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REVIEWS
in **CULTURAL THEORY**

3.2

Contents

Deconstructing the "Middle Class"; Constructing its Transnational History

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A. Ricardo Lopez and Barbara Weinstein (eds.) *The Making of the Middle Class: Toward a Transnational History*. Duke University Press, 2012. 446pp.

The Making of the Middle Class is an edited collection that spans an impressive—almost intimidating—amount of material. Featuring chapters and commentaries by 21 writers, it provides a collection of historical analyses of the formation of the middle class in a variety of historical moments and geographical contexts, offering the resources through which a detailed and global picture of its formation can emerge.

Any reader looking for an interdisciplinary treatment of the subject of the middle class will be disappointed: the book is unambiguously located in the discipline of history, which makes it challenging reading for anyone not versed in that particular paradigm. Yet this is also the key contribution made by *The Making of the Middle Class*. Its principal objective is "to criticize modernity itself as a transnational phenomenon, and to do so by *historicizing* what it meant to be middle class" (18, emphasis added). The editors argue that this historicization is necessary in order to invite critical conversation about the neoliberal present. Rhetoric about the middle class has come to take on a particular resonance and power within contemporary global political and economic debates. "In the neoliberal imagination, societies are spatially envisioned as advancing towards a one-class society—that is, the global middle class—which is seen as the political foundation for an always-becoming postclass global society" (3). A historical critique provides the means by which "the middle class as an idea and as a practice of modernity" (4) has become implicated in current conversations about global structures of power and value. The Afterword by Mrinalini Sinha (a chapter that might be best read first by non-historians) provides some context as to how the discursive construction of the middle class plays into contemporary global power structures. But the focus of the book is not the shape of the middle class as it exists today, but on its *making*.

A paradigm prevalent in scholarship examining the middle class as a "global" phenomenon conceives it as something fundamentally tied up with modernity and

imperialism, with colonialism and "civilizing missions," and with a linear determinism that conceives of modernity and the middle class as originating in Europe and then "moving out to the rest of the globe" (5). This leaves no scope for theorizing the middle class outside of global relations of power. *Making the Middle Class* seeks to unsettle the "deeply embedded Euro-American centrism in the study of the middle class" (10) by paying attention to a variety of alternate modernities and examining how middle classes took shape in non-western contexts, as such inviting "the reader to think about the historical formation of the middle class in a comparative, connective, and transnational framework" (11). The book certainly achieves this goal: it pluralizes and de-westernizes the notion of the middle class, shifting from a notion of a centre to a focus on multiple localities and from a linear narrative to multiple moments in history.

Historical middle class formations: Key themes

The book "proposes four main, interlocking historical problems through which we seek to rethink the historical formation of the middle class across the world" (12). The first interrogates "practices of modernity," the second examines experiences of labour professionalization in relation to state rule and class formation, the third notes the role of politics and revolution in middle class formations, and the fourth addresses forms of participation in the public sphere. The volume is thematically structured, eschewing a chronological or geographic organization in order to address the core cross-cutting topics of middle class formations around the globe. Each section of thematically linked chapters is helpfully summed up in a concise précis (again, for non-historians it might be more helpful to read these commentaries before the preceding chapters).

The first five chapters, collected under the section title "Practices of Modernity," focus respectively on colonial India, colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe, England, America, and Cold War Canada, examine the extent to which "modernity made the middle class" (107) and conversely how middle class practices and identities played a "crucial role in defining what it means to be 'modern'" (29). The approach shared by the contributors of chapters in this section is the acknowledgement of the inseparability of the middle class and modernity. In the US, as Marina Moskowitz's chapter argues, middle class identity was "based on notions of cultural capital, luxury, material aspiration, and credit" (13). In Canada, as Franca Iacovetta's chapter shows, a key site through which the middle class identities were constructed was the integration of immigrants into the Canadian way of life, which entailed being trained in "modern" practices and ways of life. As Sanjay Joshi articulates, "efforts of cultural entrepreneurship made the middle class a significant player in the social and political life of colonial India" (30). In Zimbabwe, Michael O. West points out, although the middle class had its origins in the colonial project, the struggle for social mobility evolved

into a struggle against the terror of colonial oppression.

As Barbara Weinstein sums up in her commentary, "The aspirations stirred by modernity may vary, but […] they vary surprisingly little; everywhere they hypothetically include roads, communications, basic services, medical care, education, and a certain capacity to consume" (112). And it is the middle class—however constituted, and in whatever cultural context—that both demanded and utilized these modern facilities.

The volume's second section, "Labour Professionalization, is comprised of four chapters that focus respectively on middle class workers in the US, colonial Bombay, the Columbian capital Bogotá, and in Mexico during the revolution. Despite these different perspectives, the chapters share the perspective that one key characteristic of the middle class is the type of work it does. Although "class as an identity linked to labour has become almost obsolete" (14), it retains a certain degree of legitimacy in examining the middle class, which was—in many contexts across the globe—defined by the expansion of the service sector and "professional" work. This in turn shaped middle class identities. Daniel Walkowitz's study of the participation of the professional managerial workers in the folk dance movement in the US demonstrates how "middle class is more about style and status claims—cultural capital—than about political or economic power" (126). In colonial Bombay, as Prashant Kidambi shows, doctors, lawyers, teachers and doctors similarly "claimed cultural capital as a way to struggle for a place in an educated middle class," thus becoming "arbiters of appropriate social conduct for the society at large" (15). In Colombia in the 1950s and 1960s, A. Ricardo Lopez argues, professional workers were conscripted into becoming development workers such that "the concept and practice of 'middle-class professional' became embedded in a new form of democratic rule in the context of US imperial expansion" (163). As Mary Kay Vaughn summarizes in her commentary, an ideology that linked middle class professional workers in all these contexts was that they could "transform society in progressive, modernizing and civilizing directions" (223). As "professionals, engineering a modern society" (224), the middle class "propagated and appropriated a cultural project that was transnational in nature, diffused, and easily recognizable wherever it took root" (224).

Three chapters examining middle class politics in revolution in Peru, Mexico City, and the Arab Middle East, respectively, make up a section entitled "Revolutionary Politics." In Peru, as Iñigo García-Bryce shows, the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) did not merely represent a pre-existing middle class, but in fact created and reinforced that identity. "Belonging to APRA became one of the many identity markers that could make an individual middle class" (237). In the context of urban Mexico, Susanne Eineigel argues that "in contrast to traditional characterizations of the middle class as passive and apathetic" (253), they in fact took an active

political role in the aftermath of the revolution. Meanwhile, Keith David Watenpaugh's examination of Arab middle class politics shows how they created institutions of civil society while remaining unable to translate their solidarity into real political power (269). The commentary by Brian Owensby highlights the shared argument of the previous three chapters: the middle class (and not only the peasantry and working class) also defined its identity through political action. This rests in tension with the "idea that the middle class has always obscured the operations of power in capitalist modernity" (295), which might be why, Owensby concludes, the middle class has so often been "brought up short by politics" (295).

The final section of the book, "Middle Class Public Spheres," includes four chapters thematically organized around notions of participation in civic life, taking in examples from 19th-century Germany, post-revolutionary France, Chile and Peru in the five decades spanning the turn of the 20th century, and Argentina in the mid-1900s. Gisela Mettele shows how "during the nineteeth century [in Germany], women critically participated in a variety of voluntary civic associations" precisely in order to constitute themselves as middle-class subjects (17). Carol E. Harrison shows how in post-revolutionary France, middle class identity was linked to religiosity, where charity in particular was linked to notions of a shared public good. David S. Parker examines the ways in which the boundaries of the public sphere in Chile and Peru were patrolled through ridicule and vilification of "the social climber." In Argentina, as Enrique Garguin argues, during the first decades of the twentieth century the middle classes claimed the public sphere as their own, and by so doing constructed legitimate political participation as not only middle class, but also as exclusively "European and white" (18).

Together, the chapters in this final section show how the middle class was formed through various kinds of public participation and action, but also how those public spheres were to some extent exclusionary and elitist. As Robyn Muncy summarizes, "one of the many variables […] in the emergence and maintenance of middle classes around the globe has been the precise way that middle-class subjects identified who their social superiors and inferiors were" (378).

Fractured Characterizations: The 'Fuzziness' of the Middle Class

As an interdisciplinary scholar working on the relation between consumer culture and the media, one of the key questions that I brought to my reading of the volume was: What are the characteristics of the "global middle class"? Despite—or rather, precisely because of—the wide range of historical analyses of transnational middles classes offered in the volume, it does not provide a clear and eliminating definition of the middle class. This is because as the editors themselves acknowledge, that the "middle class" is a fuzzy term characterized by an "overabundance of meanings" (19),

which brings up more complexities and problems than it offers conceptual and analytical usefulness.

To some extent this could be considered a strength of the volume, as it provides a degree of sophisticated flexibility, treating the middle class not as an established conceptual framework but as "a working social concept, a material experience, a political project, and a cultural practice – all of which acquire meaning only within specific historical experiences and discursive conditions" (21). Although I had hoped for a set of theoretical navigation points for studies in the middle class and was initially disappointed that they were difficult to locate, the further and deeper I read into and around the volume (for it is not the type of academic book that one needs to read in a linear fashion), the clearer it became to me that the notion of the middle class is vexed from a huge variety of perspectives, and a coherent theoretical framework for middle class studies not only does not exist, but perhaps cannot exist.

One key debate that arises again and again in the chapters is whether the middle class is a discursive or sociological formation. Indeed, this conceptual tension may be a particularly fruitful site for ongoing work in the field, be it contemporary or historical. The position outlined by the editors is instructive: it is unhelpful to simply accept the notion that the middle class is "a mere abstraction, a discourse, a metaphor, a rhetorical device" (20); but, similarly, scholars should take great care to not simply accept "middle-class identity (if not an actually existing middle class) as yet another given" (20). The volume succeeds in challenging and questioning these "two poles of interpretation by radically moving the historical analysis from fixed categories and preconceived definitions to the historical practices of what it meant to be – and live – the middle class in a variety of geographical locations" (21). By so doing, *Making the Middle Class* represents a significant contribution to the relocation of grand historical narratives about modernity, colonialism, capitalism, and civilization, and the place of the middle class in all of these structures.

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The Art World's Dark Matter

BRUCE BARBER

Gregory Sholette. *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*.
Pluto Press, 2011. 240 pp.

In Lana Jokel's 1972 film monograph on Andy Warhol (Blackwood Films), the
artist is asked to conjecture what he considers will become the next major inter-
national art movement. With his voice stammering a little under the weight of the
question, Warhol responds in a familiar affected manner with "ah…it'll be…ah…p
…. po…pol …political art……" The last forty years have in fact proved Warhol
right in several senses outlined by Sholette in this recent book, provocatively titled
for the neoliberal age: *Dark Matter: Art & Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*.
Post-1972 art has indeed become deeply political, both in what we could term its art
market capital affirmative characteristics (East Village, YBA artists, Saatchi and Saa-
tchi, international Biennales, the vertiginous art market), and its anti-capital critical
manifestations in the work of an international reserve army of hundreds of marginal-
ized, invisible cultural workers, political artists and groups, many of whom sent New
York-based PAD/D (Political Art Documentation / Distribution) examples of their
art political activities for over a decade. It is deeply ironic that this rich archive is now
part of the collection of that bastion of high culture, the Museum of Modern Art in
New York City, and now available for researchers like Sholette who are attempting to
discern the trajectories, successes and failures of political art projects.

As a founding member of PAD/D and REPO history (1989-2000), a collaborative
group of artists practicing sign interventions aimed at constituting and repossessing
lost and hidden histories in urban contexts, Sholette has had an insider's view for
over two decades of the art world and its discontents. He employs his participant
observer's experience to formulate some powerful critiques of art world hierarchies
and institutions, revealing the role of artists, described by the author as "the obscure
mass of "failed" artists" (3), and the "dark matter"—the reserve army of surplus
labour in Marx's famous thesis—who sustain and reproduce the global art world.
Throughout its eight chapters this book provides some well-argued insights into the
ideological struggles and forms of resistance that have played out in various, mostly
urban communities. Sholette explores examples of political agency manifested in art-
works and group actions that have challenged the hegemony of the art world if only

to be forgotten and marginalized, a minority co-opted and absorbed by the culturally dominant institutions. Borrowing the physical sciences' metaphor of dark matter as his unifying allegorical trope, the author conjectures that "without this obscure mass of 'failed' artists the small cadre of successful artists would find it difficult, if not impossible, to sustain the global art world as it appears today" (ibid.). Sholette argues further that without the "invisible mass, the ranks of the middle and lower level arts administrators would be depleted, [and] there would be no one left to fabricate the work of art stars or to manage their studios and careers." "And who," he asks rhetorically, "would educate the next generation of artists, disciplining their growing numbers into a system that mechanically reproduces prolific failure?" (ibid.).

This observation would be depressing enough if the avant-garde did not have the concept of failure directly inscribed within its fabric. Capitalist society's conventional indicators of artistic success are readily indicated by the accumulation of both material and symbolic capital, awards, certificates, diplomas, prizes, profitable sales, goods and property. The artist and his/her work become the subject/object of critical legitimation and valorization in newspapers, magazine reviews, journal essays, catalogues and books. S/he may also be offered honorary appointments and awards, etc. But these evaluations are *intrinsic* to success. The *succès de scandale* that with *épater le bourgeois* was a key social objective of the historical avant-gardes may be the only example of a success that includes in its very definition a measure of failure (scandal) that is *ipso facto* also perceived as success. The value of success however, like the value of beauty, the sublime and pleasure, which we know from Kant, is necessarily a question of judgment, about which Jacques Derrida has posted a signal warning.

> "Where is it to be found? This then, appears to be a/the question. Where indeed, is it to be found? Where is the limit between the inside and outside of failure?" (45).

Reading this book awry, *Dark Matter* may simply be an acknowledgement that the art world is a Ponzi-like pyramid scheme with artist players, payers and prayers at its base, symbolically and economically paying forward and upward to the accumulators of symbolic and actual capital aggregated at the apex: the mega art stars, gallerists, collectors, publishers, art critics and art historians. Sholette, however, is supremely aware of the political nuances in his prognoses, offering less a symptomology of a degraded art world than culturally strategic vehicles for critiquing capitalism that could be used as political models by the Occupy movement of today. As Sholette opines, "What is described in these pages as "dark matter" therefore, is not intrinsically progressive, not in the typical liberal or radical senses of that term." Instead, he argues, "it possesses at best a *potential* for progressive resistance, as well as for reactionary anger" (44).

Sholette's Marxist critique describes the artist agents and collaborators of *Dark Matter* as engaging in "hidden social production, missing mass, shadow archive," a reserve 'army of labour' without which the art world would simply collapse under the weight of its own contradictions (45). The author infers critical agency to this dark mass of invisible, surplus, yet essential artists who provide the shadow glue for the reproduction of the global art world. They are, he writes, "a presence/absence of a vast zone of cultural activity that can no longer be ignored." Sholette argues that although the artists within this shadow mass may be practically and perhaps therefore tactically invisible, "no amount of uncertainty relieves us of the responsibility to engage with them *politically,* as an essential element in a long standing promise of liberation yet to be fulfilled" (45).

Chapter 2, "The Grin of the Archive" offers a Derridean-inspired examination of PAD/D providing insights into its importance as a counter culture archive, less a product of archive fever than an active model for networking and political organizing throughout the 1980s, and hence for Sholette "a Cheshire grin without the cat" (70). Some readers may remember PAD/D's SECOND Sunday programs of performance at Franklin Furnace, meetings held on the third Sunday of every month at 339 Lafayette Street in NYC, where ideas for developing new strategies for practicing cultural activism in NYC and beyond were fomented. PAD/D's support of the 1984 "Artists Call against U.S. Intervention in Central America" had an active base of support around the world and particularly in Canada.. Chapter 3, entitled "History that Disturbs the Present," is an excellent insider report of the activities of REPOhistory, followed by in depth discussions of Temporary Services. Chapter 4, "TM"—Tactical Media, not as in the 1960's Transcendental Meditation—discusses DIY practiced by Public Collectors.org, Temporary Services and the large and growing group of interventionist collectives groups, and cooperatives the Critical Art Ensemble, Wochenklausur, Ala Plastica, Supeflex, subRosa, and other progressive political art groups (see list on p.107). With the introduction of social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Wordpress and MySpace in the 1990s, Sholette argues that in the contemporary world everything previously "marginalized, overlooked, or made redundant, requests our attention" (95), but inevitably such networking and sharing of the 'invisible' archive simple ensures that everyone has their fifteen minutes of fame only to sink back into obscurity and the precarity of the Dark Mass. Temporary Services (TS), described as "a Midwestern artists group dedicated to erasing the distinction between professional and everyday acts and creativity through archives, exhibitions, publications and public interventions" (99), is presented by Sholette as one of the few tactically efficient groups resistant to incorporation and or absorption into the cultural dominant.

After laying out in chapter 5 "the depressing conditions of glut, overproduction and

redundancy in the art world, everything from the market to the expansion in num-
bers of art graduates (BFA and MFA), Sholette describes the redemptive prospects
of some exemplary dark matter practitioners—for example, the détournements, gift
artists and DIY valorizers of everyday life, those following the tactical example of Mi-
chel de Certeau. As he posits, "in an age of deregulated aesthetic practice such dark
matter inevitably intervenes within the valorization process of official artistic produc-
tion" (99-100). Employing Nietzsche's powerful notion of *ressentiment* and creative
negativity (*Genealogy of Morals*), Sholette argues that the subversive impetus of the
agents of dark matter is a poisonous gift and a bottom-up counter-institutionality:
"indeed the archives, public projects, exhibitions, and publications of Temporary Ser-
vices, PAD/D, AWC, Critical Art Ensemble – and for that matter even the presence
of this book – would probably not be conceivable without the creative negativity
made possible by a shadowy *ressentiment*." (113).

Chapter 6, entitled "The Unnamable," discusses at length the protracted legal strug-
gle of Steve Kurtz of the Critical Art Ensemble, who with his scientist colleague
Robert Ferrell was arraigned under the auspices of the U.S. Government's Patriot Act
on charges of bioterrorism. The author describes the chill that this sent through the
art world, similar to the McCarthy virulent anti-communist witch hunt of the 1950s
and the community response to pay for their legal expenses and to exonerate Kurtz.
This is followed by a discussion of Tactical Media theory as practiced by groups like
CAE, ACT-UP Gran Fury and DIVA TV whose interventionist strategies challenged
the homophobic reactions to the AIDS and HIV crises.

As Sholette demonstrates throughout his book, the archival, historical redemptive
projects of many interventionist, tactical media, operative, and littoral art groups
owe a debt to the historical avant garde: dada, futurism, surrealism, productivism/
constructivism and also the neo avant-gardes such as situationism, pop, minimal and
conceptual art. "TM's most articulate predecessors, the Situationists, sought a total
negation of day-to-day fragmentation, not through the institutions of art, which they
saw as dead, but through a process of turning artistic practices outwards and against
monopoly capitalisms spectacularization of day-to-day reality" (146). The critical,
and one could say, philosophical impetus behind many political art groups described
in *Dark Matter* is derived from the Situationists and strategically their critical proce-
dure of *détournement* (diversion) that is conceptually allied to Walter Benjamin's con-
cept of allegory. At several points Sholette invokes Benjamin's work, associating his
media critique with the critical agency of tactical media. The critical impetus of TM
is closer perhaps to Benjamin's than is either John Heartfield's anti-fascist montages
or the process/technique and forms that art theorist Peter Bürger (1984) employed
in his influential arguments for sustaining the legitimate and authentic work of the
avant-garde—art/life sublation—and critical procedures that resolve the contradic-

tory features of *normative* avant-gardist practice that capitulates to bourgeois intentions. The Situationist notions of distantiation and decomposition (the destruction of conventional cultural forms), that are both implicitly and explicitly endorsed by many artist groups discussed in *Dark Matter* parallels the 'surrealist inspired' tropes that Benjamin employed in his discussion of allegory. The emphasis on meaning 'substitution' or 'sublimation' as a prelude to critical consciousness in Guy Debord and Gil Wolman's conception of *premonitory détournement* is also a form of critical redemption that is similar to the historical distantiation and quest for transcendence elaborated in Benjamin's theory of allegory.

Dark Matter may be compared also Guy Debord and Gil Wolman's conception of cultural exhaustion and the oppositional use of the strategy of détournement to resist and overcome this symptom of monopoly capitalism finds its homiletic in Walter Benjamin's "profound fascination of the sick man with the isolated and insignificant [is] succeeded by that disappointed abandonment of the exhausted emblem" (Benjamin, *Origins* 166). For in both strategies, the symptoms, or better, the `syndrome' of alienation, is seen as responsible and responsive – the *pharmakon* – "poison and drug" for both the sickness and the cure. Subsequently for Benjamin, Debord, Wolman, and arguably Sholette, critical consciousness comes only to those who have realized their own alienation as a part of the political (collective) present. For Benjamin, redemptive criticism, and for the Situationists, the construction and deconstruction of situations, for Sholette a Nietzschean inspired "shadowy *ressentiment*" (113), albeit representing a possible alternative to the passivity, isolation, and political death of those who acknowledge the central paradoxes inherent in our time.

The most insightful chapters in *Dark Matter* for this reviewer are those that attend to Sholette's dual [ethnographic] role as artist/activist and participant/observer. Much of the author's primary information on political art groups and collaborative art projects is discussed at length in Chapter 7. "Mock Institutions" is a richly augmented discussion with information gleaned from responses to an art group survey (with 67 from 211 respondents) undertaken in 2008 that is also graphically displayed (164-165) and appended to this volume. The survey questions directed at these groups were arraigned under four separate headings: Basic Information, Relationship to the Art World, Organizational Structure, and Reasons for Working in a Group or Collective. Sholette's survey indicates a wide range of responses, from politically sophisticated to the startlingly naïve.

Sholette distinguishes perhaps unfairly between "the dour leftist artists of the 1960's, 70's and early 80's" to illustrate how new artist groups such as The Yes Men, Carbon Defense League, and Applied Autonomy provide "plagiarized factories, mock corporations and ludic clown armies" in their pursuit of critical agency. He further

indicates that these mock institutions are "indifferent to proper organizational struc-
ture [and] that they adopt any convenient form of governance" (161). The author
concludes that "one could say a certain deregulated aesthetic is the 'new normal' in
an age of enterprise culture" (ibid) and argues that "corporate plagiarism has become
synonymous with the practice of Tactical Media." This parodistic dissimulation can
be redeemed politically if as is the case of The Yes Men, the art groups align their spec-
tacular actions with the objectives of specific NGOs and social justice groups, exactly
Marx and Engel's claim to resist political tendency. In their broadside against the
Young Hegelians and speculative philosophy in "The Holy Family" (1944) Marx and
Engels argued that socially informed cultural practice could be identified as either
liberal altruism, or as leftist *tendenzkunst* - and perhaps both. Like Marx's criticism
of this "wretched offal of socialist literature" the 'critique of critique' tendenzkunst
argument insists that while evidencing the 'correct political tendency' the artwork
remains still at the level of representation, merely acting out the forms of cultural
politics without providing the important political substance that would engender real
change. Armed with the legacy of Marx, Engels, Walter Benjamin, György Lukács, et
al., many on the left including Sholette would argue that the artist/intellectual should
align him/herself with the appropriate progressive or revolutionary forces within soci-
ety and their representative social groups and political parties. Like Marx and Engel's
critiques of Ferdinand Lassalle and Eugene Sue, much contemporary Dark Matter
art practice could also be criticized for evidencing the correct political tendency but
lacking the correct engagement with its object of concern, which would arguably
necessitate an adoption of the appropriate (time honoured), and normative political
strategies for social change.

The Occupy movement has been criticized by some for being tendentious, lacking
exemplary leaders, guiding principles or a clearly defined political philosophy or alle-
giance. *Dark Matter* is richly illustrated with primary research information on politi-
cal organizing, its successes and failures, as well copious examples of the strategic and
tactical roles the media -- culture -- can play in social change. Sholette provides sev-
eral effective strategies for the development of an authentic political praxis in the neo-
liberal age of enterprise. Perhaps the occupy and art groups political praxis could be-
gin with 'whatever' as the ethical ground for the potentiality of a party without party.
"I prefer not [to]…." says Herman Melville's Bartleby the scrivener, three times. This
famous speech act constitutes the ur text "what if/ever - potentiality" of Italian philos-
opher Giorgio Agamben's ethics for the contemporary philosopher (as) scrivener, the
one who like the party without party member may engage in "an experience of the
possible as such" (*Potentialities* 2000: 249). Does this privileging of potentiality in the
political process coincide with the renunciation of the creative will to power in Guy
Debord's famous line from his film *Critique de la separation* (1960-1)? "I have scarcely
begun to make you understand that I don't intend to play the game"…at least, one

could or perhaps should add, "not in the usual way." And yet creative negativity in the Nietzschean sense is an act of will, is it not? And if action speaks louder than words as we understand it in the vernacular sense, then perhaps preference (I prefer not) is an illocutionary act that infers the actual (result) of the speech act as a whole. This was certainly recognized as such by the receiver of Bartleby's 'communication' – the man of the law! This is also a structure versus agency issue (debate/*debat*) *n'est pas/nicht*? And this claim is necessarily one that the contemporary philosopher, artist or politician may identify as an aporia for the continuance/maintenance/potentiality of philosophy, art and politics as modes of institutionalized discourse. Taking his cues from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* "thought thinking itself, that is a kind of mean between thinking nothing and thinking something, between potentiality and actuality" (251), Agamben affirms the anaphorized potential of Bartleby's speech act: "I would prefer not to prefer not to…" (255). He follows with a discussion that presents the proposition that "the aporias of contingency…are tempered by two principles" (261). The first secured by the "irrevocability of the past" and the second, "conditioned necessity" both of which are contingent upon one another. What if conventional party politics, partisanship, and left/centre/right divisions were a thing of the past? This is certainly a tactical media question for the present that the author of *Dark Matter* reinforces in his conclusion—the apotheosis of dark matter—that must rise from the "the dawn of the dead" (188).

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Colonial Trains, Postcolonial Tracks

NILAK DATTA

Marian Aguiar. *Tracking Modernity: India's Railway and the Culture of Mobility.* University of Minnesota Press, 2011, xxiv +226 pp.

When I first heard Marian Aguiar discuss her book project on Indian Railways at an informal gathering of faculty and graduate students in the fall of 2005, I was excited, skeptical, and optimistic about her project all at once. As a child, Indian trains had always fascinated me. To my childish fancy, they always magically appeared on the horizon and carried unknown people to far-off places. Because of this, I'd always wanted to be a steam-engine train driver. I could visit distant places and without having to answer for it, return home smeared with grease, dirt, and (coal) dust. Besides, I'd heard exciting stories of my paternal grandfather who worked for the British Indian Railways as a stationmaster during the Inter-War years and retired during the heyday of postcolonial reconstruction. In fact, my happiest childhood memories are those of watching steam engines whistling at the sky. When Aguiar spoke of her interest, I anticipated an exciting read.

However, I was skeptical of the efficacy of the project. After all, a study of what trains have signified to a previously colonized people could considerably rehash what has already been described in Indian history schoolbooks. The colonial administration touted the Railways in India as a harbinger of progress and as an emancipatory tool freeing Indians from archaic traditions, while masking the element of political control over a subcontinent and the inevitable exploitation of India's natural resources. But when Aguiar added that she was also interested in exploring what trains mean to Indians today, my hopes were roused as well. As a Bengali, I'd heard horror stories, which had been passed down four generations, about the ethnic massacres in trains crisscrossing the Bengal-Pakistan border. Now, most discussions of postcolonial literature on the India-Pakistan Partition tend to focus on the sufferings of people situated in the Punjab-Pakistan border; the sufferings of those in the Bengal-East Pakistan region (now Bangladesh) rarely find mention. Moreover, most exegeses of Punjab-oriented Partition literature have not offered theoretically coherent understandings of the broader rhetorics of modernity at work. As Aguiar spoke warmly of the importance of the Railways at this traumatic historical moment, I hoped that her book would correct such a bias. Again, as a Bengali, I was familiar with

internationally acclaimed film director Satyajit Ray's depiction of trains. As a fan of Bollywood films, I'd noticed how mainstream Indian filmmakers used trains as a setting for developing characters' ruminative moments, and even sometimes, to forward a raucous movement of action and plot. The western world has consistently misunderstood this genre by calling these films "musicals." I hoped that Aguiar's project might correct this bias too.

Tracking Modernity: India's Railway and the Culture of Modernity did not disappoint. The singular achievement of this book is that it not only revisits the canon of Partition narratives through rigorous attention to a greater diversity of texts including film, but it also offers fine distinctions between the ways recent postcolonial fictions of community are influenced by the continuing presence of railways in India. The third chapter analyzes how railways were germane to the formation of an imagined community in the immediate aftermath of the traumatic 1947 Partition into India and Pakistan; the fourth and fifth chapters, and particularly, the Conclusion bring out the far-reaching consequences of this unique association with Indian trains that are still being expressed in Indian literary texts, films, and Indian national politics.

In 1947, people migrating from both sides (Hindus to India and Muslims to Pakistan) sought respite in the refugee trains; the latter were understood as a "civil arena" (75). The violence of the Partition sorely tested that belief. In chapter three, Aguiar combines theoretical insights from de Certeau and Etienne Balibar to make two remarkable points. First, the train offers the paradigm of a "space suspended from the intimacy of place", thus effecting the transformation of social relations from concrete lived relations to abstract generalities. She shrewdly observes that this process closely "parallels [that of] national constituency" (84). The train becomes a sign of "abstract collective identity", a process of "deterritorialization" implicit in modernity that allowed perpetrators of ethnic violence to target refugee trains (and their occupants) for murder, rapine, and loot. Second, the targeting of refugee trains reduced individual identities (of fleeing refugees) to mere communal ones, a process that, according to Aguiar (quoting Anthony Giddens), dis-embeds and displaces everyday social relations (85). Modernity disembeds established social norms through such actions. The "civil dreams of modernity", as exemplified by the grand narratives of progress through voluntary movement, are broken; the counter-narratives of violence and terror now forge imagined communities. Close readings of Partition literature and film ground these two theoretical insights. This chapter offers the most sustained balance of theory and close reading in the book.

The materials in chapters four and five explore the large-scale development of railway networks in the post-independence (post 1947) period and the ways in which it forged modern forms of national consciousness. Inspired by Raymond Williams's

work, Aguiar argues that the socially progressive era of railway extensions created an artificial "relational space" that allowed Indians to see themselves as part of a large network connecting developed and underdeveloped areas as a "kind of seam" (105-107). She astutely claims that, both epistemologically and ontologically, the trains' creation of relational space allows the subject to form new connections, thereby forging a new kind of subjectivity born out of the "relations of movement" (107). Named by Aguiar a "traffic consciousness", this subjectivity has an ambivalent relationship to the dominant "rhetorical, strategic, and imaginative" goal of achieving "economic homogeneity" in India (102, 108-115). Aguiar demonstrates this mostly through her detailed analysis of film director Satyajit Ray's Apu trilogy. For example, she sees the train in the films as a harbinger of change and a producer of "the ambivalent consciousness and social relations of traffic" in the life of Ray's protagonist Apu (109-110). In her analysis, she proves how the train while being a "persistent symbol of the new" also symbolizes those forces that fragment and destroy a holistic rural consciousness. Apu's hopes and dreams are crushed by the seamlessness of the railway network. The network contains both a material and ideological structure. This structure lends itself, in a seemingly natural way, to incorporation by the post-independence rhetorics of modernization, modernity, and progress.

In these chapters, Aguiar's analyses also cover a wide range of texts from *different stages* of post-independence India to show how artists have questioned the monolithic vision of a modern India; her analysis shows how artists revisit its relevance to everyday realties. Aguiar's work makes fine distinctions between the ways the male *auteur* and female writers pay attention to class and gender inequalities respectively. She also shows that all post-colonial narratives don't use the "traffic consciousness" of their protagonists to question the dominant state ideology to the same degree. The position of the speaking subject depends on the relative degree of upward social mobility, a residue of the "rhetoric of colonial modernity", which Aguiar analyzed in the Preface, as having placed modernity and mobility in a direct causal relationship (xvii). For instance, on account of the artists' greater socially mobile status, diasporic fiction and film on India such as Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* and Aditya Chopra's film *Dilwale Dulhanya Le Jayenge* are able to use the train to represent the nostalgia of an imagined and distant homeland, a position not necessarily available to more homegrown novelists and film directors (128-129).

The fourth and fifth chapters of Aguiar's book boldly claim that the broader alignments between subjectivity, mobility, and narration in postcolonial India make these narratives receptive to ideology-critique for three reasons. First, mobility becomes a metaphor that affords a forward movement of the stories. Second, the constructed spaces of the railway apparatus and the spaces in the train allow the possibility of this forward momentum through storytelling. Third, the train's motion allows the subject

to ruminate on the phenomenological possibilities made available to the memory and to the imagination (117-118). Unfortunately, Aguiar's application of these claims to the developing scenario in postcolonial India rests on the implicit claim that the rhetorics of colonial modernity are still at work in new avatars.

In her first chapter, Aguiar had argued that trains were understood as symbols of a "rational utopia", a term she borrows from Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Briefly put, de Certeau had claimed that the impermeability of the train's interior to the outside world it traverses gives the passenger a space of contemplative retreat from the complete chaos of life outside (de Certeau 111-114). Aguiar deconstructs the myth of such impermeability as colonial modernity's attempt to preserve alterity and difference both through the phenomenological possibilities of hermetic isolation and a contemplative detachment through forward movement. However, despite the emergence of a "traffic consciousness" in postcolonial times, she applies the same phenomenological model to explain the problems of postcolonial identity and individual consciousness in later chapters. While discussing how, with the transformation of India through the Railways, women became a "kind of front line for maintaining certain patriarchal and class social orders", Aguiar launches on a discussion of three films that range from the conservative representation of female train travelers in the 1960s to that found in diasporic films of the 1990s (Aguiar 137- 144). In Aditya Chopra's 1995 hit film *Dilwale Dulhanya Le Jayenge*, the tenor of her argument suggests that, because of the ever-present distinctions between private and public space caused by the same binaries of inside and outside, the train "plays a stimulating… role [in narrating] the expression, sublimation, and finally, compromise of female desire" (144). The use of psychoanalytic terminology notwithstanding, the colonial contemplative attitude appears magically installed as a ten-armed goddess in such analyses. By preserving alterity and difference, this deity invests postcolonial protagonists and eponymous narrators alike with full powers to resuscitate a colonial attitude of contemplative retreat.

Trains as products of colonial modernity's rational utopia run their course through postcolonial junctions. In the concluding chapter of her book, Aguiar takes up the cultural production and meaning of terror; terrorism is both a material and cultural phenomenon as it adopts and adapts to the railway's "enduring role as an emblem of modernity" (151). Recent terrorist attacks on Indian trains become counter-narratives to the rational emancipatory rhetoric of the postcolonial state. Postcolonial Indian "traffic consciousness" continues to pay its tithes to the colonial utopia through *strum und drang*. But Aguiar's point is taken. After all, trains have endured in India as symbols of modernity. Greater mobility (read, voluntary movement) has implied greater access to socio-economic resources. In the lay sense, "to *be* modern" is to be upwardly mobile (1, emphasis in original). So, *any* oppositional discourse such as ter-

rorism disrupts the bonhomie of public life by exposing the acceptance of everyday train travel in metropolitan centers (like Mumbai) as the product of a nation state's ideological labor. A terrorist attack on Mumbai's "Western Line" exposes everyday travel as forced, not voluntary, movement (167). While offering a *longue durée* vista of violence, murder, accidents, terrorism, and suicide on Indian trains, Aguiar brings the discussion of such counter-narratives into the broader cultural semiotics of modernism and modernity.

I think one should read this book twice in order to assess its potential. It should first be read as a collection of brilliant chapters. For instance, the book's second chapter can be read as a descriptive analysis of the nationalist discourse that exposed the colonial rhetoric of development through voluntary participation in train travel. This discourse critiqued such rhetoric by positioning the railways as a means of exploitation through the "compulsion of displacement" (xxi, 52, 60). Thus, at first, the reader could pay attention to the broad religious platform (no pun intended) from which a diverse number of social reformers and literary figures like Swami Vivekananda, "Rishi" Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, and Rabindranath Tagore rejected the Enlightenment framework upon which the colonial justification of the railway projects rested. With a second reading, however, the reader will realize that the chapter's strength lies in the way it narrates an important historical part of the relationship Indians and Westerners have had with modernity, a relationship that was, and continues to be, influenced by the "spatial and temporal paradigms of the [Indian] railway" (69). India's trains have linked her cities, towns, and villages; they've helped redefine their presence less as points on a map and more as part of a modern Indian consciousness. As such, they are the material grounds of that unifying consciousness.

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Rethinking Race and Digital Divides

LISA PATTI

In their introduction to the edited collected *Race After the Internet*, Lisa Nakamura and Peter A. Chow-White trace the emergence of multiple digital divides in the wake of what they call at different moments the "biotechnical turn," the "technobiological turn," and the "techno-genetic turn"–a cultural, institutional, and scholarly transformation that "privileges the technological and specifically the digital over other forms of knowledge, mediation, and interaction"(4). They open the collection by declaring the importance of an expansion of critical race scholarship that addresses the conceptual and experiential imbrication of race and the digital. Turning to the *African American Lives* series produced for PBS by Henry Louis Gates as a paradigmatic example, Nakamura and Chow-White argue that Gates' investment in digitally distributed genealogical inquiries about racial identity highlights the ways in which "race has itself become a digital medium, a distinctive set of informatic codes, networked mediated narratives, maps, images and visualizations that index identity"(5).

The recognition of a "digital divide" isn't new to critical race theory or to broader discussions of technology, but this collection advances these conversations by combining fresh investigations of unequal access to technology along and across racial lines with an exploration of the "co-production of race and computing"(6). This approach frames the collected essays within a dynamic critical matrix in which various constituencies are defined not only through their access to and representation within digital media but also through their tactical engagements with digital media. The collection thus manages to resist the utopian theorization of digital media as racially neutral without limiting its analysis to the representational biases and limits on display on digital screens. Citing Tara McPherson's opening essay on the relationship between discourses of race and the development of the UNIX operating system and her observation of a shared modularity between UNIX and racial logics as a critical model, Nakamura and Chow-White propose that "media critics must force themselves to do more than read what's visible in new media's interfaces, for this work may distract us from the working of race within code itself"(8-9). With this provocation, the editors tie their advocacy of critical race scholarship that recognizes the shifting definitions of s race in a digital context to the separation of the digital from the visual.

Wendy Chun's "Race and/as Technology or How to Do Things With Race" investigates the ways in which race can be analyzed not only as a digital representation but also as a technique. She finds in a close reading of Greg Pak's film *Robot Stories* a template for the rethinking of high-tech Orientalism or the figuration of the "raced other as technology"(49) because the film "plays[s] with the stereotypes of Asian Americans as relentless, robotic workers, as looking all the same (can't tell them apart), as dragon ladies, in order to create a livable future – literally a future in which Asian Americans and African Americans live as the non-abject"(52). By approaching race *as* technology, the film challenges the link between visuality and representation, "making possible new modes of agency and causality"(56).

The effort to "rethink the rhetoric of the digital divide"(11) also entails a rigorous examination of new forms of racial coding, particularly within new media. In his essay "Does the Whatever Speak?," Alexander R. Galloway begins with a photograph of the rehearsal for the inauguration of President Barack Obama depicting the stand-ins for the President and his wife–a black man and a black woman. Galloway observes the bizarre specificity of this moment of racial typing: "The very lack of necessity drills forward like an irresistible force. Racial coding has not gone away in recent years, it has only migrated into the realm of the dress rehearsal, the realm of pure simulation, and as simulation it remains absolutely necessary. The Obama body doubles, as pure simulation, must be black"(113). This reflection on the reliance of the virtual on the absolute buttresses Galloway's observation that the popular massively multiplayer role playing game *World of Warcraft* operates through a split logic in which "race is static and universal, while class is variable and learned"(118). His examination of racialized avatars and their rigid coding leads to a call to embrace "the whatever" as a critical and political intervention.

The reimagining of the rhetorics of the digital divide turns to social networking in two directly linked essays contributed by danah boyd and Eszter Hargittai. boyd mines interviews with Massachusetts teenagers about their social networking experiences to investigate digital segregation among social media platforms. The academic year 2006-2007 witnessed a radical shift from MySpace to Facebook as the preferred social networking site among white teenagers. One of the users boyd interviews describes MySpace as a "ghetto," adding rhetorical resonance to boyd's observation of the racial division that emerged during this time between MySpace and Facebook. boyd cautiously uses the term "digital white flight" to describe this migration, registering her reluctance to "devalue the historical tragedy that white racism brought to many cities" but noting the importance of issuing "a stark framework for seeing the reproduction of social divisions in a society still shaped by racism"(218). Hargittai's quantitative analysis of the racially segregated use of a set of social networking sites complements boyd's ethnographic analysis. Collecting data from two cohorts of stu-

dents at the University of Illinois, Chicago during the same academic year, Hargittai finds race and ethnicity to be significant variables in the usage of specific social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook. She concludes that online social networking in many ways replicates offline social networking, constraining the imagined possibilities of cross-cultural interaction in online fora. These paired studies support the collection's overall investment in moving beyond the formulation of the digital divide solely in terms of unequal resources (although issues of access remain relevant and urgent) in order to acknowledge the multiple divides that structure digital experiences.

The final set of essays in the collection returns to the focus on the "biotechnical turn" introduced by the editors. Developments in racial genomics intersect with the expansion of digital media to produce important iterations of the "race as technology" model introduced by Chun. Alonda Nelson and Jeong Won Hwang explore one of these points of intersection in their discussion of the proliferation of genealogical revelation videos on YouTube. Young amateur genealogists use genetic ancestry tests provided by biotechnology companies to explore their genetic and racial histories, record their discoveries on video (including the moment of the "reveal" in which they open the results of their genetic tests for the first time on camera), and then post their revelation videos on YouTube, inviting viewers to comment on what are often surprising results that challenge the link between racial identity and genetic identity. Nelson and Hwang describe these videos as "roots revelations" and argue that the videos allow the young genealogists to "perform the new or elaborated selves made available to them through genetic ancestry testing"(272), transforming these revelations into digitally-mediated social encounters.

Race After the Internet provides a new set of frameworks for analyzing race and technology, continuing established conversations about the digital divide while drawing attention to the emergence of multiple digital divides. One of the main strengths of the collection is its interdisciplinarity, showcasing new scholarship from the fields of media studies, literary studies, communication, information studies, and sociology. The volume manages to maintain critical coherence while bringing together discussions of gaming, genomics, online journalism, social networking, labor relations, and data mining (to name only a small selection of the book's subjects). In a field in which new technological and cultural developments often limit the endurance of scholarly attempts to make sense of those developments, this collection promises to have staying power for scholars interested in developing critical race studies in tandem with developments in technology.

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Psycho-History

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In *The Fantasy of Feminist History* an eminent cultural and gender historian interrogates some of the basic methodological and epistemological assumptions that constitute her discipline. While affirming history's continued intellectual relevance—it is historians who, crucially, "introduce the difference of time" into interdisciplinary theoretical discourse, for instance (42)—Joan Wallach Scott nonetheless seeks here to problematize, if not transform, many of the fundamental aspects of her field. From the perspective of a scholar steeped in a wide variety of intellectual currents, including feminist theory, gender studies, and poststructuralism, conventional or mainstream history simultaneously appears too dry and retains too many problematic ideological blind spots (particularly when it comes to women's history) to be practiced in a "business-as-usual" fashion. In broad terms, then, this book articulates a "critique of history's disciplinary assumptions" in order, Scott avers, to produce a "beneficial 'vertigo'" that will lead, the author hopes, to "the writing of a different kind of history" (3-4). In her formulation of what we might call a *history of difference*—a discourse defined by its revisionist focus on examining previously marginalized individuals and social groups, its linguistic and methodological self-consciousness, its disruption of key disciplinary concepts such as the agential subject and teleological master-narrative, its refusal of epistemological closure or scholarly certainty, and its linking of scholarship with politicized critique—Scott inhabits the same general terrain as certain "postmodern" historians who have, over the past several decades, sought to leaven what they perceive to be a stubbornly conservative discipline with the fruitful insights of critical theory (scholars such as F.R. Ankersmit, Keith Jenkins, Dominick LaCapra, Alan Munslow, Hélène Bowen Raddeker, Beverley Southgate, and Hayden White come to mind here).

Scott's specific emphasis in this book is on applying terminology drawn from psychoanalytic theory—particularly from the work of Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek—to writing and thinking about history. As such, concepts such as fantasy, castration, and sexual difference are used by Scott in order to explore the ways in which the putative "social fact[s]" that history tends to be concerned with explaining can be understood not only in terms of their concrete or objective occurrence, but also according to their "unconscious dimension" and in relation to the "operations of fantasies" that

are finally irreducible to the realm of determinate knowledge (19). Indeed, for Scott, it is precisely the conundrums inherent in sexual difference and gender identity, including the absence of any "necessary correspondence between the anatomy of men and women and the psychic positions of masculinity and femininity," that "make history" in the first instance (17). From this perspective, the focus of feminist historians shifts away from, say, the recovery of occluded female subjects and their material "experience" (the object of Scott's critique in her seminal 1991 essay "The Evidence of Experience"); this latter approach becomes untenable, for Scott, since it presumes the stability and knowability of the subject that psychoanalysis—in its emphasis on sexed identity as an "unsolvable riddle" (17) that imbricates the psychic and social, the natural and cultural, and the material and discursive in an endless circulation of energies—fundamentally puts in question. Instead, Scott argues for a broad shift in emphasis in history away from *the subject* as such toward "the means and effects of … subject production as it has varied over time" (40). Scott's psychoanalytically-inflected critique of historiography thus centres around the questions of "how, under what conditions, and with what fantasies the identities of men and women—which so many historians take to be self-evident—are articulated and recognized" (21).

Each of the seven chapters in this book—three of which are reprints of essays previously published elsewhere—takes up an aspect of the complex relation between gender and the production of subjectivity with respect to the disciplinary history of feminist thought in general and women's history in France in particular (*history*, for Scott, names both events in "the past" and a discipline that produces knowledge in written form about those events). In the introduction, Scott clearly establishes the theoretical framework that undergirds the subsequent essays. Drawing on an impressive array of thinkers on a number of distinct but intersecting topics, including historiography, gender, identity, causality, and constructivism, Scott demonstrates lucidly how critical and psychoanalytic theory may productively be deployed in the service of what she terms a "critical reading practice for history" (4).

The book's first chapter combines a narrative about the emergence of feminist history in the early 1970s with reflections on its contemporary disciplinary location and future directions. If many—though, crucially, not all—of the goals of early feminist historians have been attained (women have been "[introduced] into the picture" as subjects of mainstream history, while an "enormous written corpus" has been produced by women historians [24]), Scott wonders if a high price has been paid for the attainment of institutional legitimacy, by a concomitant blunting of insurgent energies. Interrogating the "melancholy" of an earlier generation of feminist scholars for a passionate, affective engagement with women's history, Scott thus argues for the replacement of this idealized lost object with a reconceived model of "feminism as a restless critical operation" unattached to any essentialized notions of identity

(35). The second chapter demonstrates how such a critique might unfold in practice. Re-imagining identity as a process of *echoing*, a "repetition [that] constitutes alteration" (52), Scott analyzes a series of writings by early French feminists—particularly scenes involving the recurrent figures of the female "orator" and the "mother"—in order to demonstrate how, from a contemporary perspective, a fantasized narrative of sameness, whereby earlier feminist arguments lead seamlessly to their culmination in contemporary successes, has tended to elide important conflicts and differences between feminists in earlier periods. Chapter three discusses how the field of twenty-first century feminist thought and political action are just as discontinuous, albeit in relation to a radically different context. However, the fissures between, for example, a universalizing, "First-World" feminism, and the particular engagements emerging from the "global circulation of feminist strategies" (80) are, for Scott, a source of critical possibility and (qualified) hope. Localized, decentralized, and heterogeneous feminist strategies, exemplified by the Women In Black movement, thus contest the "reductive categorizing" and "ruses of essentialism" (74, 75) that structure the heavily racialized and gendered discourse of the so-called "war on terror." Scott's fourth chapter extends this focus on the complex intersections of gender, race, and nation in the post-9/11 world. Dissatisfied with the overly hasty equations made by some feminists in the context of debates in France about the *hijab*, between the secular culture of the West and women's liberation on the one hand, and Islam and misogyny on the other, Scott responds by tracing the ambivalent, contradictory relation that has inhered between secularism and gender equality since the very founding of the French Republic. In her fifth chapter, Scott continues her attempt to link contemporary and historical gender politics in France, analyzing the ways in which a particular strand of French nationalism has been structured around the metaphor of heteronormative sexual "seduction."

Scott concludes *The Fantasy of Feminist History* with a brief epilogue in which she reflects on the question of archiving the documents of feminist theory (including her own work). Wondering initially if "there might be a contradiction ... between the conservative tendency of any archive and the avowed commitment to revolution" of many feminist theorists and scholars, she ultimately rejects this idea of archivization as "imprisonment" in favour of a model of the archive as a dynamic, contested space and site of transferential encounters between the historian and her objects of study (143, 145). Here, Scott seeks to differentiate the specialized territory of the historian from the object of the musings of "philosophers and others who haven't spent much time in archives," including Jacques Derrida, whose *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* she briefly references here (143). But Derrida's 1996 monograph, which similarly focuses on the relation between psychoanalysis and history, suggests, in turn, an important limitation to Scott's overall approach in this book. Derrida devotes much of *Archive Fever* to discussing the work of the Jewish historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi,

whose reading of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* attempts to prove, in an exemplary scholarly mode, that Freud's wildly speculative argument about the Egyptian origins of Moses is indeed historically inaccurate. Yet Yerushalmi's text simultaneously calls into question its own status as objective history by concluding with a "Monologue with Freud" in which the father of psychoanalysis is conjured as a spectral presence able to discourse directly with the historian. Breaking with historiographic convention by "dar[ing] to speak to the phantom" (Derrida 39), Yerushalmi, in Derrida's estimation, points to an outside or fissure in determinate knowledge, thus resisting the lure of a closed-off, totalized archive. There is a certain performative aspect here—whereby an argument is secured via the generic *form* of a text—that is rather lacking in Scott's book. Despite, from the outset, stressing an urgent need "to attend to passion and madness in the writing of history" (2)—that, in other words, feminist scholars should approach history with a kind of unbounded *jouissance*, as part of their ongoing attempts to resist ideological strictures that persist in disciplinary and methodological norms—Scott herself remains curiously bound to sober expression and rational analysis. In the end, Scott's claim that the titular "fantasy" and its related concepts (passion, the irrational, the unconscious, and so forth) "disrupts ... the certainty of disciplined history's categories" (21) remains something of an abstraction, rather than a fully fleshed-out method for doing history differently.

That being said, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* remains a fascinating and timely engagement with important questions concerning the rhetoric and ideology of historical representation, and it will undoubtedly have broad appeal for scholars working in and across a range of disciplines and fields of study, including history, gender studies, critical theory, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, and postcolonialism. Scott is particularly adept at rendering complex theoretical concepts in eminently clear, readable terms, as well as at providing concise genealogies of the institutional, intellectual, and social contexts in which those concepts were initially developed and have been put to use subsequently. She is also good at reminding us of what is at stake in the histories we write, and that thinking about the way we tell stories about the past has no little bearing on urgent political questions in the present.

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Moving Mountains:
Art History for the Neoliberal Era
DANIELLE CHILD

Nato Thompson, ed. *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011.* Creative Time Books and MIT Press, 2012. 280 pp.

Living as Form is an important volume for anyone interested in understanding the complexities of socially engaged art. The volume accompanies an exhibition of the same name held in Essex Street Market, Manhattan, curated by Nato Thompson and co-authored by Creative Time—a New York-based non-profit arts organization—and Independent Curators International, NY. Thompson gathers together over one hundred projects in a collection of socially engaged art spanning twenty years. Although this is not an exhaustive compendium, it is a valuable sourcebook for anyone wishing to see what socially engaged art "does." Thompson consulted twenty-five advising curators in preparation for the exhibition and the book, which is demonstrative of the collective nature of projects such as this. Whilst presenting a plethora of artists and artists'/community groups' projects, the volume also collects together seven essays from key commentators on socially-engaged art: Nato Thompson (editor, Chief Curator at Creative Time, *Seeing Power: Socially Engaged Art in the Age of Cultural Production*), Claire Bishop (*Participation*, *Artificial Hells*), Maria Lind (Director of the Tensta Konsthall, independent curator and critic), Teddy Cruz (political architect, *Estudio Teddy Cruz*), Carol Becker (*Thinking in Place*), Brian Holmes (*Unleashing the Collective Phantoms, Continental Drift*) and Shannon Jackson (*Social Works*). Although these authors have the subject of socially engaged art in common, their approaches and methods are diverse—from activism and architecture through to curating and theatre—which aptly reflects the heterogeneous worlds in which socially engaged art manifests.

Thompson's introductory essay to the volume is articulate and thought-provoking. The opening begins by re-visiting old ground—the familiar rhetoric surrounding collective, socially-engaged art and relational aesthetics—such as the 2001 Women on Waves project (featured in Claire Bishop's canonical *Artforum* essay "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents"), the diverse terminology and types of practice (as cited in Maria Lind's "The Collaborative Turn") and the common avoidance of the question "is it art?" However, it soon becomes apparent that, in a volume such as this, the ground needs to be fertilized in order for Thompson to present his own approach;

an approach that draws upon art historical references without tying these new prac-
tices to a particular lineage or legacy. Instead, Thompson shows us how unimportant
categorization is to a social practice that has now traversed the art-life boundary. The
question is no longer "is it art?" but "what is life?" (33). However, this new practice
is rooted in and yet distinct from the twentieth century avant-gardist adage of the
return of art to life praxis. The projects discussed in this volume cannot be articulated
in terms of the everyday aesthetic; they *are* the everyday. Thompson shifts the focus
from the aesthetic to the methodologies adopted by socially engaged artists. He also
emphasizes the spatial component of new artistic practices that move out of the gal-
lery and, quite literally, onto the streets. These acts play with the cultural symbolism
of a society now thoroughly ensconced in the spectacle. Perhaps play is not the cor-
rect term; serious issues ranging from the political and the social to the cultural and
the geographical are the subject and object of these formless acts. Because the spec-
tacle is embedded in contemporary society—fulfilling Debord's perhaps premature
accolade "the society of the spectacle"—the symbolic becomes the real and the real is
what socially engaged art takes as its material.

Part II changes pace. The priorities of art are now changed and this is routed in the
social, which Thompson argues is symptomatic of cultural production at the begin-
ning of the 21st century. He begins to contextualize this change with a focus on what
Thompson terms "spectacular living" (29). In the past twenty years, there have been
profound changes within society including the growth of the creative industries and
the emphasis placed on symbolic forms adopted by the media and the advertising
world. Thompson argues that this all-encompassing focus on the spectacular has af-
fected the way in which artists and activists respond to the world. Symbolic forms
become important to the media and artists, activists and cultural producers alike.
Acknowledging the new position of the symbolic helps us to understand the forms of
resistance to that power from artists, activists and engaged citizens.

Whilst contextualizing social practice, Thompson contributes one of the most ar-
ticulate distinctions between "relational aesthetics" (Bourriaud) and socially engaged
practices—a familiar debate, and one that is returned to within this volume. He
distinguishes between relational artworks and socially engaged projects in terms of
space and time; relational art is a short-term investment—a temporary project that
adopts the symbolism of activism—whereas socially engaged works adopt the "stra-
tegic turn" of a long-term investment in space. The strategic turn is local, long-term
and community-based (31). The practices in this volume espouse the "strategic turn"
rather than making a short-term investment in gallery space. Thompson concludes
his essay by re-emphasizing the conception that socially engaged art produces effects
and affects instead of placing a focus on form. This idea is key to opening our minds
to socially engaged works; one must move away from the modernist focus on form

that has dominated twentieth century art historical discourse and turn to concepts that help us understand today's artistic production.

Claire Bishop's essay elaborates the discussion of the "spectacle." Whilst acknowledging that it is a key word in analyses of socially engaged art, she notes that the term is rarely used in the Debordian sense, which refers to social relations under capitalism. These social relations, we recall, are mediated by images. Bishop recounts Boris Groys' updated notion for the information age—the "spectacle without spectators"—and argues that participatory art "forecloses the traditional idea of spectatorship and suggests a new understanding of art without audiences, one in which everyone is a producer" (36). But what are the historical conditions of this new phase of artistic production? For Bishop these are twofold. On the one hand, there are the practices that are born out of the legacy of the historical avant-garde; on the other, there are those that emerge out of the 1960s' legacy. The former adopts constructivist gestures of social impact, proposing an alternative to an unjust world, the collective production of which is affirmative. The latter adopts a nihilist redoubling of alienation that negates the world's injustice and illogicality on its own terms. In this case, the collective production is indirect, what Bishop conceives of as the "negation of negation" (36): the Situationist International's "dérive," for example.

Bishop utilizes Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's critique of capitalism as a way of articulating the tension between two different interpretations of participatory art. However, Bishop's is not a direct reading of their analysis. She understands the two modes of critique to be in tension with one another when, in fact, Boltanski and Chiapello state that it is the four sources of indignation on which the critiques are based that can be at odds with one another, thus creating an apparent incoherence or tension (Boltanski and Chiapello 38). Boltanski and Chiapello propose that each mode of critique comes to the foreground within distinct phases of capitalism; for example, the social critique within the 1930s and the artist critique post-1968. Around the 1990s, they claim, capitalism co-opts the terms of the artist critique, creating a society in which the ideological traits associated with a certain conception of artist becomes a model for management and work (flexibility, individuality, creativity, etc.). A constant tension is not necessarily fostered between the critiques, as Bishop suggests; rather, the types of critique target the negative aspects of capitalism within the respective periods. Therefore, as the artist critique gets absorbed into neoliberal ideology, Boltanski and Chiapello argue that the social critique begins to be revived.

Bishop suggests that participatory art gains prominence during periods of social and political change. These are generally the periods in which the mode of critique transmutes. Ultimately, from a Rancièrian perspective, Bishop argues that a tension should be maintained between the social and artistic critiques. It is the binary

tensions within the historical analyses of participatory art that perpetuates it (i.e. spectacle/participant, individual/collective). Moreover, she states that art alone is not equipped to effect social change; however, the historical avant-garde's proximity to political parties provides a model upon which to build. In a final rallying cry, Bishop calls for the realignment of the negation found in new modes of art with left-wing political movements in furtherance of better equipping artists engaged in devising new models of social and political organization.

Maria Lind's contribution to the volume takes a more reflexive turn. She draws upon her own experience as a curator of socially engaged art and addresses the need for it to escape the traditional art institution. As such, she introduces some important early examples of this practice, such as Elin Wikström's *Returnity*—upon which the title of the essay is based—which involved members of the public cycling backwards in Münster, Germany during the summer of 1997. Lind pragmatically acknowledges the reservations held about social practice, namely temporality and the limitations on direct feedback. However, she remains optimistic that social practice can still "offer the possibility of avoiding preconceptions about art production and direction," she adds, "if only for a moment" (55).

Teddy Cruz's essay focuses upon the political role of art and architecture in the US post-2008. Against a changing social and economic backdrop, Cruz stresses the need for art and architecture to address the social (rather than focus on the formal and the aesthetic—a recurrent theme in these essays). He begins by identifying three "slaps in the face" to the American public since 2008: first, the bank bailout; second, the foreclosures and rising unemployment; and, third, cuts to social programs and other austerity measures (58). Cruz argues that the current period is socially and politically distinct from the post-depression years because an "elite" minority now holds the majority of US wealth. Moreover, the contemporary crisis is not predominantly economic or environmental; it is a cultural crisis with a dwindling "public" at its heart. Therefore, a more functional relationship between art, architecture and the everyday is called for in order to restore the critical bridge between the public and the cultural institution (now under the power of the "elite"). This bridging, in turn, is important to rebuilding an alternative idea of the public within a neoliberal world.

As Thompson articulates in his opening essay, the "praxis" of the everyday is, once again, emphasized over its "image" (62). Cruz offers two possible solutions within art and architecture. First, the call for artists to foster a "radical" or "critical proximity" to the institution and to become interlocutors between art and the everyday, "mediating new forms of acting and living" (58-59). Second, Cruz pinpoints examples of "communities of practice" within immigrant communities in the US that demonstrate an "informal urbanization" (63). These communities are not reliant on top-down

neoliberal models but rather engage in bottom-up culture in order to foster the utilization of space based around a new idea of community and born out of specific social conditions.

For Cruz, the motivation for change lies in pedagogy—in the knowledge gained from practices that exist outside of a neoliberal model and also in understanding the origins and the nature of the socio-political condition in which we live. Through combining institutions with an "ethical" knowledge of community and artists, new knowledge corridors can be produced between the visible and the invisible.

Whilst Cruz acknowledges a "shrinking relevancy of the public" (57), Carol Becker revisits the question of the public and the private proposing that the two have become hopelessly blurred. She further argues that the private has colonized the public. Becker identifies a microutopian moment in which the two converge in the events that took place in Tahrir Square, Egypt in early 2011. The protest was organized by means of mobile phones and social networking; however, the physical event occurred in public space, thus utilizing both private and public space. The underlying question is whether local space is lost in a globalized world. The images of Tahrir Square were rapidly disseminated across the globe, allowing the world to follow the events blow-by-blow. Becker stresses the need for public space to be utilized as a place for the public to gather in defense of yet another colonization by private interests. In this analysis, the museum becomes exemplary of public space that masquerades as private.

Becker cites numerous examples of artists who have engaged a public within the gallery or museum space, but why do artists have this responsibility? Like Cruz, Becker argues "Artists are uniquely positioned to respond to societal transformation and to educate communities about its complexity and implications" (67). Moreover, artists gravitate to what is missing. Today, she suggests, what is missing is a public discourse about the relationship of individuals to society. Microutopic communities are one way in which artists respond to the contradictions between the public and private. Becker references Marina Abramovic's *The Artist is Present* (2010) performance at MoMA as an example. In this piece Abramovic invited visitors to sit in front of her for as long as they wished to – creating a private encounter within a public setting. However, this act is distinct from those predominantly discussed in the volume as it remains within institutional space with little (external) political engagement or affect. The gallery acts, in many ways, as the neutralizing space of a potentially uncomfortable encounter in the "real" world. Becker proposes that Abramovic created a microutopian moment; however, there is a vast difference between this and the microutopian moment in Tahrir Square that she cites in the opening to her essay. Arguably, *The Artist is Present*, in this instance, lies with the relational works from which the socially engaged art in this volume is distinguished. Becker's reasoning lies in the

notion that utopian thinking is always communal and is fostered in the collective. In this interpretation, the coming together of Abramovic and her audience is utopic. However, the specter of relational aesthetics cannot be exorcised from this deduction. We recall Thompson's distinction between relational works and socially engaged art from the opening essay. Relational art is the "art of the encounter" (Bourriaud), a short-term investment in space, whilst the latter creates a long-term, lasting investment in the community. The subsequent discussion of Ramírez Jonas' *The Key to the City* (2010)—in which Jonas-designed keys that would unlock twenty-plus sites in New York City were bestowed to esteemed and also everyday citizens—provides a more fitting piece for the volume and in illustrating the public/private dichotomy. Ultimately, Becker's analysis takes an, at times, uncritical (some may read romantic) view of the possibilities of art in challenging the division between public and private space. However, she does not deny the potential of art. She states that art is "dreaming a world into being" (68), that is, if anyone can sleep.

Drawing upon his involvement with social movements, Brian Holmes coins the term "eventwork" to describe an avant-garde artistic practice that does not turn to modernist ideals as its model. Why do we need an alternative? Holmes proposes that avant-garde proclamations of "art into life" or "theory into revolution" are too simplistic for a consideration of new social art. Taking up a Boltanski and Chiapello-ian argument, he argues that society tended to absorb the transformations and inventions of a post-1968 re-politicized social agenda (73). Holmes states: "The question is how to change the forms in which we are living" (73). Therefore, in an argument not dissimilar to Thompson's, art must move away from a focus on form and the aesthetic to an inter-disciplinary practice that draws on a fourfold matrix of eventwork: first, critical research; second, participatory art; third, networked communications and strategies of mass-media penetration; and fourth, self-organization or collaborative coordination. These are not linear categories but aspects that are drawn upon in different quantities and in different ways in order to change the forms in which we are living. Drawing upon this matrix, art should no be made for the gallery or the museum but should contribute towards social change. But these categories do not exist in the same space at the same time; they are there to be drawn upon as and when required in differing combinations and quantities.

Despite the capitalist absorption of post-68 ideas, Holmes historicizes his new "eventwork" as rooted in 1968 which, in turn, moves through what he identifies as an expanded post-Fordist realm of activism. The expanded realm evolves from dissatisfaction within specific disciplines contributing towards critique from within. The dissatisfaction led to an insular form of critique, that is, a response to the worker's own alienation. The paradox of eventwork is that it begins within the disciplines that it seeks to overcome (75). But this is not simply a case of a revived institutional

critique (as originated in the 1960s), as some believe relational art to be. Relational art or the "radical chic of critical theory" (here both are considered to be modernist disciplines) are, according to Holmes, the result of a failed cultural critique (75). Without downplaying the importance of institutional critique within its own historical circumstances, eventwork extends beyond the politics of the institution and becomes a political act in itself.

In the final essay of the volume, Shannon Jackson turns to the 1930s to remind us that art had a social role to play in the last American Depression. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) held an important position in reimagining the social order and, despite the accusations of corruption and dubious political motivations from the top, contributed to the rebuilding of society. There are lessons to be learned from returning to consider the social role of the WPA.

The main lesson from Jackson's contribution to the volume lies in her encouragement for us to acknowledge the disparate sources in which socially engaged practices are rooted and manifest. Jackson suggests that we can learn from previous periods in which art has taken on a heterogeneous social role, to develop a tolerance for mixing art forms. Here, the notion of living supersedes the visual or the aesthetic, which echoes the dominant line of the diverse approaches to socially engaged work in this volume. Rather than judge these practices from one position (albeit a socially-engaged artist or a theatrical perspective), one might consider the broader picture—the community in which the work took place, the background of the artists, the many disciplines from which the project is formed—rather than adopt a modernist form of categorization.

Living as Form avoids projecting a dominant narrative or voice, allowing for a conversation to emerge amongst the "speakers" and, in the second half of the volume, the projects themselves. While this is, for the main part, a redeeming feature for a book presented in the midst of emergent narratives of participatory art; it may also be considered to be its downfall by those looking to the volume for solid answers to the question "what is socially-engaged art?" A question that, we learn, has no definitive answer. Naturally, there are concurrent tropes and ideas across the essays and the projects—the recurrent questioning of the avant-garde "art into life" adage; the escape from modernist notions of form; space, place and urban interventions and perhaps, more specifically, the role of the institutional space within these practices that take place in the wider public realm; establishing a position against the common relational works and a consideration of the political climate. And there are also those ideas on which they diverge—the role of the museum; the terminology used to discuss socially engaged art and where to draw the line between participatory and performative acts. This diversity is what makes the volume distinct from its predecessors. A miscellany

of projects, from Pedro Reyes' *Palas por Pistolas* (Pistols into Spades) and the form-
ing of an Art Workers Council, through to protests such as Suzanne Lacy's *The Roof
is on Fire* and attempts to literally move mountains (Francis Alÿs) work alongside
the essays to illustrate the myriad ideas emerging out of them. Thompson makes
no apologies for the incompleteness of the list of projects included; once again, the
reader is reminded that this book is meant as a conversation-starter. True to its word,
Living as Form instigates a conversation with seven inter-disciplinary voices (and over
one hundred community/artists' projects) challenging the dominant discourse of art
history and changing the terms in which it is spoken.

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"Working in the Space Between": Understanding Collaboration in Contemporary Artistic Practice

S A R A H   E . K .   S M I T H

Grant H. Kester. *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*. Duke University Press, 2011. 309 pp.

Collaborative methods of practice are increasingly the norm in contemporary art. Such works prioritize process over object production and technical proficiency, as well as social engagement and community over artistic autonomy. At the same time, the spheres of contemporary art and activism are increasingly intertwined. These developments have led to debates policing the traditional boundaries of art, as well as over the efficacy and potential of art as an instigator of change. Central to these deliberations is the work of Grant Kester, who publicly engaged in these discussions in responding to Claire Bishop's widely cited *Artforum* piece "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents" (2006). *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* will be of interest to those who followed Kester's engagement with these debates, as he utilizes this volume to address critics and curators mapping collective art practices, including Bishop and Nicolas Bourriaud. Broadly, Kester positions collaborative practice in relation to the current period of neoliberalism and the avant-garde tradition in modern art. Identifying the recent growth of collaborative projects as a "global phenomenon" (1), Kester defines these practices as existing on a continuum that encompasses mainstream work in biennials and work that overlaps with the fields of development, urban planning and environmental activism. As such, the rise of collaborative practice evidences a "paradigm shift *within* the field of art, even as the nature of this shift involves an increasing permeability *between* 'art' and other zones of symbolic production" (7). Kester deconstructs this shift into two components: the move towards collective production and the organization of process-based art projects to allow for viewers' participation. He explains that collective projects function to structure that experience, "setting it sufficiently apart from quotidian social interaction to encourage a degree of self-reflection, and calling attention to the exchange itself as creative praxis" (28).

Kester's aim is not to address all collaborative art, but rather to speak to the gap in theoretical discourse employed to discuss such projects. To this end, he draws on a

variety of global case studies, ranging from contemporary artists and collectives op-
erating within well-established international circuits, such as Francis Alÿs, Santiago
Sierra, Thomas Hirschhorn and Superflex, to less well known collectives, includ-
ing Park Fiction, Ala Pastica, Dialogue and Huit Facettes Interaction. Throughout,
Kester makes use of compelling examples of artistic projects to prove his arguments,
giving the reader a sense of the breadth of global artistic engagement in collaborative
practice. The variety of projects he examines are further illuminated for the reader by
the eight pages of colour plates in the volume and by black and white images embed-
ded throughout the text. The introductory chapter establishes the ambivalent nature
of collectivity, with Kester noting its potential to be coercive and oppressive, as well as
to signify unanimity and solidarity. He positions questions of autonomy and unity, in
particular, as central to understanding new modes of contemporary artistic practice.
Early in this chapter, Kester includes the disclaimer that contemporary art projects
cannot avoid complicity with hegemonic forces structuring the context in which they
are created, setting up his subsequent arguments for a middle ground from which to
understand the complex politics mobilized in different ways by different forms of
collaborative artwork. Significantly, he differentiates the current dominance of col-
lective practices since the 1990s as distinct from past methods of collaboration in art,
linking the recent embrace of collective practice to the erosion of public resistance
brought about by the spread of neoliberalism as the dominant global economic order.
He also suggests that the emergence of collective practice is concurrent with the rise
of biennials and a result of the encouragement of specific curators and critics.

The first chapter, "Autonomy, Antagonism, and the Aesthetic," examines collabora-
tive projects by three collectives: Park Fiction, who engage creativity to address issues
of redevelopment in urban spaces in Hamburg, Germany; Ala Plastica, who work to
resist large-scale development by mobilizing local knowledge in the Rio de la Plata
basin near Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Dialogue, who collaborate with Adavasi and
peasant populations in the Bastar region of India, specifically engaging with women
and children. Kester's interest lies in how "the various social interactions that unfurl
around a given project, rather than being ancillary to, or collapsed into, the *a priori*
formal structure or design of a physical project…are openly and often independently
thematized as a locus for aesthetic practice" (24). He notes the similarities between
the three collectives in that they challenge artistic autonomy, a tenant of the modern
avant-garde that presumes the artist, who provides critical insight, must be removed
from society.

Here, Kester traces recent critical scholarship on socially engaged art. He first analyses
Bourriaud's work on relational aesthetics, acknowledging the ubiquity of his frame-
work, but critiquing his inability to account for the multifaceted nature and range of
collective practice. Subsequently, he addresses Bishop's writings, particularly her *Art-*

forum piece in which she dismisses activist art. Kester argues that the larger problem with Bourriaud and Bishop's critiques is their location within the post-structuralist tradition, which has ties to early modern aesthetic philosophy. He points to the canonical status of theorists such as Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Rancière in the arts and humanities. Kester identifies a rapprochement between contemporary art and post-structuralist theory, a circular relationship with artists and critics relying on the same sources and set of concepts, and stresses that it functions as a significant impediment to fully understanding collaborative practice. He explains that the "distinct 'post-structuralist' strand within the larger field of critical theory has been so successfully assimilated that it's now largely synonymous with critical theory *per se*" (54). To highlight this framework's limitations, Kester outlines how it has historically contributed to the dominant narrative of the modern avant-garde. As such, he posits that current theory is unable to address collective practice, possessing an inability to work between oppositional categories.

Kester investigates how collaborative art functions in the second chapter, "The Genius of the Place," by focusing on ideas of labour and knowledge. He contends that new collective projects produce a different form of knowledge that is experiential; this form of knowledge is contingent on participants' unique exchanges and cannot occur within a scripted event or predetermined object. Kester explains the approach necessary to produce such knowledge, stating, "The mode of perception…is not instrumental (site is not a resource for the enactment of an a priori vision or a goal already-in-mind), but rather, anticipatory and open" (152). He demonstrates that such an approach was missing in Alÿs' 2002 work *When Faith Moves Mountains*. *Faith* was a performance at Ventanilla, outside of Lima, Peru, in which hundreds of volunteers were mobilized to engage in the futile activity of shifting a sand dune by shoveling. Kester critiques this piece, arguing that Alÿs marginalized the dialogical aspect of the work, did not engage in the specifics of its location, and foreclosed participants' agency through the organization of the piece. Ultimately, he takes issue with Alÿs for reproducing the paradigm of the modern avant-garde.

In contrast, Kester offers up several other collaborative projects that engage different global sites to successfully produce experiential knowledge. Concurrently, he argues that the discourse of international development, with its imposition of neoliberal ideology on the global south, is a pivotal context that must be taken into account in understanding collaborative practice. Here, he returns to Dialogue and details how they undertook their lengthy, complex projects to redesign water pumps (Nalpar) and to create new places for children to congregate and play (Pilla Gudi). He also describes the projects of the artistic collaborative Huit Facettes Interaction in Dakar, Sénégal, focusing on their project Atelier of Hamdallaye, in which they sought to resist the dominance of the global art world and reactivate cultural traditions by

inviting artists and filmmakers to participate in a two week residency in the rural vil-lage of Hamdallaye Samba Mbaye in south Sénégal. In this residency, emphasis was placed on having the visiting artists and filmmakers respond to the cultural context of the region. Additionally, Kester delves into the work of Ala Plastica, emphasizing the fact that their projects are conceptualized and carried out without any preconceived outcomes. Instead, each project is open and experimental, but fully engaged in the context of its site. This same flexibility is highlighted in the projects of artists Jay Koh and Chu Yuan in Myanmar, who established an independent art centre NICA (Networking and Initiatives in Culture and the Arts) in Yangon in 2003. The analyses of these diverse global projects demonstrate the productivity possible when artists at-tend to site specificity and engage in prolonged collaborative projects.

The final chapter, "Eminent Domain: Art and Urban Space," focuses on two col-laborative projects that address issues of class and race in resisting urban regenera-tion: Park Fiction and Project Row Houses in Houston, Texas. Kester details the activist roots of the Park Fiction collective in the Hafenstraße community, which in 1981 was involved in active occupation to claim space from the city and establish alternative institutional structures for its residents. Park Fiction emerged in 1994, galvanized by municipal efforts to build a high-rise office on a small piece of land that would have blocked the Hafenstraße community's access to the waterfront. The project to create a park in its place was characterized by playfulness, as the collective employed creativity to solicit residents' opinions on the structure of the park, which was ultimately a whimsical design featuring metal palm trees and flying carpets made out of grass, as well as a dog park with poodle-shaped hedges and gates. Kester em-phasizes the complexity of understanding the resistance enacted by this project, as the collective worked within city development mechanisms, while also employing an alternative method of planning that prioritized community input. This is compli-cated by the nature of the finished park as a testament to the long sovereignty of the Hafenstraße community and a site for future alternative actions. As Kester notes, the project "proceeded neither through a direct, frontal confrontation with the state in the public space of the street, nor through full complicity with existing bureaucratic channels, but rather by working in the space between overt activism and formal state protocols" (205).

Kester's second case study in this chapter, Project Row Houses, similarly demonstrates the potential of negotiating complicity and resistance. Initiated by artist Rob Lowe in 1993, the project serves to promote and produce alternative methods of develop-ment in Houston's Third Ward. It originated with Lowe's purchase of twenty-two "shotgun" style homes originally marked for demolition. After studying the archi-tecture of the houses and their history, which reflected diverse self-contained African American communities who espoused a tradition of mutual assistance, Lowe decided

to refurbish them. Ultimately, the houses were transformed into affordable homes for single mothers and artists in residence, while maintaining their architectural integrity. In this way, Lowe has rewritten the traditional narrative of urban redevelopment by locating the shotgun houses as a focal point of the Third Ward, an element to be celebrated and linked to cultural traditions in the face of processes that seek to remove poor and working-class residents. Again, Kester notes the conflicted nature of Project Row Houses' ongoing resistance. For example, it inadvertently encouraged gentrification, but concurrently was able to challenge and contest the goals of urban redevelopment in a sustained manner. Kester dwells on these larger questions of the efficacy of artistic critique in concluding his analysis of both projects. He emphasizes the potential of such work to disrupt neoliberal capitalism by engaging it creatively, rather than attempting to dislocate it in one revolutionary moment. Suggesting that resistance can be fostered by engagement in individual actions, he maintains that there is "much to be learned from the ways in which people respond to, and resolve, the struggles they confront in everyday life" (226).

In *The One and The Many*, Kester makes a significant contribution towards providing an innovative and comprehensive understanding of the role of art in political struggle, namely how collaborative projects can enact resistance by "working in the space between" (205) to result in concrete and sustained change. By providing new methods of analysis, he advocates for a move beyond the dualities that have clouded art criticism. As he explains, thorough evaluation of collaborative art "can reveal a more complex model of social change and identity, one in which the binary oppositions of divided vs. coherent subjectivity, desiring singularly vs. totalizing collective, liberating distanciation vs. stultifying interdependence, are challenged and complicated" (89). More importantly, Kester reveals the necessity of thinking through naturalized theoretical frameworks for understanding art's role in society, as well as the labour of both artist and viewer. Tackling some of the most hotly debated subjects in art and criticism today, *The One and the Many* represents a decisive intervention into what we can expect to be a much longer discussion about the nature of collaboration in contemporary art.

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No Faith in Form

KRIS COHEN

Claire Bishop. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. Verso, 2012. 388 pp.

> …a *form*: no matter what the philosophical postulates called upon to justify it, as practice and as a conceptual operation it always involves the jumping of a spark between two poles, the coming in to contact of two unequal terms, of two apparently unrelated modes of being. Thus in the realm of literary criticism the sociological approach necessary juxtaposes the individual work of art with some vaster form of social reality which is seen in one way or another as its source or ontological ground, its Gestalt field, and of which the work itself comes to be thought of as a *reflection* or *symptom*, a characteristic *manifestation* or simple *by-product*, a *coming to consciousness* or an imaginary or symbolic *resolution*, to mention only a few of the ways in which this problematic central relationship has been conceived (Jameson 4-5).

Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells* is an exhortation in the guise of a history lesson. The book's pre-condition is a welter of generic terms: "new genre public art," "dialogic art," "community art," "relational aesthetics," "social practice." Each attempts to describe a related but non-identical assortment of contemporary artworks. In the face of the confusion that results, Bishop offers a competing collective noun, and more importantly to her, a set of standards by which such works can be sorted and assessed. Specifically, Bishop offers a critical genealogy for what she calls "participatory art." The term is meant to encompass, while more thoroughly historicizing, the names in the above list (the list itself is now a commonplace—it's as though the proper form of the name for this set of works, its true collectivizing concept, is an ellipsis). The genealogical impulse in Bishop's book hints at her primary response to the confusion: she believes the category of participatory art, defined, historicized and properly judged, has earned a name and a name's accompanying generic shape. This book, as much as any other work to date, means to perform that nominalization.

Bishop attributes the impasse in the discussion of participatory art to several factors, each of which she sets out to address: a lack of critical nuance around binaries like active/passive, singular/collective, participation/spectatorship; a preference, in both the art and the critical literature that remediates it, for what Bishop calls the ethical over the aesthetic (or as she elsewhere draws the distinction, for social reform over

aesthetic judgment); and, in a more periodizing frame, the onset of a neoliberal milieu in which the very notion of participation has been compromised by its new value in a networked commodity market. By drawing a distinction between the ethical and the aesthetic—Bishop's primary instrument of categorization and assessment—Bishop means that participatory art seems to care more about producing an ethical relation with a set of participants than it has cared to foster the exercise of critical judgment.[1] In other words, works of participatory art, Bishop fears, might all be equal, their differences not subject to judgment so much as to infinite modulation. Against this specter, Bishop wants to create the grounds on which critical distinctions can be made.

In its desire to foster judgment about certain contemporary art practices that she feels have been indifferent to that enterprise, *Artificial Hells* continues the work of Bishop's influential essay from 2004, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." But unlike the earlier essay, the page-by-page tonality of the book is distanced, enumerative, exploratory. While the original essay included a detailed discussion of Laclau and Mouffe's work on radical democracy, to whom Bishop's concept of antagonism is indebted, here the discussion of political theory is muted in favor of the proliferation of artistic examples. These examples of participatory art are chosen from wider spans of time and geography than the earlier essay, and include works that are variously (to use Bishop's own oppositions) antagonistic and accommodationist, artistic and social, aesthetic and ethical. In other words, the book includes more than just the works that Bishop favors (the former term in each of these pairings).

Three dates and their familiar referents anchor the book's historical sweep: 1917 ("artistic production was brought into line with Bolshevik collectivism,"), 1968 ("artistic production lent its weight to a critique of authority"), and 1989 ("the fall of really existing socialism")(193). This chronological structure allows Bishop to build to an argument about the "ambivalence" of participatory art in our current socio-economic period, where certain forms of participation have been commodified (think: Face-

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[1] In the conclusion, Bishop attempts to transcend the impasse between the ethical and the aesthetic. The argument sketched there is that participatory art tends to appear at moments of political transition—1917, 1968, 1989—and its appearance at those times is symptomatic of a concomitant clash between the ethical and the aesthetic, the first risking reformism in order to enact "actual change," the second risking social irrelevance in order to antagonize norms of doing and knowing. The terms Bishop uses at this point in the book are "social critique" and "artistic critique." She borrows these terms from Boltanski and Chiapello's book *The New Spirit of Capitalism* and immediately aligns them with her own oppositional pairing of the ethical and the aesthetic, so that by the end of the book we haven't traveled very far from where we started.

book). "Ambivalence" is Bishop's word, and Bishop's feeling (although one might also feel, given the dangers of economic proximity that Bishop herself dramatizes, that participatory art is a risky form as much as it is an ambivalent one). But against critics who have seemed to want to dismiss the entire endeavor of participatory art because it can be so easily analogized to a feature of contemporary commodity culture,[2] Bishop wants to rescue certain strains through the exercise of judgment, the generation of standards by which artworks put forward for inclusion in the category can be deemed unequal—some praised for the right reasons, others dismissed or criticized, also for the right reasons. Specifically, Bishop wants to clarify a distinction between work that capitulates to its own instrumentalisation and work that is able to reflect critically on the inevitability of its own historical situation. In other words, she wants participatory art to be treated as a medium. This would mirror Rosalind Krauss' understanding of a medium, spelled out most recently and most starkly in her latest book, *Under Blue Cup*. Krauss is never cited in this regard, but Bishop's belief in the efficacy of critical judgment, in the making of distinctions, clearly follows Krauss's, as well as that of the many Modernist critics and art historians who agree with Krauss. But the concept of a medium, so strongly suggested, is nowhere discussed in depth. Its definition and implications for this context are not spelled out so much as entailed by Bishop's desire to promote standards of judgment, and her attempts to produce a genealogy, a tradition for participatory art.

The book's silence on this point marks a broader tension between Bishop's goal and her means for arriving at that goal. From page to page, example to example, *Artificial Hells* unfolds according to the conventional logic of a survey text—a genre of survey text in which a previously heterogeneous set of cases is assembled to produce critical acumen around certain motifs: singular/collective, active/passive, participant/spectator, social/aesthetic. Bishop proliferates cases, the amassing of which does the work of historical argumentation by producing a genealogy for some contemporary problem or impasse.[3] Each chapter, excluding only the introduction and the conclusion, sets out a historical period and a geographic location, then identifies artworks from that time and place that can speak to the themes the book pursues. By the end, Bishop has assembled a generous array of cases, including some unfamiliar works from familiar movements and some works from contexts that are unfamiliar within the predominantly American and Western European milieu out of which Bishop writes (an especially striking example is Ján Budaj, the Czechoslovakian coal heating engineer, and his 1978 piece *The Lunch* [152]).

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[2]   See, for example, Hal Foster's "Arty Party."

[3]   The archetype of this genre is *Art Since 1900*—of course, there is no comparison of scale here, only of genre.

By speaking of the survey text as a genre, I mean to draw the specific conventions of its generic form into relation with the kinds of disciplinary problems Bishop sets out to resolve. One of the values of a survey text is a kind of generosity in which the amassing of cases enables the future re-assembly and re-use of those cases. Choice in this context, the author's pre-sorting of cases into worthy and unworthy, is sub-jugated to a more ecumenical procedure, the survey of a field where inclusion is determined not by a polemic but by a desire to mobilize the reader's attention. The debate sparked by Bishop's own "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" foundered on a question of choice, with the difference between the main participants—Nico-las Bourriaud, Grant Kester, Liam Gillick and Bishop—too often seeming to turn on their allegiance to certain artists and the modes of art production they are each made to represent (Bourriaud sides with Rirkrit Tiravanija, while Bishop sides with Santiago Sierra). Bishop addresses this problem by assembling a heterogeneous array of cases that might all be considered part of the expanded medium of participatory art, even while she never hides her belief that some are more "successful" (a common word in Bishop's writing) in their contexts than others, or her desire for her readers to be able to make such distinctions in their own work.

The survey text, in other words, puts its faith in the example, while not always theo-rizing what counts as an example or exemplification in the context under consider-ation. It follows that Bishop does not consider the claims that any other medium might make to a form of participatory engagement with spectators, although this is a common complaint about participatory art—e.g., hasn't painting always engaged viewers in a kind of participation? What forms of participation are permitted by the optical? Are there times when opticality is powerful, multivalent, even multi-sensory? Bishop anticipates this complaint by defining participation as a situation "in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theatre and performance" (2). By that definition, Bishop feels that painting, sculpture, instal-lation art, land art, etc. should be excluded. But to agree on that definition, we have to set aside some important questions, questions that are not only in the vicinity of, but central to Bishop's own concerns about the relationship between participation and spectatorship: questions, for example, about what exactly it means to consider a person a medium; about what constitutes a coherent, stable form of personhood in any given historical moment; about historical changes to subjectivity and thereby to the mediation of subjectivity. Can a person be a medium in the same way that painting is a medium? Did classical modernism exclude people from being mediums? Didn't modernism have a theory of participation, and through it, a theory of subjec-tivity—that is, a theory of persons as participants in a mediated scene?

It is here that the choice of the survey format precludes certain forms of analysis, or—to bend the discussion toward the concerns signaled in my epigraph—precludes

an analysis of form that might begin to address such questions within the bounds of Bishop's primary interests. Bishop's priority is to amass examples, running each through the same set of questions, making diverse geographic contexts and diverse political environments answer to her interests in semiotics, duration, documentation, phenomenology, liberal subjectivity and mass collectivity. One consequence of this choice is that her time for the work of explicating each individual artwork is necessarily limited. A few paragraphs of explication is the most any work gets. Analysis therefore arrives epiphenomenally, as an accretion, something that can be given in conclusion at the end of the chapter or the end of the book, after a number of cases have been considered on the run. It rarely emerges from within a sustained analysis of form in any single instance.

But it is difficult to see how the confusions surrounding participation and contemporary art can be addressed without considering, in patient detail, the specific forms of participation that appear in participatory art, in other artistic mediums, and, crucially, in the commodity cultures whose own aesthetics of participation make the whole project of participatory art such an anxious one. This would require that particular examples be treated as singular rather than as generalizable data points—that they be treated, in other words, as form. Participation—the galvanizing force of Bishop's ambition to make a medium out of the diverse array of works she assembles—has been an intractable analytical object because it confusingly names both a potential, an open field where anything might happen, and a pre-coded possibility, a form of sociality that arrives in the aesthetic scene already tainted by its circulation in a new commodity scene. It is, on the one hand, an encounter whose formal qualities always need further specification while, at the same time, it is an iconic feature of what Bishop characterizes as a neoliberal landscape. That guilty association makes the term's invocation almost automatically into a value judgment, a taking of sides against participation understood as such. This negative valence, which is predicated on the simplistic analogy between the always-unspecified participatory nature of commodities and the usually-under-specified participatory ethos of some art, normally precludes the description and analysis of form because the pre-coding seems to make that analysis irrelevant. But in the absence of careful formal description, "participation" is a nearly meaningless (or impossibly meaningful) term.

Without what Jameson calls an "unrelated" "sociological" pole, which in *Artificial Hells* is always the enemy lurking just off stage, the analysis of form cannot spark. The problem here is viciously circular—and, more than it is about any particular art movement, it is a problem of how the writing of history relates to living in the present tense. Bishop's method, to amass cases and mobilize attention across those cases, precludes the kind of careful description that would historicize participation rather than just analogize it to a particular commodity form. Bishop's ultimate desire to in-

duce judgment, to produce an inequality of cases among those she surveys, disregards most of the historical action, debased though it may be, in the forms of participation available to the majority of people. It neglects the ordinary in favor of an avant-garde desire for rupture, negation—idealized events of frame-breaking. Considered as a shifter between the aesthetic and the ordinary, participation would be less an artistic medium than an optic for viewing any moment of aesthetic or mediated encounter.

This re-framing raises a number of questions that have always lingered on the sidelines of the debate over participatory art, and that remain sidelined in Bishop's work: what is the difference between the structure of a participatory occasion and the affective experience of that event? Does an antagonistic work always feel aggressive or oppositional? Likewise, does a convivial work always induce convivial feelings—is it always only comforting? When structure and affect are misaligned, what combination of historical, social, or aesthetic factors has caused the divergence? How, in any given instance of proffered participation, do people move between habits, expectations, and an unavoidably improvisatory encounter with the event—between comfort and risk, self-consolidation and self-dissolution? What resources do people draw on to accept or refuse a participatory ethos? I would call these all questions of form in Jameson's sense—questions, in other words, about how the historical forces that shape people's capacity to show up for a participatory event come into contact, frictionally, with the event as it is structured aesthetically (be it a painting or a meal, a political protest or the reenactment of one). Such questions are only answerable where each case is considered on its own terms, for the difficulties that it presents, for its proximity to as well as its distance from the compromised ordinary zones of contemporary life. Considered as such, the aesthetic case can do more than reorganize the art world around another collective noun. It can do analytical work in and on the present tense. Such attention to form would seek not only to use disciplinary standards to reassure ourselves of art's critical distance—to notice when, from that distance, it attacks other people's comforts—but would demand that historians of the aesthetic event re-invent the genres of our own participation.

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Middle Games and Possible Communisms

R Y A N C U L P E P P E R

> The trickiest and most demanding moment in chess is the one that separates the middle game—when many pieces are still on the board, forces still appear level in positions not codified in theory, and each player has a plan of action—from the approach to the endgame. This is when a skillful player needs to be boldest in attack, but also most alert to the weaknesses of his position and the strength of his opponent's, foreseeing likely moves ahead and showing sufficient flexibility to adjust his own plans when necessary (Magri 244).

A tailor in Ulm boasted in 1811 that he had invented a flying machine. Challenged by a local bishop, the tailor—entirely confident in his contraption—leapt from the steeple of the village church and fell to his death. His spectacular failure was later celebrated by Bertolt Brecht in a poem that ends with dramatic irony: the triumphant bishop standing over the disgraced tailor and sneering "That man is not a bird/It was a wicked, foolish lie,/Mankind will never fly" (178). And yet, of course, humans *did* invent flying machines, making a mockery not of the ambitious tailor but of the skeptical bishop, who took a single collapse to mean the necessary and eternal impossibility of a project still in its nascence.

Pietro Ingrao, for decades the figurehead of the Italian Communist Party's (PCI's) left wing, quoted Brecht's poem to lift the spirits of Party members deciding in 1989 (a most dispiriting year for communism) whether the Party should remove the word "communist" from its name. Lucio Magri, who was present, begins his book *The Tailor of Ulm* by probing the metaphor of the tailor with difficult questions like, "Can we be sure that, if the fall had only crippled the tailor instead of killing him, he would have immediately picked himself up and tried again, or that his friends would not have tried to restrain him? And what contributions did his bold attempt actually make to the history of aeronautics?" (2). The mere fact that something admirable has been tried does not imply that it should be tried again; indeed, wise and sympathetic parties may be justified in preventing its repetition. Nor does even the advantage of

prescription—the certainty of the stolid Marxist that, despite every innovation of the last century, capitalism *still* cannot survive its self-generated crises—necessarily justify the repetition of a revolutionary project in any form remotely resembling the forms of the 20ᵗʰ century. (They may be like the tailor's flying machine: technically preceding communism but contributing nothing concrete to the actual form it will take.) It falls to communists to do the hard work of combing through the wreckage beneath the steeple and determining what materials, if any, may help build a contraption *actually* capable of flying—and a subject worthy to commandeer it—if humans are ever to learn to fly.

The Tailor of Ulm shares a commitment—if not an approach—to these tasks with another, much more feted and widely read book: *The Idea of Communism*, which came out just a few months before Magri's book on the heels of a sold-out £100-a-ticket conference at the Birkbeck Institute in London. It is useful for the purposes of cultural theory to read *The Tailor of Ulm* as a necessary supplement to *The Idea of Communism*, for in both its form and its aims, Magri's book offers a perspective missing from that otherwise compelling collection: a resuscitation of and practical activity in classical Marxism-Leninism.

The Tailor of Ulm, a last testament Magri was determined to complete before ending his life in a physician-assisted suicide in 2011, is a long book (434 pages in its English edition) and quite dense in historical specifics. Unlike the heavily philosophical collection *The Idea of Communism*, *The Tailor of Ulm* is not a book from which theoretical generalizations may be easily extracted. *The Tailor of Ulm* is historical materialism, as painstaking and unglamorous as it ever was. It is limited and measured in its claims, all of which emerge from and return to the daily grind of politics. Magri seems uninterested in making points that will outlast the specific practical concerns, past and present, of his book. And yet the book is much more than a political memoir or a compendium of "adventures in communism." Readers who are surprised that a book like *The Tailor of Ulm*, so mired in practicalities, is treated as "cultural theory" may do well to recall Magri's predecessors in this particular tradition: How much of *What Is To Be Done?*, so indispensable to political theory, is actually a discussion of the intricacies of running a newspaper? Or of the *Prison Notebooks* an evaluation of "Bukharinist" trends in the USSR and the *Risorgimento* in Italy? Indeed, a central claim of historical materialism has always been that the universal—itself historical—emerges only from the rigorous investigation of the historical particular (something the mature Marx clearly understood). With *The Tailor of Ulm*, Magri plunges us into the details, hoping that therein a devil may be found of use to us in present-day Left politics.

Magri himself was an anachronism in European politics, a type of political intellec-

tual prevalent in the generation of the Great War but scarce in recent times. Today the very form on which his thinking relied—the mass Party with all of its ideal (if never realized) features: "collective individuality," "conscious and voluntary discipline," "revolutionary agency"—has all but disappeared. Horizontal consensus-based movements have replaced the "democratic centralism" of the Party; single-issue and "no demand" politics, with their celebration of spontaneous action, have replaced the exhaustive elaborations of program and strategy at annual Party congresses. Magri nevertheless turns his focus toward the possibilities that exist today for an institution—for he never stopped believing in the necessity of institutions—capable of what Antonio Gramsci called the "unity between 'spontaneity' and 'conscious leadership' or 'discipline'" which alone constitutes "the real political action of subaltern classes, insofar as this is mass politics" (198). Gramsci's ideas were so much a theoretical touchstone for Magri and the entire PCI that Magri calls them "the Gramsci genome . . . a part of the genetic material" (38). And Gramsci, like Lenin before him and Magri after him, always insisted on the absolute requirement to dialectically reconcile daily politics (the "spontaneity") with the science of history (i.e. Marxism, which demands "disciplined" action).

  This reconciliation—praxis in its purest form—is necessarily messy and requires constantimprovisation: re-thinking as well as re-organization. But it cannot occur without a stable locus committed over the long term to the *work* of reconciliation. The question for politics today is *where*, if not in the old Party form, such a locus can exist. Magri, for his part, is not at all interested in a restoration of the PCI or any other 20th century mass Party, nor is *The Tailor of Ulm* an apologia for the many failings of the PCI, which Magri takes pains to catalogue. It is, however, a historically grounded defense of the basic Marxist-Leninist principle that, on the path to communism, the stage of proletarian control over *existing* institutions—the means of production and the structures of state power—during which time these institutions are re-tooled and re-directed to create a material basis for communism, cannot be foregone. Disconnected acts of destruction and negativity are insufficient; merely destroying the state or the factory will do nothing to usher in non-exploitative social relations, and it risks, moreover, wholesale acquiescence to the barbarism that already exists in current social relations as modernity's ("enlightenment's") dialectical twin. This was the truth of the old Wobbly slogan "building a new society in the shell of the old" and what prompted Gramsci to theorize the "historical bloc" in the first place. Magri says it this way:

To challenge and overcome such a system [21st century global capitalism], what is required is a coherent systemic alternative; the power to impose it and the capacity to run it; a social bloc that can sustain it, and measures and alliances commensurate with that goal. Much as we can and should discard the myth of an apocalyptic break-

down, in which a Jacobin minority steps in to conquer state power, there is still less reason to pin our hopes on a succession of scattered revolts or small-scale reforms that might spontaneously coalesce into a great transformation (10).

The difference between Leninism and Jacobinism, of course, is that Lenin never saw the February 1917 overthrow of the Tsar or the October 1917 Bolshevik seizure of power—both accomplished, Jacobin-like, at unique moments when the existing regimes were in terminal crisis—as expressing the full meaning of "revolution." If communism had any chance of being built, revolution would occur not only in pre-industrial Russia but also in the industrialized countries of the West, where capitalism was fully developed. The failure of these revolutions to materialize was precisely the catalyst for the (fully Leninist) extension of Leninism undertaken in Italy by Gramsci, which produced the theory of hegemony. As Magri points out:

Among the Marxists of his time, [Gramsci] was the only one who did not explain this failure [of revolution] only in terms of Social Democratic betrayal or the weakness and errors of the Communists. [. . .] Instead, he looked for the deeper reasons why the model of the Russian Revolution could not be reproduced in advanced societies, even though it was a necessary hinterland (and Leninism a priceless theoretical contribution) for a revolution in the West that would unfold differently, and be richer in results (41).

Equally unwilling to explain political realities by moralizing (via the Left's cherished narrative of "betrayal") or by self-flagellation (blaming communist weakness and indecision), Magri adopts the Marxist-Leninist stance. And here we can see the meaning of this review's epigraph (from Magri, a famously skilled chess player): the October Revolution of 1917 offered only the opening moves in a long game—a set of moves not to be simply repeated later in the game. In the middle game, different strategies, and a different kind of Party, would be (and are) needed.

Of course, Magri had an uneven relationship to the PCI, which expelled him in 1970 over his participation with the far-left journal *Il Manifesto*, only to re-integrate him—and merge with the party (the Partito di Unità Proletaria, or PdUP) he had founded in the meantime—in 1984. It is often remarked today that *Il Manifesto* and the PdUP were much closer to *Autonomia* and the Italian anarchists than to the PCI in their commitments to the social unrest of 1968, which the PCI (among other communist parties) handled clumsily, losing a generation of activists. This is true, but also misses the point: Magri and the *Il Manifesto* group fell out of step with the PCI after 1968, yes, but they did not forsake the conviction that the Party (*not* the PCI *per se* but the Party as a theoretical construct, occupying a structural position) needed to exist as a place wherein a social formation—a collective revolutionary subject—could

take root and become disciplined if it were ever to successfully revolt in a developed capitalist country.

Regarding the 1968 student movements, with which he sympathized, Magri writes, "Am I saying the radical character of the student movement should have been accepted and encouraged [by the PCI] just as it was, and used as a battering ram for a general revolutionary breakthrough? Quite the opposite. What I mean is that a 'revolution' in education could have been aligned with the workers' struggle and brought in still other social subjects" and that "the PCI's failure even to attempt this, at a time when the mass revolt was seeking a way forward, prevented it from acquiring an important role" and perhaps, we might add, likewise prevented the student movement from *finding* the way forward that it sought (234).

Despite his frustration with the PCI, the sobering insistence of Marxism-Leninism on a counter-hegemomic (and internally contradictory) historical bloc, which alone during the "middle game" had the power to seize existing structures and usher in new socials relations for the "endgame," prevented Magri from aligning with other Left movements in Italy, such as *Lotta Continua* or Antonio Negri's *Potere Operaio*, and to repeatedly side with the PCI (where he was *persona non grata*) in its clashes with these and other *Autonomia* groups. Far from a political strain of Stockholm syndrome, Magri's defense of the PCI during the period of his expulsion was the defense not of a specific ossified body (which he believed the PCI was), but of a *mode* of political organization he himself was still pursuing in the foundation of the PdUP. (One of the most important revelations of *The Tailor of Ulm* comes when Magri writes that the proposal "for rapid unification of the various New Left groups" made in *Il Manifesto* was immediately rebuffed by those groups, not only because they were, unlike *Il Manifesto*, suspicious of institutions and unity, but because "our expulsion [from the PCI] meant that another possible rival had appeared on the scene" (242)). But even *Il Manifesto*, Magri hastens to point out, was never intended to undermine the PCI or to create division within it. On the contrary, Magri and his collaborators hoped "to contribute by various means . . . to a renewal of the whole PCI" by creating "a journal that would not organize forces but produce ideas" (240).

In relating the episode of the *Il Manifesto* purge, Magri is careful to note that the PCI went wrong not by acting to discipline Party members (for there will never be a historical bloc without internal discipline), but by failing to recognize the role *Il Manifesto* could have played *within* the PCI: "to help the Party through the difficult 1970s . . . it would have been good for the PCI to allow a space within its ranks for left-wing dissent that was culturally undogmatic" (243). His attitude is similar toward the other highly controversial action of the modern PCI, namely its participation under General Secretary Enrico Berlinguer in the "historic compromise": a government

in which the PCI agreed to terms of "no no-confidence" in the minority Christian Democrats (DC) while not forming a coalition with them (and therefore not receiving any cabinet or other leadership positions). While Magri does not defend the historic compromise, he does highlight the objective factors that led Berlinguer to accept it (avoiding "betrayal" stories) and laments most of all that "neither at the time nor later, neither internally nor with one another, did the Left parties open a debate or engage in public reflection on the experience. Each went its merry way" (277).

This "going of the merry ways" was in fact disastrous for the Left, both because it further atomized the Left, which was already fragmented and powerless, and because, in conditions of frustration and factionalism fragmentation , the far-left Red Brigades became violent, eventually kidnapping and assassinating the Italian Prime Minister, Aldo Moro, destroying the historic compromise and justifying a massive crackdown on all Left groups. Magri did not as a matter of principle oppose the use of violence. He strongly condemned the Red Brigades not for their militancy but for their thoughtlessness and most of all their isolation, their refusal to act in concert with the mass Left movement: "A life apart, the imperative of secrecy, the constant danger, the use of weapons and exemplary gestures to communicate a message to the people . . . makes the organization itself increasingly self-referential, so that its analysis becomes distorted and instrumental" (287). Again, for Magri there cannot be proper political theory apart from active participation in mass politics (it becomes necessarily "distorted"); no more can there be proper political action apart from the collective determination of a historical bloc. This is a severe and often halting stance, one whose practical limits Magri personally confronted and urges us to confront. It brings to mind Gáspár Miklós Tamás's statement: "It is emotionally and intellectually difficult to be a Marxist since it goes against the grain of moral indignation which is, of course, the main reason people become socialists" (233).

Given the insights of Magri's firsthand experiences, what, if anything, may be salvaged from the Marxist-Leninist (and Gramscian) mode that animated worldwide communist politics for six decades before falling out of favor and giving way to New Left, syndicalist and single-issue "anti-oppression" movements, which continue to dominate Leftist thought and politics today? Marxism-Leninism was always a peculiar and formidable theoretical construction, requiring for its coherence some philosophical gymnastics and a few mini-leaps of faith. A theory—even a materialist theory—that tackles the question of building a better world could not be otherwise. Unlike the abstruseness of the "all-star" theory to be found in *The Idea of Communism*, however, Marxism-Leninism's primary features are its specificity and its essential practicality. It has no use for "concepts" of the State as amorphous as Badiou's or Negri's; it deals with actual state apparatuses (cf. *The State and Revolution*). It finds notions like Rancière's "self-management," which inspired so many Occupy "people's

libraries" and "people's schools," too vague to engage, focusing instead on existing libraries and schools and the means required to overtake and re-make them. This practicality is not vulgar; it is not a glorification of leaping from steeples without great thoughtfulness and detailed planning; it is far from the current meaning of "action-driven" politics (in which we are constantly told that an "action" is taking place on such-and-such corner or at such-and-such bank). It is a formal as much as a practical proposition: concerning the dialectical relationship of thought, action and organization. This is why the *kind* of book Magri has written, and not only the content of the book, matters.

There are two good discussions of Lenin in *The Idea of Communism* (in essays written by Bruno Bosteels and Slavoj Žižek), but the collection lacks a contribution that is actually *Leninist*. *The Tailor of Ulm* fills that gap. At the end of his book, Magri concludes that "the question of an activist party that not only has a 'mass' character but operates as a collective intellectual should absolutely not be consigned to the archives" (423). Here, unwavering, he is at his most Gramscian, and he is in basic agreement with at least Žižek (who was the only participant at Birkbeck to unapologetically defend the Party form). What follows Magri's statement, however, is something not found in Žižek: a discussion of present-day Italian demographics (age composition, class composition, etc.) and a series of concrete suggestions for the construction of an efficacious counter-hegemonic bloc. These include the need for communists to work inside existing non-mass movements (especially the women's movement) where nevertheless "a capacity for self-organization still exists" as well as "to create the minimum structural and institutional conditions for the growth of an organized democracy" by taking over or supplanting existing systems of mass education and mass media, which are concrete obstacles to the emergence of a "collective subjectivity" (426). Here, in a Marxist-Leninist way, the form of *organization* is connected to material conditions, and from the necessary formal configurations come *actions* that enable new types of collective *thought*, with the aim (in a dialectical return) of re-*organizing* society.

The Italian title of *The Tailor of Ulm* was *Il Sarto di Ulm: Una Possibile Storia del Comunismo nel XX Secolo.* Here a concept is raised that is missing from its English subtitle, namely *possibility*. *The Tailor of Ulm* works as "a possible history of communism" by maintaining that, whatever the failings of the organized Left, the *possibility* of communism always existed in an objective sense: the trajectory of communism in the 20th century was only one of its *possible* trajectories (it could have gone otherwise, and still could). But it also enacts as well as prescribes the form of political thought that could once again make a middle-game communist project possible. Whatever our own readings of the 20th century's mass Parties and their legacies, we who refuse to accept the impossibility of flying machines would do well, in addition to engaging

the substantial body of current communist "theory," to consider as a *possible* model the theoretical propositions of *The Tailor of Ulm*.

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Establishing Binaries

JEFF HEYDON

Alberto Toscano. *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea*. London: Verso, 2010. 277 pp.

A quick Google search using 'Kim Jong Il' and 'fanatic' as the terms brings up the following results: "Kim Jong Il: The Movie Fanatic"; "Kim Jong Il's golfing accomplishments will never be repeated"; and "Farewell to a Fanatic." The search also brings up a number of references to websites that include the word 'fanatic' in the title, more often than not in a positive context. It is a word that seems to emerge wherever there is an opening for strong opinions. In truth, 'fanatic' probably belongs somewhere near the term 'genius' on the list of generally devalued signifiers in the English language. As much as all language signals an intent on the part of the user, a need to communicate and, typically, a coinciding need to convince, the term 'fanatic' is one that immediately forces the listener or reader to take sides.

Toscano's introduction to *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* makes the specificity of his interests clear: "my principal focus will be on the various configurations taken by the idea of fanaticism in philosophy and theory" (xvii). This will be a book about the thinking of 'fanaticism', about its history of determination and the work of those who have tried to untangle and explain it over the history of its use. The determination of a label, a name, is something that can have profound consequences in the subsequent life of the object under analysis.

To borrow a line from McLuhan, "The name of a man is a numbing blow from which he never recovers" (McLuhan, 35). The determination of a line of thinking as 'fanatical' carries with it this symbolic weight. As much as the term itself may live a relatively flexible existence determined entirely by historical and circumstantial properties rather than a clear etymological progression, the results of the application of the term are generally uniform. In all but a few (fascinating) examples provided by Toscano, the term 'fanatic' functions as a grab for political leverage. The application of the word generally serves to devalue a position before it is fully articulated and to grant a degree of invulnerability to the position of the accuser. Whether this works out in practice is immaterial – we tend to understand the term 'fanatic' as a rhetorical tool rather than as a label that requires immediate justification.

Of particular interest for Toscano is an investigation into the 'Enlightenment reloaded' position and its endless proclamations against religious fanaticism. His text

illustrates, rather convincingly, that the degree to which fanaticism is assigned to one party is often directly proportionate to the galaxy of unchallenged or unevaluated assumptions or convenient lapses of memory on the part of the accuser. It is not that a position, whatever that position might be, necessitates a certain inflexibility on the part of those occupying that position. Toscano's point is that there appears to be a mechanism, a dynamic that accompanies ideological disagreements.

This book, then, is about a repeated happening – a social event that has occurred across a variety of cultural and temporal planes – and the internal and external causes, conditions, and results of that happening. The purpose of Toscano's writing is not to assign a predictive series of characteristics to the term 'fanaticism' but to investigate the way in which this label has either produced or become the symbol of reaction to human behavior interpreted by others. The social life of the terminology investigated here must be weighed amid the political events that were branded fanatical at the time as well as those that were assigned the term retroactively. All of this feeds into the realization that fanaticism, as a cultural and historical object, which is to say as something that has an existence that is built on the passage of time, is only meaningful in its intent. The decision to label something or someone fanatical belies an attempt to defend the opposing position. When used as a pejorative term, it is the closure of considered debate and the establishment of a binary relationship between groups.

The approach of this book appears to be the treatment of fanaticism as a sort of tangible intangible; something that needs to be measured so that it might be understood. The historical examples and lineage traced – through Hume, Voltaire, Locke and others – are included in the text in the interest of a reckoning, a determination of what overall body of characteristics qualifies something to be described as 'fanatical' or for some specific person to attract the label. In this sense as well, the text is the investigation of how this relationship develops. How it is that a term that is an overt attempt to establish leverage, to elevate the esteem of one side of an argument independent of any substance, manages to maintain some sort of continuity in its application and its use?

Toscano is talking about a maneuver, then. A bid for power that is rooted in language and the sole determination of success or failure depends on the altering of perspective. The barrage of synonyms we hear on a daily basis from politicians, news organizations and community leaders appears to have very little to do with the idea of fanaticism or the determination of what, indeed, a fanatic might be. Often, there seems to be a need to augment the thrust of the term with a preceding label – right-wing fanatic, religious fanatic, sport fanatic, etc. – or to circumvent the original signifier with another label that carries roughly the same contemporary connotations – terrorist, extremist, liberal, conservative, etc. Toscano's text drags the focus back to the

heart of the term itself; to what this designation means in a theoretical sense and what it creates on a practical level. The movement between an historical and evolutionary treatment of the presence of fanaticism and its theoretical groundings in application and determination manages to paint a much clearer picture of what is, typically, a term that hides its meaning in plain sight.

There is an obvious timeliness to this book. Contemporary political and social discourse consistently leans toward binary definitions of what are, in truth, nebulous and inherently malleable social designations. With that in mind, the majority of political dialogue commonly leans in the direction of these types of binary determinations. The degree to which the label 'fanatic' is applied often reflects the polarization of dialogue on a particular subject. To the extent that this process seems *easy*—that it seems to reflect the properties of a situation rather than connote a designative process itself—this book makes the term complicated.

And, really, complication is what is needed in this instance. The most compelling thing about Toscano's analysis is the illustration of how easily a label like 'fanatic' or an attribute like 'fanatical' is applied from a variety of different perspectives. The pliability of this term, the ability to match it with wildly different ethos, determinations and even meanings speaks to the core of our understanding of political and theoretical vocabularies. It is precisely this pliability that gives the word 'fanatic' its currency. It is impossible to determine the meaning of the word without knowing its context, without determining the purpose of its being applied in the first place. This is the point at which 'fanatic' is comparable to a number of other labels and, really, this is where I find the greatest value in Toscano's work. It is not so much the problematizing of a single collection of syllables (whatever language they may be uttered in) but the depth to which this one collection may be problematized that is of interest. This is a book that investigates the historical application, the historical evaluation and the theoretical history of the intent behind language in the abstract. The term 'fanatic' is one that is applied almost exclusively in political contexts and is one that derives its power from its inevitable establishment of a false binary in human relationships. It is a word that has some energy and force behind it. How has the idea, or the label of fanaticism been applied throughout time? What benefits are there to the use of it? To what extent can we say that language is always a political act and how does that politics function?

In writing *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea*, Alberto Toscano has drawn a map of an idea that is born and has perpetuated itself almost entirely through political language and a politics of language. This book provides a clear view of how power functions through symbolic methods and how perspective can be pre-determined according to rhetoric. This may not appear to be a revolutionary claim, but the depth to which

the term is investigated, the way in which the argument forms around historical precedents and extensive theoretical investigation feels entirely unique. Toscano announces his intention to illustrate "fanaticism as a politics of abstraction, universality and partisanship" and does so with admirable depth and style.

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Inquiry into the Truth of Communism

MARC JAMES LÉGER

Bruno Bosteels. *Badiou and Politics*. Duke University Press, 2011. 436 pp.

Tom Eyers begins his review of Bruno Bosteels' *Badiou and Politics* by addressing the relevance of critical theory to the current political conjuncture in which the 'Arab Spring' of 2011, the anti-austerity demonstrations in Europe, and the Occupy movements have inaugurated a new era of revolt. I would be remiss if I did not make a similar observation concerning the relevance of Bosteels' book on Badiou to the Quebec "Maple Spring" (*Printemps Érable*), which, beginning in February 2012, pitted the striking student assemblies against the provincial government's proposed 75-82 per cent tuition increase. Before getting to this, however, and even before addressing *Badiou and Politics* more directly, I want to emphasize that the question that is of primary concern here is the contemporary relevance of communism. One could gain a little perspective on *Badiou and Politics* through a consideration of Bosteels' *The Actuality of Communism*, which was published by Verso in 2011. The purpose of the latter is not only to assist the cross-generational transmission of the ideology of communism in a world that is weary of past disasters (AC 2011: 6), but to also consider communism as the name attributed to an emancipated future (AC 2011: 9). As part of this, Bosteels wonders if one should embrace the idea of communism as the art of the impossible—in the case of Badiou, as an ethics of courage and fidelity, and in the case of Slavoj Žižek, as the political variant of not giving way on one's desire. Can there be a unified front, he asks, beyond the multiple disagreements of this speculative left? In advance of *Badiou and Politics*, therefore, *The Actuality of Communism* lets us know that Bosteels' overarching purpose is a dialectic "between the actuality of communism and the attraction of so-called speculative leftism" (21). If Badiou's ultimate goal is to help bring into being a new modality of existence, then Bosteels' purpose is to take an extra step beyond philosophy and to consider how it is that politics thinks inside of Badiou's periodizing of the communist hypothesis.

Badiou and Politics is based on the intuition that Badiou's 1982 book, *Theory of the Subject*, as well as some of his earlier writings, such as *Théorie de la contradiction* (1974) and *De l'idéologie* (with François Balmès, 1976), are necessary for a proper appreciation of his later major works, *Being and Event* (1988) and *Logics of Worlds* (2006). The reason for this emphasis, according to Bosteels, is the tendency in the

reception of Badiou's work to consider his theory of the event to be unduly meta-physical and doctrinaire. Bosteels' overall argument, in contrast, is that there is an underlying continuity between the early and later writings that favours dialectical materialism, a continuity that may not be apparent to readers of *Manifesto for Philosophy* (1989) and *Ethics* (1993), but which is evident in *Logics of Worlds*. Bosteels makes no apologies for his relative ineptitude regarding Badiou's unprecedented association of ontology with mathematics since, in his estimation, outside of being, the role of math is negligible (xviii). This assertion, I would argue, is hardly irrelevant to those of us who, unlike Bosteels, are more directly invested in the work of Žižek. Never-theless, despite Bosteels' assertion, *Badiou and Politics* does offer cultural and social theory some exciting possibilities for thinking about the interconnections between social and subject formation and for considering the terms in which artistic practice might be conceived alongside politics as the central truth procedure in Badiou's work.

Bosteels argues that Badiou's thinking is dialectical primarily because it makes con-nections between being and event, between being as a science of multiplicity and event as the basis of a truth procedure. The significance of structural change is not what happens, not what we can know in terms of reality, but what is new in the situ-ation. Being and event are not external to one another, but articulated through the impasse of being itself (7). What is it, a dialectician might wonder, that closes the gap between subject and object? Badiou's metapolitics, which resists all forms of repre-sentational politics, opposes politics (or culture) to economic base. Politics must not be considered against an eternally fixed notion of either capitalism or discourse. Dia-lectics, Bosteels argues, allows us to conceive of politics in terms of void and excess rather than totalization and negation (11). What's important here is the manner in which politics (culture) becomes thinkable, not as essence, but as distinct from politi-cal (aesthetic) philosophy. The truth procedures of politics, art, science and love can-not be subordinated to philosophy. In this regard, Bosteels states that the subject is "a fragment of the sustained enquiry into the consequences of an event for a possible universal truth" (25). From this we derive the simple understanding that not every-thing is political, and by the same token, not everything is of aesthetic significance. Politics is thus an art of the impossible that favours a truth that is universally the same for all, an art that can organize a generic equality that could be named communism.

The six principal chapters in *Badiou and Politics*, minus the last two digressive chap-ters on potentiality and radical democracy, are rich in theoretical concerns that are often taken as *passéiste*, sections that demonstrate how Badiou has made a consistent effort to preserve a dialectical materialist outlook. After establishing Badiou's debts to Althusser and Lacan, from the construction of a philosophy that provides schemas with which we can overcome contradictions (in other words, Theory) to a theory of the subject that goes beyond ideological interpellation (a subject that responds to and

displaces its own structural placement), Bosteels elaborates the primacy of the real, which in Badiou can become the site of a newly constituted truth. Badiou's example of a new social truth is Aeschylus' *Orestes*, in which, in contrast to Sophocles' *Antigone*, anxiety and sacrificial logic are replaced by courage and justice, leading to the composition of a new order. Badiou's preference for Aeschylus provides an example of the shift from the algebraic to the topological, the shift from the real of the vanishing to the real of the knot, which is the recognition of a subjectivity that is conditioned by truth (87). This figure of unheard-of-justice is then presented by Bosteels as the Maoist basis for Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*. Bosteels takes great pleasure in presenting us "his" Badiou, who is the Badiou for whom fidelity to May '68 derives from the French Maoist period of 1966 to 1976. The inquiry into the truth procedure, which for any cultural theorist is a challenge on the highest order (one thinks of the significance of the Russian artistic *avant-gardes* in relation to the historical mission of the Bolshevik revolution), is defined in terms of a Maoist investigation (*enquète*) into the dialectic between truth and knowledge, a report on knowledge and an analysis of the concrete situation (112). The Maoist Badiou has little use for the good moral conscience of the Beautiful Soul, for left-wing populism, Third-Worldism, or for identity struggles that vacillate between authoritarianism and anarchy. Badiou's education in the Union of Communists of France Marxist-Lenininst (UCFML) led him to found L'Organisation Politique, a new type of party that does not merely propagate the reality of the party. This post-Maoist suspension of the party-form, Bosteels tells us, works to grasp the laws of politics rather than leading the working class in a revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society (127). What is significant here is that the organizational form remains necessary in Badiou's politics for anything that wishes to be more than a short-lived uprising.

This juncture in Bosteels' book brings me to the events of the "Maple Spring," which changed dramatically around May 18, 2012, when the Quebec provincial government under Jean Charest proposed the draconian "law 78," which severely curtailed people's rights of assembly and free speech and sought to prevent the continuation of the strike in the autumn of 2012. At that stage, Quebec citizens vehemently displayed their indignation by spontaneously assembling "casserole" demonstrations, bringing the student strike closer to more a generalized social strike.[1] The upshot of this mass involvement tilted the political process in the direction of electoral politics. In response to the student uprisings, the Parti Québécois (Quebec's separatist par-

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[1]   For critical writings on the "Maple Spring," see "Out of the Mouth of 'Casseroles' I and II" *in Wi:journal of mobile media* (Spring 2012); "Theorizing the printemps érable" supplement in *Theory & Event* 15:3 (2012); as well as Marc James Léger, "The Québec Maple Spring, the Red Square and After," (October 2012) at eipcp. net/n/1350583322.

ty and traditionally the Liberal government's political opposition on the provincial stage) appeared to many as an absolutely confusing and often contradictory choice: sometimes supportive of the students, sometimes associated with Quebec nationalism and separatism, and sometimes perceived as no less neoliberal in social policy than the Liberals. In an interview that was published in the newspaper *Le Devoir* on June 11, 2012, Badiou celebrated not only the particular form of the Quebec student resistance to tuition hikes but also the more general revolt of subjectivity against the corporate paradigm of free markets. He warned against independence movements, however, stating that in the last two to three decades, both the explosion of national identities as well as their destruction have proven to be negative phenomena. "I would not be in favour of the separation of Québec," he wrote. "I'm not convinced that the world making of the Québec people requires a state-led separation" (Gauvin 2012).

The terms of Badiou's politics in this interview are somewhat obscure. They could be more readily elucidated, as it happens, by the discussion that is provided in Appendix 2 of Bosteels' book, which is an interview with Badiou conducted by Peter Hallward and Bosteels in Paris on July 2, 2002. Badiou begins with the prevailing opinion that the political project of the left has been associated with totalitarianism, with communism as crime. Against this, Badiou proposes that the twentieth century was marked by the passion for the real, a will to transform the world, including the state and its police functions, according to a new formalization. Badiou accepts that in this regard the Cultural Revolution succeeded in mobilizing the masses, but failed by turning into anarchic violence and by preserving the party-state framework. Maoism, however, was correct in maintaining a dialectical relationship between the local and the global, in managing to preserve a place through subtraction rather than insurrection, confrontation or antagonism—in other words, by recognizing that the contradictions were not only between the people and their enemy, but in the midst of the people themselves (327).

Badiou goes on in the interview to reflect on anti-globalization demonstrations, which he considers insurrectional. Such movements, as advocated by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for example, are considered by Badiou to be forms of adaptation to domination and not the genuine constitution of independent political spaces based on axiomatic stability (329-30). The anti-globalization movement, he says, is nothing but the "wild operator" of capitalist globalization (336). The horizontality, transversality and non-organizational aspects of the "multitudes" repeat the "very ordinary performances from the well-worn repertoire of petit-bourgeois mass movements" (337) and avoid all forms of discipline. The multitudes operate according to the terms of diffuse networks of power rather than according to differentiated statements that can concentrate the political rupture. The task of philosophy, therefore, is to separate politics from such forms of ideology as have become the stock in trade

of contemporary activism. Badiou continues his interview with a clarification on the links between contemporary nihilism and the democratic form of struggle. He suggests that contemporary artists who are attempting to move beyond postmodernism are also abandoning the politico-subjective configuration of democratic materialism, which recognizes no truths, only bodies and languages.

Bosteels' Badiou is the Badiou that would trouble the way in which Lacan responded to the revolutionary aspirations of the students by stating that what they are looking for is a master. For Badiou, the real, as the point of the impossible that structures the symbolic order, must not vanish into its effects, but must instead displace and transform the place of the lack, sustaining the elaboration of new truths. In this respect, the communism of the speculative left is more than an ideal. However, insofar as the Maoist theorist sees the revolt of the masses as typically appropriated by dominant forces, or by a faction becoming dominant, Bosteels asks that we supplement Badiou's work with a critique of political economy and a consideration of those emancipatory movements that relied on the guiding principles of Marxism. Today's leftist is typically caught between the masses of civil society and the coercive machinery of the state. Against a pure leftist reason, Bosteels champions Badiou's dialectical rethinking of class, the party and political organization. In turn, against the negative tendency of Badiou's speculative leftism, he calls for factions on the left to go beyond polemics and to build a common front.

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