnick’s) point that the science itself is always changing and is shot through with its own debates, I nonetheless find his academic position-taking against the very critics who would be most interested in and sympathetic to his approach rather puzzling. Especially since I fail to see a large gap between 1.0 and 2.0. After all, whether one is drawing on cognitive neuroscience to try to clarify some widespread feature of aesthetics (the sort of thing Zunshine or Scarry might do) or to explore the underlying mental dispositions against which artists feel the need to push (the sort of thing Clune in fact does), the arrow of explanation runs quite directly from brain science to aesthetic effects. And why shouldn’t it? Nothing about the aesthetic effects is thereby lessened or reduced, nor is their majesty and fascination undercut. Our discipline suffers not a jot—its knowledge, arcana, traditions, obsessions, lore, conventions, norms, topographies, sophistications, self-justifications, neuroses, defenses, and sheer vibrant comic life are far too strong to be undone by the somewhat bemusing fact that science is finally catching up with literature in shining its flashlight into the mind’s stranger reaches.

“Unreasonable” is one of Clune’s key words. By attending to “literature’s unreasonable efforts to do something the brain can’t do” . . . “a truly interdisciplinary relation between literature and science becomes possible” (19). “Unreasonable” signifies not just cognitive approaches to literature 2.0 but Romanticism against Classicism, the living image versus the dead form, the unfolding tale versus the finished maxim, the “evanescent intensification of the feeling of life” versus “the knowledge that comes at the end of the process of grappling with an art work” (164-5).

Clune has done something intellectually thrilling—he has made the old story of Romanticism versus Classicism come alive again, turning it from a somewhat hoary topic in literary history into a vital means of talking about the experience of art. This is a great achievement (and the book itself is serious and written very much with its readers in mind). For what Clune so sensitively describes is the very difficulty and intensity of the sort of “[c]ognitive engagement [that] amounts to a striving to understand, to grasp the form of the work” (38)—not to kill it off and dance triumphantly on its grave but even just to render it conversable while staying open to its effects.

Clune clearly prefers the Romantic to the Classical mode—the intensity of the sensuous present to the fully articulated, processed, broken down, and grasped—Shklovskian immediacy and excitation to the calm summing up of Winckelmannian Classicism. His worry is boredom, the dulling of fresh experience. And I admire his skill in parsing a long tradition of writers who have had not only the worry but found an antidote for it in certain kinds of literary experience. While reading, however, it struck me viscerally how complex this whole question is, but I can no more fault Clune for his preferences than, if he told me he liked chocolate ice cream, I could point to a tub of butter pecan. All the same, I recalled that several years ago I had a new and to me utterly strange and unaccountable experience of a work of art. Time stopped. I was, to borrow Clune’s resonant phrasing, bewitched by an image, in the grip of an aesthetic disease (66). It certainly felt unreasonable and I badly needed time to start up again. One day I was nosing around on Google Earth and I discovered that Google had made available eleven masterpieces from the Prado, photographed in such high resolution that one could actually see hairline cracks in the paint. I became instantly entranced. I started by looking at Bosch’s “Garden of Earthly Delights” and, even though I’d studied the painting before, I don’t think I had ever really taken it in. I had, for instance, never noticed the presence of birds, both menacing and vaguely maternal, feeding swollen berries to sinners out of their lowered beaks.

Then, clicking along to the next image, I found myself suddenly confronted by the bewitcher, Mari Barbola, the achondroplastic dwarf in Diego Velazquez’s “Las Meninas.” Mari Barbola was also perhaps overly academically familiar—I’d seen her in a medical school slide show on dwarfism, in an art history class, in so many illustrations I had stopped paying attention,

and of course in graduate school when I read the first chapter of Foucault's *Les Mots et Les Choses* where Mari Barbola and her fellows are hailed as symbols of a new episteme, midwives at the birth of modern consciousness. But this time, Mari Barbola's look—subdued, dignified, utterly penetrating—struck me like a blow to the stomach. I felt shaky, dry-mouthed, and a bit panicky. Why? What was going on? I simply had no idea and it would take me an actual trip to the Prado to look at her directly before I could begin to harness my response. But in order to harness my response, I had to increase my knowledge. It took me a while just to work out what is going on in "Las Meninas," to see it as a meditation on the relationship between an official story and the forces that swamp it—to recognize the painting as capturing a moment in which a group of people are collectively freaking out. Only Velazquez and Mari Barbola (towards whom he is intensely empathic) seem to be holding themselves together. Velazquez doubles their kinship by dressing them both in the same colors and placing them in postures that mirror each other. And once I began to see that, I could also see that Mari Barbola's relationship to the people around her shone a spotlight on a predicament in which I then found myself and for which I had (yet) no language. (My predicament was that somebody I deeply loved and admired was subtly and quite possibly unconsciously making me feel like an outcast, like lumpy Norse Fafnir weirdly transposed to Middlemarch and made to drink tea from tiny china cups in Rosamond Vincy's living room.) I finally found the words to describe my predicament but they came along much later than the feelings of gross discomfort. If you are of a psychoanalytic bent, you might call my reaction to the painting a case of transference, but that word has gone stale from overuse. Maybe we can pierce its rotten diction by tracing transference back to its etymological roots. What happened to me that day was transport, translation, metaphor.

All of which is to say that Clune shows how Classic and Romantic are live wires rather than dead letters. They mesh together in ways I don't yet understand. Far from being poles apart, both positions seem open for any critic to inhabit, even at the same time and in utterly self-contradictory ways.¹ Like Silicon Valley and the Green Gulch Zen Center, they require each other. And this seems true as well for the writers Clune takes on. Even Humbert Humbert, who in Clune's wonderful chapter on the addictive image, lives in a traumatized nympholeptic present tense, can seem positively Winckelmannian as he battles his nemesis Aubrey McFate. Meanwhile sad Lo is a most unwilling and inarticulate Romantic:

"Dear Mummy and Hummy,

Hope you are fine. Thank you very much for the candy. I [crossed out and re-written again] I lost my new sweater in the woods. It has been cold here for the last few days. I'm having a time. Love, Dolly

“The dumb child,” said Mrs. Humbert, “has left out a word before ‘time.’”²

NOTES

¹ I was amused by this sentence for instance: “Harold Bloom tells us that after we have digested the voluminous criticism on Orwell, ‘we are driven back to what makes 1984 a good bad book: relevance’” (87). And what, I wanted to ask (Bloom—not Clune), of the toil of all those commentators? Dashed like so many mosquitoes on the windshield in a rush to summary judgment.

² Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 81.

Michael Clune Responds

I am fortunate to have these generous and stimulating responses from critics I admire. Indeed, I couldn't have written my book without the benefit of Matz's work on literary impressionism, Kramnick's account of the limitations of literary darwinism, or Starr and Vermeule's achievements in bringing brain science into meaningful relation with literary art. I conceived *Writing Against Time* as a test case for a new kind of criticism, and I am grateful that these five scholars chose to focus on my book's most ambitious claims. They ask why I insist on discerning the outlines of an ideal, unrealized aesthetic object within each actual work of art I consider. And they wonder why I believe those ideal objects to be the source of a kind of knowledge superior to that offered by the dominant critical models of the past three decades.

Unreal Form

Kotin targets my belief that the literary works I consider are "delivery systems for ideas about aesthetic objects—not aesthetic objects themselves." And Kramnick wonders: "Where else is time stopped—or imagined to stop—but in the formal features of the poems and novels to which Clune attends?" My answer is that all the works treated in *Writing Against Time*—with a single partial exception to which I'll return—do in fact imagine time stopping somewhere outside "the formal features of poems and novels." I don't deny that each work constitutes an example of actual literary form—and without exception an unusually powerful example. But each work sets up a goal for aesthetic form that is explicitly or implicitly distanced from what the work's actual aesthetic form can possibly achieve.

To take just one example, we know from Orwell's essays and letters that he feared the slow erosion of the sensible surface of the earth by habit. Orwell understood art as a technique for arresting that erosion. The peculiar vividness of the descriptions in *1984* clearly have a Shklovskian artistic aim: to make the reader see and taste the world anew. But this is a science fiction novel, and these sentences have two sides. From one angle, they are actual art objects to be experienced by actual readers. From another angle, they are transcriptions of the preternaturally heightened senses of Winston Smith, the inhabitant of an imaginary world. Winston's world is constituted by a totalitarian prohibition against perception—don't see what you see, don't hear what you hear, don't feel what you touch—the effect of which is to endow perception with an intensity of interest it lacks in our own. In Oceania, ordinary sensations are endlessly fascinating; the "wetness of water" and the "hardness of stones" never grow dull with familiarity. In this world time, as Winston reads in the forbidden book, has stopped.

One side of the Orwellian sentence is an actual aesthetic object designed to deliver an aesthetic experience to a reader, an aesthetic experience understood in terms of the countering of habit. The other side of the same sentence is the representation of an imaginary character's time-resistant sensations. These sides are not equal. The time-stopping power of the fantasy regime is infinitely stronger than the time stopping power of the actual aesthetic object. This difference fascinates Orwell; it is, I argue, the secret subject of his book. We see a version of this difference between a relatively weak actual art, and an impossibly powerful ideal art, in the other works I examine. Swann regrets the way Vintieu's sonata dulls with time; Marcel is fascinated by "the fountain of youth" of an imaginary music that allows him to experience the world through the composer's sensorium. Keats' "Hyperion" obsessively marks the distance between the speech of the poet and the speech of the gods, and between the music of lesser (Clymene) and greater (Apollo) gods. Humbert Humbert continually forces us to notice the gap between the way the always-new image of Lolita works for him, and the way his fantastically inventive verbal images of Lolita work for us.

Writers like Peter Burger have long associated the desire for the work of art to extend beyond "the formal features of poems and novels" with the historical avant-garde. But what the tradition I study suggests, is that as soon as the generation of Kant and Burke define art as a technology designed to produce a certain effect, the rationale for restricting those effects to artworks vanishes. This is why Burke and Kant fail to distinguish between natural and artificial aesthetic objects. Catching a glimmer of this logic, Kotin wonders if Keats and the others are perhaps trying to create artworks that would have the properties of natural forms. But the particular effect the writers of Romantic immortality pursue means that real mountains are no more useful than real poems or sonatas in permanently arresting habit. Actual art forms become valuable as labs in which effective affective solutions to the hardest problem—the problem of human time—are experimentally probed.

So when Kramnick and Kotin wonder why I focus on the distance between actual and ideal form in reading the representatives of this Romantic tradition, I can reply that I am only following the lead of Kant, Keats, Proust, Orwell and Nabokov. My interlocutors might well, however, be dissatisfied with this answer. After all, I have chosen to write about *these* writers, and I have selected from their work only those examples which stress the ekphrastic gap between actual and ideal form. (I have nothing to say in this context, for example, about *Animal Farm*, "To Autumn," or even *Pale Fire*.) So the deeper question is why I *value* ideal form over actual form.

I chose to write about the works I did because I believe that the distance between ideal and actual form is a source for a new kind of literary knowledge. I certainly don't think it's the *only* such source. But I do think that the special qualities of romantic ekphrasis make possible an

economical exposition of the properties of this new knowledge and the procedures by which it can be secured.

But before proceeding to address the question of literary knowledge, I want to take up Matz's somewhat different question about the ideal forms projected by Romantic and post-Romantic writing. "What might Clune recommend for the actualization of these virtual techniques?" How can we use the strategies developed—but not realized—by Proust, Nabokov, Keats, or Orwell to create time-stopping forms we can actually use in our lives?

My first response is that one of the things we learn from these writers is that there are good reasons for wanting to keep effective time-retarding technologies in their virtual condition. Orwell is the most emphatic proponent of this skepticism, and I've argued that he appreciates actual aesthetic form for its very weakness at arresting psychological time. (No one could imagine, after all, that Orwell secretly loves Big Brother!) Similarly, Nabokov presents his ideal aesthetic object by imitating an addictive object. I argue that this instance of romantic ekphrasis has the potential to enrich our understanding of actual addiction. But I imagine few readers will want to find their very own *Lolita*. (Nor, despite a notorious passage in Gideon Lewis-Kraus' *New Yorker* review of my memoir, do I think many people will be eager to catch the strain of timelessness with which I've been infected).

And yet, in writing this book I've never been able to entirely rid myself of the suspicion that Nabokov and Orwell paint effective time-killers in such dire colors out of a barely repressed resentment. What if, in other words, their hatred of the prospect of effective time stopping is a result of their hateful sense of the failure of their own writing to touch its lofty goal? Keats and Proust, on the other hand, express a relatively uncomplicated desire to halt neurobiological time. Let's kill habit! And so my second response to Matz's question is, well ok, maybe we can use some insights from this tradition to design really effective anti-habit techniques. I sketch one possibility in my discussion of Keats' imaginary music, when, with the help of recent research in the psychology of music, I identify the phenomenon of "nuance ineffability" as an area for practical research on this question. Proust's unique conception of how empathy might unexpectedly play a time-defeating function in music offers another avenue for exploration.

I have no musical talent; if someone pursues these Romantic hints, it won't be me. But Matz's question encourages me to be more explicit about a set of literary works I hesitated in my book to identify as the exception to the rule of Romantic ideal form. John Ashbery's poetry, it seems to me, does in some measure succeed in producing genuinely habit-resistant images. To summarize my final chapter's complex argument, I think that Ashbery's late poetry shows us the kind of form possessed by an object removed from its context in another culture, but described as it is seen from within that culture. I realize this formula is somewhat obscure. A

simple archeological example helps to clarify what is essential about the type of thing Ashbery shows us.

Say an archeologist digs up a bit of rock in the desert. Now, if she believes that bit of rock to have a natural origin, she has no problem giving a complete description of the thing's shape. But if she instead believes it is an artifact, then the stone's cultural context prevents her from describing it completely. Questions about its shape arise that could never occur for a natural object. Which way is up, for instance, and which way is down? It wouldn't make sense to ask this of a rock, but it does make sense to ask it of an ancient stone tool. Insofar as the archeologist does not fully understand the cultural matrix from which the artifact derives its shape, something curious happens. It's not quite right to say the context is missing. On the contrary, the archeologist is keenly aware of that context. Rather, it is more accurate to say that the context is present. *The missing context is present in the formlessness of the thing.* And so we have a wonderful paradox: a delimited object that refuses to resolve into determinate shape. And this is exactly the kind of thing that defies habituation.

The things Ashbery introduces into his poetry are generated by a two-step procedure. First, an alien artifact is assembled by combining words or images in unfamiliar ways. Second, the artifact is presented using the literary conventions for representing culturally familiar objects—the poem incorporates the forms of dialogue, the ritual, the saying, the colloquial-sounding expression. Thus an unfamiliar object is presented to us as it appears to those familiar with it. Like the archeologist, we are left gazing at an object rendered permanently multiform and unstable by the presence of its unknown context.

Vermeule wonders at the absence of phenomenological aesthetics, and of Heidegger in particular, from most of *Writing Against Time*. Yet I rely on Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricouer in my analysis of Ashbery. This fact does not answer Vermeule's question, but broadens it. I can't say I didn't notice that I suddenly dropped reference to post-Kantian aesthetics when it came time to write about Ashbery. But I didn't stop to reflect on the significance of that decision until receiving Vermeule's response. When writing about how artworks project *imaginary* forms, I make use of a Kantian/Shklovskian aesthetic. But when writing about literature with an interest in the capacities of *actual* form, I turn to phenomenology. What does this half-conscious decision reveal about my critical commitments? This question may point to the major unfinished work of *Writing Against Time*. But I will try to articulate some initial thoughts.

I think my choice to drop Kant for Heidegger reflects my suspicion of Kantian affective aesthetics as an account of the operations of actual art works. While I share this suspicion with critics like Todd Cronan and Walter Benn Michaels, I don't go quite as far as they do. I

am perfectly happy to accept that much of the pleasure of art consists in the interplay between familiarity and novelty that Kant and his successors illuminate, a pleasure that's always been strongest for me in music. But I think it undeniable that much of the power of art has to do with *meaning*. The magic of Ashbery's poetry, for example, derives from his deep insights into our cultural meaning-making practices. It is the strange *meaningfulness* of his images that fascinates. And in this sense, Keats, Nabokov, and Proust aren't so different. *Writing Against Time* treats their work as engines generating new *ideas* about experience, its temporal limits, and the chances of overcoming these limits. This is why my introduction refers to this literature as a kind of "philosophy," and why I present Kant and Keats as engaged in similar practices.

My reluctance to accept that our literature's most powerful work consists in creating actual affective responses, also suggests an answer to Vermeule's larger question about the basis of my disagreement with much cognitive aesthetics. Put simply, cognitive criticism generally investigates the actual effects literature produces; it is thus methodologically blind to literature's thinking *about* these effects, and about the perceptual and cognitive structures that underlie them. And yet I think much of what literary studies can contribute to science lies in the identification and development of this thinking. In the Romantic works that occupy the first three chapters of my book, this thinking takes place in the space between the kind of experiential effects form plausibly achieves, and the kind of effects the artist desires.

But before pursuing the question of literary knowledge in depth, I want to emphasize that even Ashbery's things have a virtual side. Kotin appears confused by the fact that I draw from Ashbery's poetry examples that deal with artifacts from imaginary cultures, as well as artifacts that derive from actual cultures, such as Japan or South Korea. The late Ashbery substitutes Japanese or Korean things for the kind of object the origin of which he previously presented as fantastic, mysterious, science fictional: objects that are like "the temple of an unknown cult." I argue that with this substitution Ashbery tries to provide us with a way of encountering the artifacts of our own globalized world. As I also argue, this attitude must remain virtual in our actual world, because the capitalist market positions foreign commodities in a way that forecloses the peculiar mixture of mystery and familiarity on which Ashbery's magical time-cancelling effect relies.

The final example of *Writing Against Time* thus resembles the final example of my first book, *American Literature and the Free Market*, in which I point to the dual status of the hip-hop practice of tinting the windows of expensive cars. On the one hand, this technique can be seen as disentangling economic form from social recognition, by making the inhabitant invisible to others as she drives past. "You can't see me." But on the other hand, a cultural context ruled by recognition might simply focus on the moment in which the car's owner emerges from his

hyper-exclusive world onto the street in front of the club. “Look at me.” In both Ashbery and gangster rap, the transformative potential of the aesthetic object is clearly discernable, but it remains only partially and intermittently actualized.

Real Knowledge

I’ve always been interested in literature’s extreme ambitions, its Romantic aspiration to transform life and thought. As a graduate student, a decade ago, I felt oppressed by the arguments of the literary demystifiers. Those masterful critics made frequent reference to economics, sociology, and psychology in rejecting literature’s transcendent, transformative pretenses, and showing it as confined, in various ways, to more or less boring or repellent social and historical contexts. I wanted to think about literature in a different way, but what could I do? Arguments like Bourdieu’s or Jameson’s just seemed so hard-nosed, so sober, so technical, so...*scientific*.

Since then the economic, sociological, and psychological claims of the literary demystifiers have been exposed as the withered fruit of that strangely autonomous realm, literature department “interdisciplinarity.” In the eighties or nineties, the critic could cast himself as a “tourist,” making economic claims without taking the trouble to discover whether or how his economic ideas differed from economists’. The critic could declare aesthetic experience a social illusion, without feeling the need to argue with the psychologists or neuroscientists investigating aesthetic experiences, (or, for that matter, philosophers from Kant through Adorno). For a time, this attitude protected critics from having to examine their interdisciplinary assumptions, even as it foreclosed the possibility of making meaningful interdisciplinary interventions.

Those days are gone. And I’m sure I’m not the only one who will confess to feeling a secret delight at the erosion of the older critics’ authority. After all, the much-discussed crisis in what Michael Berube calls the “prestige” of literary studies is, from a generational perspective, an intellectual opportunity. My sense of this opportunity took a form that initially seemed perverse even to myself. The sober claims of the demystifiers turned out to be the wildest nonsense, I thought. What if that dynamic were reversible? What if the wildest claims of literature turned out to be the source of hard-nosed, institutionally viable, knowledge?

I can’t think of a better phrase to describe my view of literary studies than the one Kotin generously uses to describe my book’s central argument. I think criticism should aim to “renovate the possible.” Starr finds my account of what this critical renovation can offer other disciplines “compelling,” but she questions my commitment to literature’s “autonomy.” She argues, persuasively, that what is needed is engagement, not isolation from the work going on in other departments.

Perhaps my decision to use the term ‘autonomy’ in the book’s closing argument was a mistake; the word carries associations that are confusing in this context. So let me be clear: I am all for engagement! Key parts of the second chapter, after all, were written with the collaboration of neuroscientists and cognitive scientists, and I took the (considerable) trouble to publish a portion of the argument in one of the top neuroscience journals. I would not have done this—nor would I have taken pains in the other chapters to engage recent work in musicology, philosophy, and psychology—had I not been committed to literary criticism’s robust engagement with cutting-edge research in the disciplines which our investigations lead us to broach. Indeed, this imperative is largely responsible for the polemical attacks on influential critics which Kotin finds superfluous. But it’s important to highlight the incompatibility of my way of investigating addiction or commodities from the way these topics were pursued in the eighties and nineties.

If all this is true, then what was I thinking when I used the word ‘autonomy?’ And how could a commitment to autonomy be compatible with a commitment to interdisciplinary engagement? Put simply, the lingering weakness of literary studies in the university’s economy of knowledge means that much engagement takes the form of literary critics applying the methods and models of other fields in analyzing literary works. There’s nothing necessarily wrong with this kind of engagement, and much important work has come out of it. But to fashion a viable place for literary research in the contemporary research university, we need to show that critics can generate knowledge that can’t be found elsewhere. I advocate engagement, but I don’t practice engagement for its own sake. Rather, *to identify what is new in literary thought requires intensive engagement with the work of other disciplines.*

If the Romantic tradition I explore concerns itself with escaping the limits of the actual, and if I believe there is value to this effort to create alternatives to the real, then I need to demonstrate this value. One way is to show how this effort generates new perspectives on familiar topics. And so, for example, I argue that the literary practice of imitating addictive objects in the process of imagining ideal form, shows us something about addiction we didn’t already know, and enables us to make connections between existing neuroscientific studies that haven’t yet been made. To do this, I identified the aspects of the addictive object that writers like De Quincey and Nabokov took as distinctive. Then, with the help of collaborators, I familiarized myself with the past two decades of scientific research on addiction. Using the literary image as a kind of flashlight, I then searched for something new, something missing in the science. Having found it, I submitted my findings to the review of a science journal, and to the criticism of leading practitioners. Finally, as my argument developed, I shared my work with a neuroscientist and his lab, and made corrections based on their feedback. The ‘cue fascination’ I argue literature shows us in addiction may play a

relatively small role in the disease; certainly I don't think it's the whole story, or even the largest part. But it is new, there are good reasons to investigate it further, and its nature gives it potentially wide philosophical significance. Based on the experience of composing this chapter, I can offer an updated definition of literary autonomy. Today, the distinctiveness of literary thinking is not an assumption, but a goal, to be won only at the cost of serious and sustained engagement with the work of other fields.

Noticing the extent of this engagement in my book, Vermeule wonders whether my practice is as distinct from that of other cognitive and neuro-inflected criticism as I claim. Certainly this field has grown more diverse even in the couple years since I finished my book. But I think the tendency I associate with the groundbreaking criticism of what I call "cognitive studies 1.0" is still visible. Perhaps I can best bring out my sense of the distinctiveness of my approach by contrasting my treatment of empathetic identification in Proust with the account of "mind reading" in the book many of us think of as one of the most powerful and original cognitive criticism has yet produced, Vermeule's own *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?*

Vermeule does a wonderful job showing us how the innate human ability to imagine the mental lives of others underlies both realist novelists' depiction of social interaction and calculation, and the consumption of those novels by a world of socially mobile individuals eager to school their mind-reading capacities. One of her book's achievements is to show how eighteenth and nineteenth century writers knew things about empathy that cognitive science has only recently discovered. But the literary critic's work comes *after* those scientific discoveries. Wouldn't it be nice to sometimes try to make discoveries about the mind *before* science does? Vermeule's work ingeniously shows how literary writers make use of capacities science describes, and her work often consists in the application of those scientific descriptions to literary texts. Again, I think this is valuable and necessary work. But I also think we can go a step further.

There are two kinds of things literary criticism can discover about the mind. First, it can identify aspects of mental life that science hasn't yet seen, but that can be described in a way that enables scientists to learn from literature. I tried to provide an example of this in my account of what literature knows about addiction. Second, criticism can identify new functions for mental capacities science has already described. Vermeule is on solid evolutionary ground when she associates empathy with the "Machiavellian" function of trying to get 'one up' on social competitors by trying to predict their choices and behavior. But when Proust imagines that empathy is useful for defeating time, in that it enables us to see through another's eyes at a world thereby made fresh, he has discovered a plausible use for empathetic identification that, to my knowledge, has gone largely unsuspected in the scientific literature. I would never argue that empathy evolved to defeat time. But when Proust suggests

that empathy may in fact be able to defeat time, then we have an opportunity of learning something about this brain function that we may not have had if we restricted ourselves to the science. That a Romantic writer should discover this time-killing dimension of empathy instead of scientists should come as no surprise. Romantic writers are obsessed with defeating time!

Kramnick's question helps me to further articulate the difference of my approach from that of much cognitive criticism. He worries that I sacrifice too much of the distinctiveness of literature in my effort to bring my work into contact with other disciplines. In particular, he questions the way I treat phenomenal consciousness in my account of addiction. By following the lead of influential scientists and philosophers of mind in equating consciousness with attention, he thinks I give up on the "hard problem" of consciousness, the mysterious way *experience* is associated with attention. Kramnick thinks that it is in capturing the qualities of this experience that literature's true epistemological distinctiveness lies.

Here also I need to clarify my position, which the compression of the pages in question perhaps renders slightly obscure. I do not in fact give up on the hard problem, nor do I neglect phenomenal consciousness in describing attention. Rather, I argue that the *experience* of cue fascination that literature shows us is a *cause* of sustained *attention* to the addictive object. In other words, the feeling of perceptual freshness when encountering the addictive object serves to prolong and intensify attention to it.

This is the most extreme claim in my book, precisely because it goes against the grain of current research by attempting to identify a causal role for phenomenal consciousness in behavior, two realms that have, as Kramnick intimates, generally been kept utterly distinct. I develop this argument after delineating my theory of 'cue fascination,' and one does not have to accept the former to accept the latter. I realize the skepticism with which many will greet my claim about consciousness, but I have not yet heard arguments sufficient to make me abandon it. Sometimes experts in other fields disagree with my ideas in ways that make me abandon them without looking back; other times I don't find the grounds of their disagreement persuasive. Engagement, after all, doesn't mean acquiescence. In my experience, not the least of what we can offer other disciplines is a little of the Romantic spirit.

The scientific and philosophical arguments of my first two chapters suggest one of the ways the study of ideal form can generate real knowledge. But perhaps the most important knowledge offered by my book is of the literature itself. I hope to have shown what is to be gained by taking these works seriously. I wanted to suspend disbelief in writing's effort to free itself of actuality just long enough for my reader to catch a sense of the interest and value of that effort. Jesse Prinz confesses to a certain 'embarrassment' in bowing to the evidence about

aesthetic experience and identifying himself as an aesthetic “romantic.” While I am obviously interested in experiential aesthetics, I retain serious reservations about its claims. But I have had a similar shyness about embracing my own romanticism. A number of readers have noted my reluctance in the introduction to my book to straightforwardly express the implications of my argument for literary history. But there’s no point in concealing the fact that my aim has been to show how the romantic impulse animates some of the central works of twentieth and early twenty-first century literature.

Earlier I said that I don’t think the literary effort to defeat time is the *only* source of a new, more institutionally and culturally viable form of literary knowledge. One need only glance at brilliant new work by critics from Sianne Ngai to Irene Tucker to see the obviousness of this. But I do think that the ekphrastic gap—the gap between actual and ideal literary form—provides a useful way of showing how Romantic literature generates knowledge. In this gap, we see an allegory of literature’s intrinsic interdisciplinarity. In fantasizing an ideal timeless form, literature flees its status as a delimited object of specialized study. We see literary thought in flight from literature, from its own most basic social and material actuality. As it crosses and recrosses disciplinary boundaries, the wildly improbable literary effort to defeat the fundamental human limit describes a flight path that critics, facing our own historical and institutional limits, might want to take.

Michael W. Clune teaches at Case Western Reserve University. His books include *American Literature and the Free Market* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010) *Writing Against Time* (Stanford Univ. Press, 2013), and *White Out* (Hazelden/Perseus, 2013). His articles and essays have appeared in *PMLA*, *Representations*, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, and elsewhere.

Joshua Kotin is Assistant Professor of English at Princeton University.

Jonathan Kramnick is Professor of English at Johns Hopkins University and author most recently of *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson* (2010) as well as "Against Literary Darwinism" and "Literary Studies and Science," both in *Critical Inquiry*.

Jesse Matz is professor of English at Kenyon College. He is the author of *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics*, and his work on "modernist time ecology" can be found in journals including *Narrative*, *Modernist Cultures*, and *Modernism/modernity*.

G. Gabrielle Starr is Professor of English and Seryl Kushner Dean of the College of Arts and Science at New York University. She is the author, most recently, of *Feeling Beauty: The Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience* (MIT Press, 2013), and "Aesthetics and Taste: The Beautiful, the Sublime, and Beyond in the Eighteenth Century" (in *A Companion to British Literature: Volume III: Long Eighteenth-Century Literature 1660-1837*, ed. Robert DeMaria, Jr., Heesok Chang, and Samantha Zacher, Blackwell, 2014); she is also co-author, along with Edward A. Vessel and Nava Rubin, of "The Brain on Art: Intense Aesthetic Experience Activates the Default Mode Network," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 6:66 (2012).

Blakey Vermeule's research interests are cognitive and evolutionary approaches to literature, Philosophy and literature, British literature from 1660-1820, post-Colonial fiction, satire, and the history of the novel. She is the author of *The Party of Humanity: Writing Moral Psychology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2000) and *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?* (2009), both from The Johns Hopkins University Press. She is currently working on a book about narrative and the conceptual unconscious.

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POETRY

THREE POEMS

MICHAEL FRIED

IN THE KUPFERSTICHKABINETT

There are drawings by Adolph Menzel (1815-1905) in which the black lead of his carpenter's pencil has been pressed into the paper with tremendous force, far exceeding the demands of the form or the requirements of the shading in that precinct of the image. I said to Kathrin: What we see here is first-hand evidence of Menzel's desire— his compulsion— to make the world as real to him, and at the same time to make himself as real to the world, as it was within his power to achieve. At whatever cost to strict fidelity to appearances, which was of urgent concern to him but only up to a point. As Kafka wrote in another connection, "That is the point that must be reached."

FROM MICHAEL SCHMIDT'S *FRAUEN*

In Michael Schmidt's black-and-white photograph of a young woman's naked back there are perhaps fifty or sixty moles of various intensities scattered across her pale skin like stars, nebulae, and galaxies in the night sky. On a clear night, needless to say, somewhere in the countryside, far from the illumination of cities. (Michael Schmidt lives in such a place.) The viewer takes the point that the young woman is unaware of these, that she cannot see her back, or rather could not have seen it until the artist on a follow-up occasion showed her the

recently developed image. In my enthusiasm I fantasize observing to her that, facing away from the camera and thinking her own thoughts, she was, and in Michael Schmidt's perfectly composed photograph will forever be, a living map of an alternative universe.

THE PRINCE OF HOMBURG

Bugles blare, torches are lit, cavalrymen in above-the-knee boots hasten to their mounts, on all sides lethal violence strains to be unloosed, this happens not just once but many, many times, and no one, not even his most ardent admirers, knows for certain whether or not it will prove possible to awaken the Prince of Hamburg from his dream of fame and love without destroying him.

Michael Fried is J. R. Herbert Boone Professor of Humanities and the History of Art, Johns Hopkins University. His many books of art criticism, art history, literary criticism, and poetry include *Absorption and Theatricality*; *Courbet's Realism*; *Manet's Modernism*; *Art and Objecthood*; *Menzel's Realism*; *Why Photography Matters as Never Before*; *The Moment of Caravaggio*; and, most recently, *Four Honest Outlaws: Sala, Ray, Marioni, Gordon*.

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