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REVIEWS
in **CULTURAL THEORY**

Reviews in Cultural Theory is a journal of reviews and review essays, published twice annually. We welcome offers to review or suggestions of forthcoming books engaged with contemporary theories of culture. We also wecome suggestions for review essays and similiar, lengthier variations on the review form.

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At Last, A Handbook!/?

ANDREW BUZNY

David Halperin. *How to be Gay*. Harvard University Press, 2012. 549pp.

David Halperin's gargantuan tome, *How to be Gay*, comes upon the heels of the controversy surrounding his undergraduate course of the same title. Although Halperin is an eminent scholar in queer studies, this text, which comes in at 457 pages, with an additional 68 pages of endnotes, is not the how-to guide one might anticipate given its title. Although he claims the impetus for the project springs out of an interest in gay initiation, he spends the bulk of the text explicating the generic conventions of gay identifications from pre-Stonewall popular culture to the present. He does this in an attempt to understand why members of gay male culture prefer feminine gender identifications and the queering of straight culture over the privileged identity markers of a liberated, virile, and natural gayness. He writes: "Now that gay men were living their homosexuality not as a cultural practice but as a sexual identity, they required a new gender style; and the masculine gender style that they adopted…excluded the feminine identifications that had informed and defined much of traditional gay male culture" (50). For Halperin, there is a "distinctively gay *way of being*…[which] appears to be rooted in a particular queer *way of feeling*. And that queer way of feeling—that queer *subjectivity*—expresses itself through a peculiar, dissident *way of relating* to cultural objects…and cultural forms in general" (12; original emphasis). In short, he sets out to examine male homosexuality as a cultural orientation, one that he claims is not, in fact, the sole province of gay men; indeed, writing at one point, Halperin opines, "Sometimes I think homosexuality is wasted on gay people" (448).

Surprisingly, Halperin avoids engaging prominent queer theorists, like Lee Edelman or Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who for him, draw too much from psychoanalytic discourses in their work. The queer subjectivity that Halperin seeks to uncover is not the subjectivity "which can be safely theorized in the register of psychoanalytic abstraction" because according to Halperin, "psychoanalysis…is not useful for understanding the collective subjectivity of specific social groups" (89). Halperin's attempt at disavowing psychoanalysis is refreshing, to say the least. In its place, Halperin attempts "a close reading of cultural objects" (89) to tease out the poetic or generic conventions of gay male culture. His study focuses "above all on *social and cultural forms* in their positivity, as autonomous objects of description and interpretation, and will not reduce them to mere expressions or products of social process" (137; original

emphasis). Nonetheless, Halperin is unable to fully exorcise the legacy of psycho-analysis given his own investment in lauding gay subjectivity and its identifications over gay identity.

Halperin insists that his object of study is neither gay desire nor gay identity, but rather gay subjectivity and the identifications that accompany it. As I alluded to ear-lier, Halperin insists that understanding gayness as sexual identity and not a cultural practice delimits the myriad affects and dispositions that circulate within it. Simply put: "gay male desire cannot be reduced to gay identity, to gayness *as* identity. Gay identity is therefore not adequate to the expression of gay subjectivity" (90). Halperin is adamant that examining gay identity is antithetical to his project because the "polit-icized and sexualized gay identity" that was supposed to replace traditional, feminine gay cultural forms has not replaced the queering of straight culture as the dominant cultural mode (120). Halperin argues that codifying gay identity is limiting, citing the pervasive effect that this strategy has had in popular film, television and literature, where identification is almost entirely restricted to a poisonous choice between the "Will Truman" or the "Jack McFarland" archetypes, leaving all other identifications off-limits. The gay fascination with queering and identification that Halperin insists upon is compelling for him above all from the vantage point of gay children, who grow up in a straight world, overly invested in fantastical figurations of what could be (229); as such, "gay male culture still operates through—and indeed thrives on—a metaphorical or figural reading of straight culture" (122). Whereas gay identity de-marcates boundaries, gay identification deconstructs those boundaries: identification allows for "the feeling of closeness to, or affinity with, *other people*—with anything and everything that is not oneself" (122). While such a reading of identification is not without its problems—suggesting an internalized homophobia by not wanting to be oneself—it also illustrates that not only is gay male culture highly figurative and imaginative, but also that this obsession with identification breeds a less bigoted attitude towards difference at an early age.

The second analytical trajectory that Halperin takes involves decoding the genre con-ventions or poetic forms of gay male culture since, for Halperin, genres "produce regularities in social behaviour and discursive practice throughout a wide range of human interactions" (132). He parses out and analyzes the conventions essential to the gay male genre as such: the collapse of the distinction "between tragedy and comedy, specifically the practice of laughing at situations that are horrifying or tragic" (159), the melding of feminine glamour and feminine abjection (159), the embrace of stigma (181), and the disavowal of the serious (186). For Halperin, straight culture is "earnest, judgmental, sententious, moralistic, therapeutic, literal" (176). Whereas gay male culture, due to its investment in identification and the feminine, lauds per-formance and the figural; in short, he regards gay male culture as a re-stylization of

the mundane, banal straight world.

A quarter of the way into the book, Halperin poses one of his more salient questions: "we might wonder *what gay identification does for us that gay identity cannot do*" (123; original emphasis). Rather than concern himself with contemporary identifications, Halperin examines aspects of so-called classic gay male culture, principally, the stereotypically effeminate aspects: Broadway musicals, male opera singers, and Joan Crawford films, etc. Throughout the remainder of the book, Halperin critiques the circulation of Joan Crawford as a representation of a glamorous, albeit abject femininity, a figure whom many white, American gay men have long identified with. A product of my generation, my own familiarity with Crawford's oeuvre is minimal, but Halperin's hermeneutics is transferable to other examples—which is both commendable and disappointing since he uses transferability as an excuse to escape expanding his archive (354). Even in his engagement with Crawford, Halperin restricts himself to a few examples. Halperin fixates upon her role in the film *Mildred Pierce* and the biopic *Mommie Dearest* to illustrate how the denial of serious affect is always already present within female cross-generational "tragedies" since they always appear merely melodramatic (261). The scenes which Halperin dissects at length revolve around mother-daughter conflicts, with a mother figure, in one instance Crawford-as-actress and in the latter an actress-as-Crawford, demanding respect from a defiant and unloving daughter. It is because these scenes contrast Crawford's "austere elegance and dignified bearing…with the abuse she suffers and the social and emotional mortification her face so eloquently registers" (158) that Halperin believes gay male culture affiliates itself with these camp representations. In other words, gay men are able to identify with Crawford because they, too, wish to rise above their own effeminate abject status and lead glamorous lives.

Some of Halperin's most astute analyses lie in his engagement with both seriousness and irony, though. According to Halperin, it is only by making a performance of seriousness (283) and by not taking serious affects too seriously that gay men can give public expression to their private feelings. He specifically refers to a group of men known as the "Fire Island Widows" who parodied Italian widows and their mourning rituals in order to find a space to grieve for their friends and lovers who died of AIDS at a time when gay men where not afforded a public forum to grieve those deaths (181). Parody and irony, here, provide gay men an avenue to express serious emotions in a manner most would consider unserious and disrespectful.

Despite the intellectual rigor and merit of the above arguments, Halperin's book is not without its problems. First, for a book that is over four hundred pages in length, Halperin could have had a more inclusive, diverse, and less universalizing archive. Moreover, given his own participation in gay male culture, Halperin is, on more

than one occasion, far too anecdotal. For instance, he deconstructs a pamphlet he found in his locker at a gay gym (368-374). I understand Halperin's desire to read the ephemera of everyday gay existence, but his argument that the pamphlet intentionally participates in the initiation of gay men into gay male culture by quoting "Ritorna vincitor!" from *Aida* is unconvincing. His suggestion that "multiple ironies produced by invoking opera in the context of a sporting event impart to the members of the gym a shared consciousness of being part of a specifically gay collectivity" (374) reads as utopian and circumvents ignorance and indifference as possible—perhaps the most likely—responses to such a pamphlet.

The aforementioned anecdote is not the most egregious issue, though. Halperin makes a distinction between essentializing cultures and essentializing identities. Cognizant that academics are wary of essentialist discourses, he states that "to condemn as 'essentialist' an effort to describe the distinctive features of gay male culture, is to confuse a *culture*, and the practices that constitute it, with the indeterminate number of *individuals* who, at any one time and to varying degrees, may happen to compose it" (133). To argue that cultures are not tied to specific populations is, at best, ignoring the nuances of gay male culture—is gay male culture singular? Moreover, his understanding of identification within gay male culture is universalizing and troubling given the culture to which he turns is the white middle-class culture that continues to dominate queer cultural spaces. Halperin, in fact, sidesteps the question of race:

> I will not speak specifically of White American middle-class gay male culture…
> That is not because I wish to give my statements a false universal application,
> let alone because I wish to promote White supremacism, but because it impossible to determine with any precision the specific *population* that qualifies as the subject of a specific *culture*. I prefer to allow the exact ethnic or racial contours of the gay culture under consideration to shift as the particular points of reference change in the course of the analysis. (137)

His comment gestures towards race while concomitantly dismissing it. Halperin neither provides nor considers even the possibility of a racialized counterpoint to Joan Crawford; I wonder to what extent someone such as Eartha Kitt or Oprah Winfrey could complicate and nuance Halperin's argument. He acknowledges the Fire Island Widows' appropriation of Italian mourning practices, but he does not consider representations of non-White femininities that mix the abject and the glamorous. To be fair, I do not imagine that, prior to the civil rights movement, on the whole, non-White actors achieved the level of fame that Crawford did with mainstream audiences, and, as such, the pool from which to draw non-White gay icons is, at best, highly limited. But would there not be more examples in the contemporary era?

It is at this critical juncture that Halperin's book becomes as antiquated as the Joan Crawford films he examines. Although he does illustrate how key moments from her films continue to pop up in unexpected queer places, most of those references are lost on younger generations. In the same way that one cannot claim Shakespeare is representative of all English literature, one cannot claim Crawford is representative of gay male culture and its practices. As much as I laud him for examining gay femininity and effeminacy, his book seems to be performing the work of an earlier early gay studies—not even early gay *and lesbian* studies—that did not go beyond the figure of the white, middle-class, gay male as its object of study. Missing from his analysis is the positioning of his archive and methodology within current queer theoretical debates. While he clearly disavows a dependence upon psychoanalysis, he does not sufficiently engage any current work in queer theory that could contextualize his argument. Moreover, his book lacks the critical terminology necessary to be on par with queer theory—absent from his book, both in the index and throughout the text itself, is an acknowledgement and engagement with homonormativity, a crucial concept in queer theory. While he writes that, "Just as you can participate in gay culture without being homosexual, so you can participate in heteronormativity without being straight" (451), the absence of "homonormativity," as such, as a point of analysis suggests that Halperin is not up to date with current debates in queer theory. Given his investment in queer appropriations of heteronormative popular culture, and his argument that representations of gay identity fail to take hold, one would assume that he would trace out the nuances of homonormativity. The book does not fail to provide an interesting and engaging critique and description of *some* gay male cultural practices, but with four hundred pages to work with, it is possible to engage a diverse archive, avoid repetition, and the universalizing of one set of genre conventions.

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Reverse Teleologies

HELEN KAPSTEIN

Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff. *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa.* Paradigm, 2012. 261 pp.

This volume opens with an amazing epigraph from South Africa's Ministry of Higher Education and Training, part of which reads, "We should not only be consumers of theory from the developed world. We should become more active producers of social theory...." This quotation alone is almost enough to convince me of the book's premise: that South Africa and the rest of the "global South" lead the world in new theory and practice. After all, how many governments actively promote the generation of social theory as part of their agenda? (The possible exception of the French aside.) In keeping with their interest in the flows and hiccups of capital in a post-colonial, globalized world, the authors, Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, immediately frame their conversation in these terms, opening with a reminder of how Western thought has always treated the rest of the world as a "reservoir of raw fact" (1) that can be capitalized upon. As the volume's title indicates, the anthropologists' intent is to reverse the usual assumption that theory and praxis filter down from the West to the rest and instead to demonstrate how the South produces much of what is new. This somewhat romantic notion does not, however, work as a corrective to European and American default thinking for a number of reasons, almost all of which they themselves anticipate. For instance, the problem of the word "evolving" in the title. Of course, we know (if we have properly read our Darwin) that evolution is not teleological—it consists of mistakes and mutations as much as it does improvements and advantages. Comaroff and Comaroff address the problem early and directly:

> To the degree that the making of modernity has been a world-historical process, it can as well be narrated from its undersides as it can from its self-proclaimed centers—like those maps that, as a cosmic joke, invert planet Earth to place the south on top, the north below. But we seek to do more than just turn the story upside down thus to leave intact the Manichean dualism that holds Euro-America and its others in the same, fixed embrace. Or to displace an established telos with its opposite, leaving teleology itself intact. We also seek to do more than note that many of the emergent features, the sublimated structures, and the concealed contradictions of capitalist modernity were as readily perceptible in the colony as in the metropole. Or that the former was often a site of production for the ways-and-means of the latter. What we suggest, in addition, is that

contemporary world-historical processes are disrupting

received geographies of core and periphery, relocating southward——-and of course, eastward as well—some of the most innovative and energetic modes of producing value. And, as importantly, part or whole ownership of them. (7)

Despite these best intentions, the book does succumb to a sort of reverse teleology. Describing African modernity as a history "not running behind Euro-America, but ahead of it" (12) makes the unfolding of history sound like a race, as does asking "whether the West recognizes that it is playing catch-up in many respects with the temporality of its others" (14). The basic impulse here, though, is sound and admirable: not only to redeem the contributions of the global South to modernity and postmodernity, but to insert them into the dominant narrative of those histories.

Comaroff and Comaroff see the effects of global economic processes to be most visible and most spectacular in the South. This is where they "tend to most graphically manifest themselves" (13). And they lament "our failure to recognize in Africa, Asia, and Latin America the traces of things about to happen, things sometimes destructive, sometimes productive, sometimes a mixture of both" (17). That tricky pronoun in "our failure" slips in a few times over the course of the book. We have to ask who is part of that "our," whose idea of settled is being made strange (19), and whose ordinary is being stripped "of its self-evident ordinariness" (19). Very careful about trying to avoid falling into binaries of the West and the rest, or the West and its others, the authors are not always careful enough about specific language choices and so, ironically, there are moments in which they reinforce the very hierarchies they hope to trouble.

I remain unconvinced that the essays in *Theory from the South* need to be drawn together by a single, overarching argument. As the authors point out in their Editorial Note, "With the exception of Chapters 1 and 6, the essays in this volume have all been published elsewhere" (191). Many of these essays are important and useful in their own right and do not need to be yoked into service in a compilation in which the main claim sometimes feels artificially and arbitrarily imposed on them. After the introductory essay in Chapter 1, the volume consists of essays on personhood, citizenship and difference, national borders, African political modernities, history, millennial capitalism, and AIDS. The material is wide-ranging, engaging, and densely detailed. Complementing each other, the chapters on millennial capitalism, "Alien-Nation: Zombies, Immigrants and Millennial Capitalism," and nationalism, "Nations With/Out Borders: The Politics of Being and the Problem of Belonging," stand out for their insight (in the tradition of Mary Douglas and continuing the Comaroffs' own work on witchcraft) into local political intricacies of inclusions and

exclusions in places fraught with "the contradictions and contingencies, the uncertainties and insecurities, the ambiguities and ambivalences brought about by a deep historical disjuncture" (107).
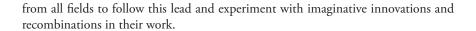
One of Comaroff and Comaroff's great strengths is their ability to derive a theoretical abstraction from historicized specifics. This happens on a variety of scales. The whole of Chapter 2, "On Personhood: A Perspective from Africa," for example, is devoted to "tak[ing] one good, historically situated case, that of the Southern Tswana peoples of South Africa during the late colonial period" to talk about African personhood without "arriv[ing] at a generic account of '*the* African conception of personhood'" (52). And in Chapter 4, "Nations With/Out Borders," the lowly South African *fynbos* plant gets dissected as one instance of a mutable emblem of national rootedness and alien border crossing.

But perhaps most enchanting for this reader is their work on enchantment. Enchantment may be a catch phrase of the moment, partly popularized by the Comaroffs' work, but it captures much about the "phantasmic global economy" (39) and its seemingly occult inner workings. The stuff here on zombies and other dread manifestations of the unknown is compelling and asks difficult questions:

> Many would agree...that witches and zombies are to be read as etiological principles that translate structural contradictions, experiential anomalies, and aporias—force-fields of greater complexity than is normally implied by "class struggle"—into the argot of human agency, of interpersonal kinship, of morality and passion.

> But here lies the rub. How does this very general truism, as valid for early colonial witchcraft as it is for latter-day zombies, relate to the implosive, shifting histories of which we have spoken? If the living dead are merely walking specters of class struggle, why have they not been a permanent fixture of the modern South African scene? What accounts for their comings and goings--and, to return to our opening conundrums, for the dramatic intensification of their appeal in the postcolony? How, furthermore, do we make sense of the particular poetics of these fantasies, whose symbolic excess and expressive exuberance gesture towards an imaginative play infinitely more elaborate than is allowed by a purely pragmatic, functionalist explication? (169)

The attention paid by Comaroff and Comaroff throughout this volume to language and poetics alerts us to their importance in all of the issues they explore. By emphasizing "imaginative play," the authors reminds us not only of the power of the anthropological subject's fantasy life in the postcolony but also of opportunities for theorists

from all fields to follow this lead and experiment with imaginative innovations and recombinations in their work.

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Longing for Lehman Sisters

MEGAN BROWN

There is a particularly illuminating moment in the opening chapter of Melissa S. Fisher's *Wall Street Women*—a blink-and-you-miss-it comment that serves as a crucial reminder of the book's significance: "It is difficult to remember the extent of sexual discrimination in the United States, as well as how thoroughly ideas of masculinity structured Wall Street in particular during the sixties and seventies" (7). It is no wonder that our memory might fail us: contemporary corporate America so often prides itself on its diversity initiatives, its Human Resources-led strides toward equality in the workplace, its glossy images of business-suited men and women of various ethnicities and ages collaborating to reach common goals. Fisher's account of professional women's experiences in the financial sector presents a quite different series of images: 1960s investment banks with just one woman on staff, a 1972 Merrill Lynch employment entrance exam with a correct answer about being interested in beautiful women, and an early 1970s Wall Street research director who congratulates himself for hiring women because he could "get the talent cheaper" (48). *Wall Street Women* serves not only as an helpful reminder of women's struggles and successes, but also as an enlightening depiction of changes—and continuing challenges—in a part of the business world often seen as mysterious at best and oppressive at worst. Indeed, the material Fisher gleans through ethnographic and archival research establishes the importance of her project, even if the book raises troubling questions about the compromises that women continue to make in the name of success, and about the nature of high finance itself.

Fisher's careful study begins with first-person narrative—the story of a 1994 meeting with Patricia Riley, a successful research strategist for a major Wall Street firm—and quickly broadens into an overview of the book's theoretical apparatus and methodology. Fisher places her work into conversation with feminist practice theory and theories of social construction, characterizing Wall Street as a set of everyday practices as well as a "social imaginary" that can shape individuals' behaviors and attitudes. Her opening chapter's shifts from narrow to wide focus—citation-heavy paragraphs interspersed with particular women's stories—characterize the book's structure as a whole, and prevent the reader from becoming bogged down in one specific series of anecdotes or interpretations.

The anecdotes, however, are essential to the process of learning about women's mid- to late-20th century strategies for finding a place on Wall Street, and for building community with each other even within competitive corporate cultures. Readers will encounter the pioneers who learned and altered the "managerial codes" of the top firms (78). Many of these women began their careers as analysts, working behind the scenes in research departments while men retained the flashier positions as brokers, traders, and investment bankers. As analysts became increasingly important within high finance, the women holding these jobs became insiders, negotiating the challenges of entering a male-dominated realm. They had to find ways to work within and outside Wall Street traditions, including modes of communication and networking; even seemingly simple decisions about proper office attire were difficult, laden with significance: "The women wanted to be taken seriously, and not mistaken for a secretary or a member of the more lower- and middle-class back office" (84). Interviewees also mention their initial confusion about boardroom seating, hosting corporate events, and table manners for power lunches. One woman even remarks that she felt like Jane Goodall, observing the unfamiliar behaviors of a species different from her own (79).

The reference to the "back office" above is one of the many details that make *Wall Street Women* a complicated and sometimes disquieting study. For the most part, Fisher's account indicates that women helped each other through the period of transition to higher status at their firms. The Financial Women's Association, founded in 1956, offered a "female financial space" where members could build informal networks and negotiate "new understandings of what it took to be a successful woman on Wall Street" (68). Later, many Wall Street women became involved in the Women's Campaign Fund, which more explicitly linked feminism, community, and politics by supporting pro-choice candidates for public office. While such examples might paint a rosy picture of complete camaraderie, Fisher avoids the potential pitfall of oversimplifying women's responses to interview questions in order to make a particular type of argument; some interviewees offer an explicitly feminist perspective, others are quieter or more skeptical, some lean to the left politically, others are Sarah Palin fans. This ideological diversity does not undermine the book's arguments, but instead strengthens the overall sense that "various structures of power constrain but do not determine people's everyday practices, and that, in turn, people's everyday practices reproduce and sometimes change those very structures" (4). (Indeed, I finished the book hoping to see a *Wall Street Women* sequel that more directly addresses another type of diversity—race and ethnicity—in the realm of high finance.)

Because, as Fisher points out, everyday practices can also "reproduce" structures of power, *Wall Street Women*'s arguments about women's communities and "market feminism" are by necessity complicated, and at times difficult to grasp. Fisher defines

market feminism as an alignment of market forces and demands with feminist arguments for equal rights in the workplace and beyond. For instance, Fisher contends that women worked hard, individually and collectively, to co-opt certain stereotypical notions of gender difference as they strove to establish their careers. She notes that two prevailing images of financial success—the Horatio Alger vision of "luck and pluck" and the more recent notion of making risky, daring bets on the market—both became useful to women working in high finance. The older vision of meritocracy and being in the right place at the right time inspired women to work within the existing system, to lobby for "sufficient adjustments and reforms to allow women access to all areas of economic and public life" (97). The later emphasis on risk "also contributed to further inculcating a more cultural and, indeed, essentialist feminism into the world of finance…revalidat[ing] undervalued female attributes such as conservative thinking" (97). While Fisher suggests that the potential gains for women subscribing to these images of success were and are complicated by each image's neat alignment with neoliberal discourses of autonomous (often coded masculine) individualism and deregulation, I wished for more acknowledgement of the idea that depending on problematic images also entails perpetuating those images and the assumptions underpinning them. For instance, the *Working Girl* admin assistant-to-executive fairy tale notwithstanding, unequal circumstances beget unequal opportunities; those "lower- and middle-class secretaries" cannot move up the corporate ladder through sheer willpower alone, and the Algeresque notion that they could do so—if only they tried harder—harms rather than helps their chances for advancement. Moreover, while I agree that the casino-like culture of contemporary high finance could certainly benefit from a more conservative (and more ethical) approach to risk, the idea that women can succeed on Wall Street because they are typically cautious and risk-averse perpetuates essentialist assumptions and becomes, ironically, a risky strategy. What happens to these cautious female executives when the tide turns, and the high-rolling gambler once again becomes the prevailing archetype? More broadly, what does success on Wall Street—and women's strategy of "deploy[ing] very traditional ideas about femininity to make room for themselves… [in a] decidedly untraditional vocation" —cost (171)?

Indeed, we may have already witnessed the answer to these questions. Wall Street itself continues to be dominated by white men. Fisher notes that many women lost high-ranking, high-profile positions after the collapse of Lehman Brothers and other banks and insurance companies. Of course, the global economic crisis resulted in many downsizings, but I wonder if Wall Street firms are continuing to cling to their gambling ways, desperate to recoup their massive losses by making huge bets on the volatile market. *Wall Street Women* offers some reasons to think otherwise, describing women taking part in an "emergent discourse of the feminizing and 'feministing' of markets" (157), some of which "articulated a divide between masculine, greedy, risk-

taking actors and behaviors…and a more feminine, long-term approach to financial practice that could possibly help the economy avoid crisis or could fix it" (158). For instance, Fisher cites specific examples of women engaging in socially (and fiscally) responsible investment practices. This notion of making capitalism somehow work differently, which runs like an undercurrent through Fisher's book, is enormously appealing. But I worry that even these images of women as "change agents'—to borrow a business term—retain reductionist ideas of gender difference that may cause more problems than they solve.

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The Problem of Religious Difference

ALAN R. VAN WYK

Martha Nussbaum. *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age.* Harvard University Press, 2012. 285 pp.

Religion has become a problem. Or rather, religion has been made a problem. Reduced to being a maker of meaning and marker of identity, it has become a maker and marker of difference, a difference that, in the North Atlantic world, against a normative Christianity, is often the difference of Islam. And within a creeping intolerance, this is a difference that is not allowed to be. It is this intolerance that concerns Martha Nussbaum in *The New Religious Intolerance*, a work that attempts to name both the cause of this intolerance and the means for its overcoming. In an elegantly simple formulation, Nussbaum argues that the cause is fear (ch. 2), proposing that, in the name of a democratic political culture, this fear is overcome through a clarification of the political principles of equality (ch. 3) and a coherent and consistent ethical practice of equality (ch. 4), actualized by a curious imagination (ch. 5). In a time of growing religious intolerance, Nussbaum offers a powerful articulation and defense of an American tradition of democracy, a democratic practice that is grounded in an equality that can function as a bulwark against intolerance.

The New Religious Intolerance is a decidedly contemporary work, quite consciously arising within the long shadow of 9/11, a shadow that is, it seems, growing darker. In *The Liberty of Conscience*, written only four years earlier, Nussbaum tells a story "in which religious fairness faces threats from both the "right" and the "left," from arrogant secularism as well as from aggressively insular forms of Christianity," (10) and presents, in the case of Islam, a post-9/11 America in which "we have something to be proud of" (347). In *The New Religious Intolerance* this rather benign sounding threat appears on the verge of turning violent, and America is less likely to produce a sense of pride. Rather, the US is now being overcome by "religious prejudice and fear," "ugly fears and suspicions that disfigure all Western societies" (2). Today, Nussbaum worries, "fear is accelerating" (19). On the one hand, the more optimistic tone might be attributed to *Liberty of Conscience's* abstract focus on constitutional law and political philosophy, as opposed to the greater cultural orientation of *The New Religious Intolerance*. But the new pessimism is also a reflection of a changing mood in which American identity is seen by many to be under a greater internal threat than was the

case in the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

Here, Nussbaum makes a helpful comparison with Europe. Beginning with a rather dangerous generalization that is only later nuanced, she argues that European nations have understood themselves to be constituted through historically specific identities, based on blood, soil, ethnolinguistic peoplehood, or religion (13). This has led many European nations to develop quite strict practices of assimilation that make it difficult for new immigrants to become proper citizens, while at the same time discouraging internal heterogeneity. Today, fueled by a renewed religious fear appearing as Islamophobia, these practices include burqa bans, bans on minarets, and religiously directed violence. Downplaying the appearances of Islamophobia in the US, Nussbaum argues that direct prohibitions against religious practice have not yet appeared in the US at least in part because its civic membership is grounded not through a historical identity, but "in terms of shared goals and ideals," a political and ethical commitment to democracy (18). Ideally, this identity makes possible a toleration of heterogeneity, a toleration of internal heterogeneity that has often mitigated against an internalized violence. Further, Nussbaum argues, this identity, and America's commitment to democratic equality, allows for a move beyond tolerance – which remains bound to social hierarchy, as "a privileged group says that we will indulge you but retains the power not to do so, should it change its mind" (70)—to an expansive liberty that pushes to friendship (245) and even to love (57).

But not only is the US not moving toward a greater love of religious difference, a deeper friendship with the religiously other, or even a tolerance of religious diversity, it seems to be moving closer to the religious prohibitions and violences that have already appeared in Europe. And this, Nussbaum argues, is because of fear. Drawing on the findings of neuroscience, philosophical rhetoric, and cognitive psychology, Nussbaum argues that fear is a rather primitive emotion, one that is probably quite helpful from an evolutionary perspective, as it is "a form of heightened attentiveness—but of a self-focused, indeed solipsistic kind. It reduces to a kind of vivid awareness of one's own body, and perhaps, at best, of a narrow circle of people and things closely connected to the body" (28-29). Fear is, in other words, narcissistic, and in its extreme, a threat not only to society but also to love (57). Although not explored in the present text, this conceptualization of fear in relation to the body is particularly helpful in trying to understand contemporary fundamentalisms and their extreme interest in the regulation of (female) bodies.[1] What is more important in the present case is Nussbaum's methodological turn to scientific research to understand fear both as

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[1]   Nussbaum explores these issues in relation to the recent rise of a Hindu right in India in *The Clash Within*, especially chapter 6, "Fantasies of Purity and Domination."

an emotion and as an emotional agent.[2] Although this is useful for determining the nature of fear and how it functions, it leaves scarce resources for analyzing the ideological projection of fear. For fear is, as Nussbaum recognizes, "easily displaced onto something that may have little to do with the underlying problem [that is threatening the self]" (23), a displacement that is influenced by culture, politics, and rhetoric (29-30), a displacement that often obscures the issues at stake (47). Although the turn to science allows Nussbaum to present fear as a generalized cause of intolerance, we are left wondering why fear directs itself to religion, and, more specifically, to Islam as the religious difference that becomes a problem.

As I have already noted, Nussbaum proposes that this intolerance can be overcome by a clarification of political principles of equality and a coherent and consistent ethical practice of equality actualized with the aid of a curious imagination. The political principles Nussbaum clarifies are those concerning human dignity and equality, especially as these have been interpreted in American political and legal theory. This clarification proceeds by proposing four premises: first, that "all human beings are equal bearers of human dignity" (61); second, that governments "may not violate that equal dignity, and in general they ought to show *respect* for our equality and dignity" (65); third, that conscience—"the faculty with which people search for life's ultimate meaning" (65)—is closely related to and a part of what constitutes human dignity; and fourth, that the conscience can "be impeded by bad worldly conditions" (65). Together, Nussbaum argues, these premises lead to the principle that "liberty should be both ample and equal," which is, following John Rawls, amplified as the principle that a just and democratic equality requires "the maximum liberty that is compatible with a like liberty for all" (68). Here Nussbaum offers a convincing case for understanding equality as requiring an expansive practice and defense of religious liberty. Yet in grounding human equality and dignity in conscience, and understanding religion primarily as a practice of meaning-making, religious practice and materiality appear as unessential and accidental. Nussbaum clearly recognizes that religious practices and material cultures are to be protected within an expansive defense of religious liberty, but they are to be so protected only as adjuncts to and extensions of the meaning-making practices of religion. Together with her earlier focus on the general emotive character of fear, this deemphasizing of religious practice and material culture functions to depoliticize religion, overlooking the many ways in which religions not only make meaning, but, in quite literal ways, make the world.

Political principles are never enough; also necessary, Nussbaum argues, is the devel-

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[2] Here she is following one of the most recent trends in religious studies, a methodological turn to science that attempts to de-mystify religious understanding and explanation. See, for example, Ann Taves' *Religious Experience Reconsidered.*

opment of a coherent and consistent ethical practice. Drawing on Greek, Christian, and Kantian thought, Nussbaum proposes that the ethical practice of the political principles of liberty and equality is fundamentally a practice of non-hypocritical equality (102). The ethical life is, for Nussbaum, at least a life that recognizes the equality of all, and, through this recognition, is a life without personal exemption. Nussbaum uses this ethic of non-hypocritical equality as a theoretical ground from which to criticize, with devastating effect, the arguments made in support of the recently proposed burqa bans in Europe (104-132). Although this ethical critique is quite effective, it is the humor of its delivery that seems most proper. In a wonderful comic tone, Nussbaum responds to the "arguments" for the burqa bans by showing, through a comparative presentation of her comically overdone Chicago style—bundled from head to toe to survive blistering cold winters, and just as bundled from head to toe to hide from the sun while watching the White Sox—the irrationality of these arguments. To the extent that this humor can easily turn to mockery, this is a dangerous method, but sometimes the only proper response to an irrational intolerance arising from an irrational fear is humor.

Nussbaum is able to avoid mockery because she has herself developed, and so is modeling, a well-developed imagination, "a displacement of mind, a curious, questioning, and receptive demeanor that says, in effect, 'Here is another human being. I wonder what he (or she) is seeing and feeling right now' . . . a willingness to move out of the self and to enter another world" (140). This curious and empathetic imagination is necessary, Nussbaum argues, because it is only through this imagination that equality and liberty become not merely principles but felt realities of life; it is only when one can imaginatively feel an other as equal that it becomes possible to practice political and ethical equality. Exploring Roger Williams encounter with the Narragansett Indians, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise*, George Eliot's novel *Daniel Deronda*, and the children's literature of Marguerite de Angeli, Nussbaum presents this curious and empathetic imagination at work. As grounding the possibility for the practice of a politics of equality and liberty, and so as the condition for resisting and overcoming fear, this curious and empathetic imagination moves beyond understanding, and, again, beyond tolerance, to a minimal type of friendship: a "curiosity, listening, responsiveness, [that is] a willingness to acknowledge a full life and world over there, outside ourselves" (187).

With this theoretical elaboration of the cause of religious intolerance and the means for its overcoming in place, Nussbaum proposes to explore what this religious equality and liberty might actually look like by analyzing the Park 51 controversy. She begins with a wonderful debunking of many of the "facts" that have constituted the debate around Park 51, before moving to narrow the debate down to two questions: "First, do the developers have a constitutionally protected right to build an Islamic

center, including a mosque, on this property? Second, is it wise (sensitive, helpful, well advised) for them to go ahead with this plan in the light of the controversy that has erupted?" (200-201). Supposing that the first question is easily answered in the affirmative, Nussbaum spends the bulk of this chapter exploring the second. Unfortunately, she does so by focusing on issues that are more properly related to PR than to philosophical, political or ethical analysis. This has the effect of proposing a set of values that are quite different than we would demand in a democracy of equality and liberty. For if the question of Park 51 is whether there was a proper PR wisdom, then the criterion of evaluation returns to tolerable acceptance, a criterion that might itself still accept intolerance as the condition of its work. This is an unfortunately unsatisfying end to an otherwise helpful and important work.

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The Trouble With Going Gaga

D E R R I T T   M A S O N

J. Jack Halberstam. *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal*. Beacon Press, 2012. 178 pp.

"Who is Lady Gaga?" asks J. Jack Halberstam in the preface to *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal*; "What do her performances mean? And more importantly, what do her gender theatrics have to say to young people about identity, politics, and celebrity?" (xii). These are intriguing questions, especially for those of us who have been spellbound—even fleetingly—by Lady Gaga's provocative music videos, adamantine earworms, and audacious live performances (recall, for example, the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards when she concluded "Paparazzi" by staging her own blood-soaked death). Indeed, the pop star's shapeshifting persona, flirtations with genderfuck, embrace of the monstrous, meteoric rise to and self-conscious lust for fame, and creative play with pop culture pastiche in videos like "Telephone" all invite—even beg for—theorization and interpretation. So it is unsurprising that there exists a growing company of scholars (Gagaists?) who approach Lady Gaga through an academic lens as part of projects that also aspire, fittingly, to the popular. For example: *Gaga Stigmata*, founded in 2010, is an online journal that responds to the pop star's work from a range of interdisciplinary perspectives; Richard J. Gray edited a collection of critical essays entitled *The Performance Identities of Lady Gaga* in 2012; and when a University of South Carolina professor announced he was teaching a sociology class on Lady Gaga, it made international news.[1]

In short, Lady Gaga has proven herself a juicy enough subject for multiple academic tomes, and Halberstam, well known in queer theory and gender studies circles—especially for *Female Masculinity* (1998) and *In a Queer Place and Time* (2005)—seems an ideal candidate for the first single-author academic-ish monograph on this generation's Queen of Pop. However, readers should not be misled by the title of Halberstam's book, or the Gaga-inspired cover art, or the fact that "Gaga" appears in the title of all five of the book's chapters: the pointed questions posed in the preface remain, for the most part, unanswered. For herein lies the rub: this isn't entirely a book about Lady Gaga. At least, this isn't a book that attends to Lady Gaga as one might expect given the main title, cover art, and chapter titles, all of which suggest a sustained

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[1] The class was "Lady Gaga and the Sociology of Fame", taught by Mathieu Deflem. For more, see "Lady Gaga course coming to U.S. university."

focus on the Lady herself. This is a kind of Queer Theory 101, an introduction to contemporary thought on gender and sexuality for a popular audience, a not-too-distant cousin of Michael Warner's now-canonical *The Trouble With Normal*. This cousin, however, just happens to be a big Gaga fan.

All this is not to say that *Gaga Feminism* isn't useful or interesting or lively or a "fun, user-friendly, and quasi-academic handbook" for "going gaga," as per Halberstam's description (xxv). It is indeed all of these things, and the book succeeds in its ambitious primary objectives: to accessibly render some significant questions and ideas springing from contemporary feminist and queer theory; to destabilize our conception of the "normal" when it comes to sex, sexuality, and gender; to invite us to imagine a more fluid approach to these ostensibly fixed facets of our selves; and to critique the institutions (i.e. marriage) that so rigidly define our relationships with one another. But Halberstam's coining and elucidation of "gaga feminism", which she describes as "the feminism (pheminism?) of the phony, the unreal, and speculative" and posits as a strategy for subversion and disruption, is not accomplished through in-depth readings of Gaga's songs, videos, or performances (xii). "To be clear," Halberstam writes, "what I am calling 'gaga' here certainly derives from Lady Gaga and has everything to do with Lady Gaga but is not limited to Lady Gaga" (xii). There are a few references to Gaga and a three-page reading of her "Telephone" video at the end of Halberstam's 33-page second chapter, but the emphasis in the book is definitely on that which is contained in the "not limited to."

One of the book's many successes and pleasures, however, is Halberstam's weaving together in lucid and engaging prose an enormous amount of material, both popular and academic-theoretical, for the purpose of diagnosing the current neoliberal, homo/heternormative state of affairs when it comes to representations of gender and sexuality, and, under the banner of gaga feminism, subverting the status quo. Readers navigate autobiographical anecdotes about Halberstam's own experience of gender (described in one moment as "boygirl," a term coined by his partner's children); theory encompassing Shulamith Firestone's Marxist feminism, sexual anthropologist Gayle Rubin's studies on kinship, and Judith Levine's work on childhood sexuality; and readings of films too great in number to list here. Halberstam takes particular issue with the "mumblecore" film genre, which pairs underachieving men with bright and ambitious women, and finds animated children's television and film to be a rich source of queer potential. In readings abbreviated from her other recent book, 2011's *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam locates queer permutations of the family in *Finding Nemo* and *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*, and reads SpongeBob SquarePants as an example of "ambiguous embodiment" in children's TV/cinema, "an animated mythological universe populated by characters with eccentric and often simply weird relations to gender" (xix).

Unexpectedly, children figure prominently throughout *Gaga Feminism*, bringing to mind recent work on the figure of the child and the queerness of children by Natasha Hurley and Steven Bruhm, Lee Edelman, and Kathryn Bond Stockton. In a move that echoes Edelman's *No Future* in its opposition to the political imaginary's figural child, Halberstam "acknowledge[s] that the child has all too often served as a justification for the most wretched forms of social and political conservatism in the United States since at least the mid-nineteenth century" (xx). Yet, Halberstam's own position on the child seems more in line with Hurley, Bruhm, and Stockton, all of whom are less interested in positioning the child in opposition to queerness, arguing instead that queerness is at the very core of children and childhood. For Halberstam, children have a relationship to language and signification that is far more fluid and creative than adults, and so he suggests that "adults should [...] pick up terms, words, lexicons from children who, in many ways, live the world differently than we do, live it more closely, live it more intensely, and, sometimes, live it more critically" (xxv). This element of childishness is crucial to the part of gaga feminism that seeks to reconfigure sex and gender through play, since "gaga" is, after all, "a child word, a word that stands in for whatever the child cannot pronounce" (Halberstam xxv).

Childishness, however, strikes me as the only characteristic that could distinguish the ostensible work of gaga feminism from that of queer theory. It is unclear, in other words, how gaga feminism is distinct from some critical concepts and questions that have been circulating, at least among queer theorists and activists, for some time now. Throughout his book, Halberstam tells us again and again what gaga feminism "is", and although an element of ambiguity seems important to the concept, each rehearsal of the definition further obscures its significance. Three examples: "Gaga feminism proposes that we look more closely at heterosexuality, not simply to blame it for the continued imbalance of the sexes but to find in its collapse new modes of intimate relation" (22). Again: "Gaga feminism will be a way of seeing new realities that shadow our everyday lives – gaga feminists will see multiple genders, finding male/female dichotomies to be outdated and illogical" (26). And later:

> [G]aga feminism proposes to be a new kind of gender politics for a new generation, a generation less bound to the romance of permanence (in the form of marriage, for example), more committed to the potential of flexibility (in the form of desire, for example), more turned in to the fixity of power relations (in the form of capitalism), and less likely to buy the broken ideologies of uniqueness, American dreams, inclusivity, and respectability. (148)

Many of gaga feminism's future-oriented promises have already been realized by other theorists. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick closely scrutinized heterosexuality, locating homosexuality at its very core, and challenged permanence through her idea that nonce

taxonomies constitute and re-constitute our sexual selves over time; Michel Foucault used homosexuality as a model for the multiplication of relational modes while tracing its definitional emergence through structures of power; Judith Butler problematized the binary structures that buttress categories of sex and gender. Furthermore, Halberstam's third and fourth chapters, "Gaga Sexualities: The End of Normal" and "Gaga Relations: The End of Marriage", respectively, have much in common with the aforementioned *The Trouble With Normal*. Both texts aim to problematize the idea of "normal" relationships and sexual modalities through a queer critique of the institution of marriage. Both texts also argue for a more imaginative approach to relationality. Warner proposes shame as "the premise of the special kind of sociability that holds queer culture together"; "[queer] scenes", he writes, "are the true *salons des refusés*, where the most heterogeneous people are brought into great intimacy by their common experience of being despised and rejected in a world of norms that they now recognize as false morality" (35-36). Similarly, Halberstam pursues "alternative intimacies", which "stretch connections between people and across neighbourhoods like invisible webs, and […] bind us to one another in ways that foster communication, responsibility, and generosity" (110-111). As a groundbreaking queer thinker herself, Halberstam is undoubtedly aware of the lineage to which her work is indebted, so the newness she attributes to gaga feminism is curious.

Halberstam's articulation of gaga feminism is further obscured by its uneasy and ambivalent relationship to, well, feminism. "Obviously any movement that calls itself 'feminist' must assume some privileged relation to the category of 'woman'," Halberstam writes, "and gaga feminism is not different in that respect" (26). A mere three pages later, however, he claims: "This feminism is not about sisterhood, motherhood, sorority, or even women" (29). And later in the book: "Gaga feminism is, above all, concerned with reconfiguring the meaning of sex and gender in ways that may favour heterosexual women in particular" (82). Gaga feminism's relationship to "woman" remains unclear throughout: is Halberstam invested in moments of strategic essentialism, or does she want to do away with this sedimented category of gender? Again, it may be that paradox and contradiction are fundamental to gaga feminism, but these inconsistencies in Halberstam's account of the concept are more confusing than theoretically interesting.

Overall, it would have been great to see more detailed readings of Lady Gaga herself—her costumes, live performances, videos—that illustrate how exactly she is the figure at the centre of gaga feminism, and how she both embodies and contradicts what Halberstam considers to be its core principles of subversion, childishness, and radical reimagination. Or, conversely, *Gaga Feminism* could have been retitled and billed as a successor to *The Trouble With Normal*, one that moves with impressive speed through a variety of popular culture texts to diagnose the persistence of heteronormativity and

our limited relational imaginary, while illustrating how feminism and queer theory have so profoundly shaped, and have the potential to continue shaping our relationships to gender, sexuality, and one another. As it stands, the trouble with "going gaga" is the fact that we don't really require Gaga in order to do so.

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The False Freedom of Rock Stardom

SARAH BROUILLETTE

Matt Stahl. *Unfree Masters: Recording Artists and the Politics of Work*. Duke University Press, 2012. 296 pp.

Academic and policy studies of creative labour have tended to suggest that creative work is unique and desirable because it is more autonomous than regular employment, meaning that it is more self-directed, expressive, and self-actualizing, and also more authentically separable from employers' prerogatives. Critics of the more celebratory rhetoric about creative labour will agree that these are good qualities for work to have. They will point out, however, that actual creative labour is rather less autonomous than it should be, and remark that it is the very autonomous and self-directed character of creative labour that allows it to prefigure the precarious conditions that an increasing number of regular workers face in light of a shortage of secure jobs and the withdrawal of institutional supports.

In *Unfree Masters*, Matt Stahl acknowledges that there may be something worth emulating in the creative worker's commitment to autonomous production. However, he argues that our understanding of this commitment has been limited by the tendency to frame it in terms of the possible forms of relation—from perfect compatibility to fundamental contradiction—between art and capital. The relation that Stahl highlights instead is between democracy and employment. He conceives democracy as an imperfectly realized movement to minimize subjugation or subordination, and understands employment as a form of productive relation that asks us to see ourselves as rational individuals who freely offer our obedience in exchange for a wage. If we accept how these terms are defined, we accept too that there is a significant tension between them. It is this tension that Stahl's work makes a crucial nexus of concern.

By shifting the terms of the creative labour debate in this way—from the art-capital relation to the democracy-employment relation—Stahl is able to use a study of recording artists in the service of what is really a critique of liberalism as the political-philosophical adjunct to capitalism. Sheryl Crow, for example, would seem to be doing quite well for herself both creatively and financially, and yet her working relationship with the record company that employs her is, like so many contracts for more regular workers, premised on several highly political and contestable

assumptions. Primary among these are the assumption that one cannot be exploited by a contract into which one freely chooses to enter and from which one appears to benefit, and the related claim that any right is alienable if both parties agree that it should be. Stahl argues persuasively that the recording industry has a direct interest in ensuring that employees possess no inalienable rights, instead only alienable ones that can be bargained away during any negotiation. He shows as well that the state has helped the industry to secure this interest when control over artists has been threatened. The liberal ideal of freedom of contract, which suggests that all productive relations are best determined by consenting individuals not subject to any oversight or regulation, involves only a false freedom. This false freedom at once mystifies the erosion of real choice for working people, and disguises the fact that we are "free" from something necessary and desirable in being "bereft" of "substantive claims on the means of making a living" (11). Put simply, the freedom *to* self-actualize through our employment has been bought at the expense of freedom *from* socially sanctioned institutional supports and stable entitlements (99).

Stahl grounds these arguments in his analyses of *American Idol*, the rockumentary film, and a series of legislative battles over the terms of record industry contracts and copyrights. He thereby addresses both the popular narratives that present a career in music as a non-alienated voyage of self-discovery, and the actual forms of contractual obligation that make these popular narratives at once so blinkered and so necessary. Popular narratives present the work of the aspiring recording artist as individual, expressive, self-actualizing, fun, "rewarding, enriching, autonomous, proprietary" (25), and it is true that some measure of authentic autonomy is granted to recording artists due to the general acceptance of the idea that artistic types must be let loose to generate material. Yet it is equally true that recording artists are quite lacking in any substantive freedom when it comes to their ability to negotiate the contracts that they have no real choice but to sign. Stahl's two-part study thus presents recording artists as at once autonomous and controlled, at once employers themselves and contracted labourers who exist within a media ecology stratified by class relations.

On *American Idol*, an individual's claim to authenticity has nothing to with the irreducibility of her work to capital. Instead, in *Idol* narratives the attempt to make it within the mainstream music industry and learn to conform to its tastes and tendencies is the main goal of those who audition. Here, authenticity is about being able to sing and perform well, being "'real" for audiences in a way that signals honesty and integrity, being attached to a life narrative that makes a music career the fulfilment of an inner self, and being gracious in submitting to reforming criticism generously offered by those in positions of authority. Success for contestants stems from character and merit, as a system that is tough but fair rewards honest hard work. *American Idol* thus portrays an ideal, liberal, meritocratic regime. Anyone can audition. Everyone

gets an equal shot at the chance to rise to the top, and has "equal access to the essential resource: the rhetoric of coherent, authentic, individual selfhood" (59). Impartial but expert advisors, who work in tandem with a popular electorate, do not so much decide who wins as reward the inherent talents that emerge as the season progresses. Those who deign to reach above their station—those without talent who are somehow blind to its absence—become the subjects of "instructive tableaux" of laughing admonishment and punishment (54).

For Stahl, *American Idol* is thus an instance of the way images of the rock star, and more broadly images of the artist or creative person at work, are serving to help acclimate people to today's kind of employment. Rewards are justly bestowed upon the glorious few. It isn't institutional support that will usher one into a prosperous future, but a benevolent system that sees talent and helps to develop it. One must compete as an individual for remunerative work. The show is instructive on these terms not just for young people but for the growing number of adults trapped in adolescence by a lack of secure work. Our attainment of legal adulthood, in the form of a willingness to entertain the idea of committing to a marriage, a family, a mortgage, is increasingly deferred these days, due to our unprecedented vulnerability in the labour market, and an accompanying popular romance with the "low drag" entrepreneur flitting from thing to thing. *American Idol* is so popular because so many people understand the story it tells. "You're going to have to keep competing to stay on top," Paula Abdul advises (63).

For those with more refined tastes, there is Ondi Timoner's 2004 rockumentary *Dig!*, which presents the divergent trajectories of the Dandy Warhols and the Brian Jonestown Massacre (BJM). Stahl notes that the film's form and content are unified. Its American vérité style reflects the ethos of anti-authoritarian individualism attached to rock star figures, and the film's box office success suggests how self-expression and playful self-actualization have become a kind of common sense rather than a choice. These anti-authoritarian values were first substantially democratized in the US via a postwar expansion of income, educational opportunity, occupational choice and social mobility, and were reinforced by the contemporaneous critique of mass society, the "lonely crowd," and "organization man." Conformity and banality became common laments. Highbrow disaffection became popular culture. The split between the artist and the bourgeois became what Thomas Frank has called a "cultural civil war" (71).

Dig! wants the war to be over. It watches the Dandy Warhols begin to embrace the limelight, while the BJM, fronted by a disintegrating Anton Newcombe, stagnates in its own integrity. Like the Dandys' career, Timoner's filmmaking technique progresses with the years of shooting footage. She reports on a DVD commentary that over

the course of the film her style became "more steady, less enthusiastic, less zooming" (79), perhaps reflecting her acceptance of her own directorial authority and career development. It is telling then that whereas the BJM remain for her a "Super 8 band," the Dandys are more 16mm (79). This distinction is significant to the film's message, because while *Dig!* spends most of its time with Newcombe—his drug abuse and psychological struggles make for interesting storytelling—for Stahl it is really about the Dandys' and Timoner's own achievement of a balance between integrity and success. The Dandys represent reasonable, productive drug use, marriage and home ownership. Their commitment to autonomy is similarly moderate. Newcombe is, instead, all excess. His commitment to autonomy is zealous and pathological. His drug use prohibits effective creativity. As Timoner remembers nostalgically, the Dandys are "warm breakfast in the morning but ecstasy at night" (86). Newcombe is just heroin all the time. In pitting the bands against one another in this way *Dig!*, like *American Idol*, recommends a particular orientation toward creative work. In this case, one is instructed that anti-authoritarian authenticity is available to an entrepreneurial subjectivity, and that business-friendly nonconformist consumer subjectivity harmonizes "self-directed" personal development and the "needs of capital" (82). The film is thus more symptom than diagnosis of a situation in which a moderately resistant claim to authenticity can "slot happily into institutions like Capitol Records, Vodafone, the Sundance grand jury prize" (84), and any more ardent commitment to autonomous artistry is simply insane.

Moving from popular narratives to legislative battles, the second part of Stahl's study begins with the successful 1987 effort by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) to amend a hundred year old California labour law stipulating that employment contracts cannot last beyond seven years. The amendment was to exclude or "carve out" recording artists from the law and make their contracts potentially interminable. The recording industry argued the amendment was crucial to the industry's survival, and bemoaned the increasing power of superstar artists who could threaten to leave after benefiting from seven years of the company's investment of financing and expertise. Stahl suggests that the subtext of the industry's efforts was the promise of profits to be made from consolidation. Companies wanted to be vendible, and that required that they be able to boast valuable catalogues and stables of promising and established talent enjoined to produce for a long time to come.

The state for its part willingly intervened to limit labour mobility and, as a result, one set of employees no longer had the once inalienable right granted by the state of California to re-negotiate their contracts every seven years. This right instead became a piece of alienable property that could be bargained away if the both of the parties wished. An unwelcome precedent was set. In 2001-2, the recording artists and their allies tried and failed to have the RIAA's amendment repealed. The artists claimed

they were now subject to civil slavery and indenture, a status especially clear in the fact that their contracts could be sold to new owners (or "assigned," in the euphemistic legal lingo). Only delivery of a set number of albums would fulfil a contract, and damages provisions required artists to pay substantial fees to get out of contracts even after seven years.

Those in favour of upholding the amendment argued again that industry sustainability required it, and presented the companies as investors of capital in risky enterprises that they helped to develop into sure things. A new emphasis also emerged, though, on the freedom of contract. Here Stahl picks up from Carole Pateman's work the term "contractarianism," which he uses as a synonym of sorts for classic liberalism. Contractarianism holds that the state should not threaten the right of individuals to enter into whatever kind of contract they like, and that employment is simply another routine contract in which even relations of servitude are not a problem because they represent the "the voluntary consent of both parties" (159). The recording industry argued that record companies contract with artists to exchange industry expertise for artists' creativity. They stressed the "voluntary contractual exchange of properties between civil equals" (178). Stahl's critique is that "freedom of contract is neither identical with, nor the extent of, substantive liberty," and that "consent does not necessarily represent or produce a free relation" (171). In fact, in a society divided by class, contract freedom is the inverse of substantive freedom. The contract, which asks people to act as though they can alienate their labour from themselves and offer it up for sale, is a mode of domination and an expression of an unequal relation. That the person who enters into it benefits in some way, and in the case of rock stars quite substantially, does not diminish the fact that the contract is premised upon a limited conception of freedom. Hence for Stahl the California law limiting contracts should be extended where possible rather than withdrawn, not because it is a self-evident panacea—after all, isn't seven years a rather arbitrary span of time?—but because it is a step closer than its alternative to substantive freedom and democracy.

Stahl's final case is the recording artists' battle to resist the 1999 change to copyright law that would have allowed for the treatment of sound recordings as work for hire, which would have meant that the copyrights were naturally owned by the employer. That the artists this time succeeded in arguing against this change reflects their power over the more vulnerable musicians they hire as employees. Sheryl Crow, one of the main figures resisting the amendment in formal hearing, argued that she is the author of her sound recordings because she is possessed of the "creative vision" that drives a recording session. "I am the author and creator of my work" (203), she stated unequivocally. But given the fact that the people she hires—musicians, producers, engineers, et cetera—would likely also imagine that creative vision is a feature of their work, what really mattered to the success of her argument is the fact that she is the

hiring party, the employer who contracts the other labour. In Stahl's interpretation, it is thus the unequal employment relation that is "determinant of authorship," rather than the level of creativity that anyone brings to the table.

What Stahl's fascinating study shows then, in sum, is that the creative labour of recording artists is like regular work in being conditioned by the inequality of the employment relation and by the spurious freedom of contract. His book's interest is in the way capitalism is itself a structuring form of unequal relation between employer and employee, one which substantively separates people from the means of subsistence and requires that they work for it and rely on others to provide them with access to it. Employment and contract cannot, in Stahl's analysis, be harmonized with democratization, because democratization means the reduction of subordination, and requires at the barest minimum that it be possible for one to reject commands with which one does not want to comply. To Stahl's political-economic perspective, cultural workers' special autonomy vis-à-vis capital is not the key matter. Their autonomy is rather epiphenomenal. What is essential is that employers still seek to enhance control and to dispossess and alienate workers, no matter how creative. Indeed they will even use the ostensible autonomy of creative work as a lever with which to orchestrate the creative worker's effective subordination.

All that is left to say about Stahl's articulate treatise is that the art-capital relation is perhaps more homologous to the democracy-employment relation than he allows, especially if one conceives employment, as he does, as the form of relation that liberal capitalism demands. For many of its theorists and practitioners, the aesthetic still represents what democracy represents in *Unfree Masters*: the attempt, anyway, at an anti-instrumental, non-vendible, illiquid refusal of the terms of capital-employment.

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"Another, Less Traveled Pathway in Aesthetic Theory": Attending to Other Aesthetic Categories

PAUL ARDOIN

Sianne Ngai's 2005 *Ugly Feelings* offered a major contribution to a rapidly-growing body of work in the still-young field of Affect Studies. Her first book focused on often-neglected negative emotions such as envy, anxiety, paranoia, and "stuplimity," a term she coined to describe "a strange amalgamation of shock and boredom" (2). Such minor emotions have received much attention in recent years, as have small affective differences. Far from an esoteric, strictly academic field, Affect Studies actually invites a sort of armchair participation, as evidenced by the novelist Zadie Smith's recent reflections on "Joy" in *The New York Review of Books*. ("It might be useful to distinguish between pleasure and joy," she begins her essay.) Studies like *Ugly Feelings* (or Sara Crangle's *Prosaic Desires* or, in another way, Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness*) are perhaps most useful and fascinating for the way their opening pages seem immediately vital and make the reader wonder how these affects could have been so understudied for so long.

Ngai's second monograph, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, adds three more to the list while making the case that these affects operate as both "subjective, feeling-based judgments, as well as objective or formal styles" (29), allowing her to ground her argument in close readings of literary texts and works of art—an option less available to affect theorists like Teresa Brennan (*The Transmission of Affect*), who write in a sort of interdisciplinary negotiation with the cognitive and other sciences. The result is that work like Brennan's veers mostly toward the prescriptive, identifying dangerous side effects of global capitalism and urging remedy and reversal. Ngai operates in the realm of the descriptive and is perhaps most fascinating for her lack of urgency; her project enacts a slow and precise exploration of ways of feeling and experiencing.

With her new volume, Ngai uses about as many pages as in *Ugly Feelings* to cover fewer than half the categories. Cuteness, interestingness, and zaniness get an extended

and very wide treatment: her citations and readings range from Marx and Adorno to Tom and Jerry, cover Henri Bergson and the antics of the cartoon *Animaniacs*, reference Pynchon's conspiracies and Ben Stiller's *The Cable Guy* (which I had honestly forgotten even existed). An early *Slate* review fairly describes *Our Aesthetic Categories* as "almost compulsively thick with references" (para. 9). And Fredric Jameson is not exaggerating in his blurb praising the "startling extensiveness" with which Ngai knows "contemporary literature and culture," a breadth Ngai amply demonstrated in *Ugly Feelings*. *Our Aesthetic Categories*, somehow, never feels bogged down in all this. Ngai's wide-ranging examples so effectively demonstrate her claims and are so well illustrated that the reader learns as much about Philip Glass and On Kawara as he does about their "interesting" aesthetic category.

Occasionally, one of Ngai's asides will feel too brief to serve that dual purpose. An example: in the middle of a discussion of the zany in such films as *The Toy*, *The Full Monty*, and *The Cable Guy*, Ngai offers a parallel to Richard Wright's radio play "Man of All Work" *as* radio play, all but eliminating the possibility that any single reader shares her wide body of artistic experience, while at the same time bypassing a real engagement with or new reading of Wright's text. It is simply another text in which a "male African American protagonist … masquerades as a woman … to get hired as a domestic servant for a wealthy white family" (210). One wishes all Ngai's asides could receive the attention of her longer examples. I cite the Wright example specifically because more time with it may have led to the kind of fascinating work she produced on race and affect in *Ugly Feelings*.

The results of Ngai's critical range and acumen, though, are clear and impressive. Certainly, she convinces with her

> simple argument about the zany, the interesting, and the cute: that these three aesthetic categories, for all their marginality to aesthetic theory and to genealogies of postmodernism, are the ones in our current repertoire best suited for grasping how aesthetic experience has been transformed by the hypercommodified, information-saturated, performance-driven conditions of late capitalism. (1)

One could imagine an Affect Studies industry in which an author—particularly with Ngai's referential range—could spend a career producing a volume on three new affective categories twice a decade or so. There are, after all, "a stunning variety of aesthetic styles and terms" from which to choose (233). But the cute, the interesting, and the zany do indeed emerge in this study as fundamental "for grasping [the] aesthetic situation" of late capitalism "as a whole" (233).

The cute, exemplified by the creations of Sanrio (the Hello Kitty company), Takashi Murakami's Mr. DOB artworks, and Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, is rooted in the viewing "subject's affective response to an imbalance of power between herself and the object" (54). That is, the cute is not concerned with "fairness, symmetry, or proportion" (54). Rather, it evokes "helplessness, pitifulness, and even despondency" (65). In its commoditized incarnation "as an anthropomorphic being less powerful than the aesthetic subject" (60), cuteness "epitomizes the minorness of not just 'minor aesthetic categories' but arguably all art in an age of high-tech simulacra and media spectacles" (59). It is "the name of an encounter with difference—a perceived difference in the power of the subject and object" (87), and the "small, helpless, or deformed object" we find cute (78) foregrounds its deformation and potential deformation—that is, the violence that might be done to it. The cute object "bears the look of an object unusually responsive to and thus easily shaped or deformed by the subject's feeling or attitude toward it" (65). In this way "cuteness might also be said to epitomize the process of affective 'objectification' by which all aesthetic judgments are formed" (65).

Ngai's exploration of the category of the interesting likewise serves to reveal much about the formation of our aesthetic judgments. Through a discussion of the prevalence of the series form in 1960s and 70s American conceptual art, Ngai reveals the judgment of "interesting" as primarily a placemarker, "a euphemism, filling the slot for a judgment conspicuously withheld" about an object to which we intend to return "for judging at a later moment, like putting a sticky note in a book" (134). To say something is interesting is to say it is worthy of another look. A non-professional, non-vocational viewer's assessment of a work of art as interesting is "a silent promise to the self: come back to this later" (134).

Interestingness, then, is deeply tied to temporal experience. This is why the mundane photographic series (for example) produced by the conceptual artist is so aptly described as interesting. It, too, is dependent upon temporal experience:

> Indeed, no other aesthetic category in our contemporary repertoire (not the beautiful, not the sublime, and certainly not the cute or the zany) has the same relation to time, not to mention the interesting's complex involvement with a multiplicity of temporalities: the temporality of ongoingness or sequential progression, of anticipation, of recursion, of lingering, and of transience or change in general. … The extended time frame of the interesting seems to partly explain why it is so prone to not being recognized as an aesthetic value, even in contexts where feeling-based judgments are explicitly called for or expected. (134-35)

Having one's work described as "interesting" by a professional critic is also part of a

process. From the critic, the declaration "interesting" "suggest[s] that some texts are more worth paying attention to than others" (171), and contemporary criticism is, in general, "an implicit provision of evidence for why the object that the critic has chosen to talk about is interesting" (171). This provision of evidence becomes the first step in another interpretive series: it acts as "the demand for justifications that it solicits from others, which in turn creates the occasion for one to supply them" (172). Interestingness emerges as a way to "enfranchis[e] others" in the process of interpretation, judgment, and meaning-making, as "an aesthetic of and about circulation" (172). The most "interesting" art has the effect "of making the act of perceiving less instantaneous and more durational" (172).

A mere two pages after invoking a "durational" affective experience, Ngai invokes key philosopher of affect, Bergson. Curiously, as in *Ugly Feelings*, Ngai will make use only of Bergson's theory of laughter (rather than his theories of, say, qualitative states of emotional duration). She offers, though, an intriguing application of Bergson's theory of the comic (from his *Laughter*): Bergson defines the comic as "something mechanical encrusted on the living" (qtd. in Ngai 174), the apparent "transformation of a person into a thing" (Bergson 36). Ngai wonders: if, in Bergson's time, we "laugh[ed] at characters incapable of adjusting to new roles and social situations quickly," then how are we to react in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries "to characters who seem almost too good at doing so" (174), such as the zany Lucy Ricardo characters who take on one job immediately after another? "If the rigidity of others is what makes us laugh, can an absolutely elastic subject—one who is nothing but a series of adjustments and adaptations to one situation after another—be genuinely funny?" (174). Bergson might call such "momentum" merely another type of "rigidity" (Bergson 12), but Ngai is right to note the complexity of "the zany's incessant activity" (Ngai 187).

For Ngai, zaniness, too, is specific to our moment of capitalism because "this playful, hypercharismatic aesthetic is really an aesthetic about work—and about a precariousness created specifically by the capitalist organization of work" that results in "a politically ambiguous erosion of the distinction between playing and working" (188). At the same time as zany portrayals of this condition become more common, "zany" "as an aesthetic judgment or verdictive speech act" is "slowly vanishing from our lexicon of feeling-based evaluations" (231). There are, according to Ngai, resulting implications about "the increasingly ambiguous aesthetic status of 'performance' under conditions of capitalist production" (232). The zany antics of *I Love Lucy* teach us as much about performance as cuteness teaches us about commodities, and as interestingness teaches us about information and interpretation (233).

Our aesthetic categories, it seems, can be revelatory. Through careful attention to

the implications of the zany, the cute, and the interesting, Ngai illuminates "another, less traveled pathway in aesthetic theory" (106). That is, contemporary affect theory continues to prove at its most useful when cataloging and unpacking the ambiguous, curious, or in-between feelings and aesthetic experiences, instead of, say, sublimity, beauty, or terror.

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A Call to Theoretical Indiscipline

CAROLYN ELERDING

Jonathan Sterne. *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*. Duke University Press, 2012. 341 pp.

The last decade has been a truly exciting one in cultural studies of sound, largely due to the generous and catalytic contributions of Jonathan Sterne. These include several significant articles, a strong intellectual and activist web presence, and a provocative genealogy of early sound reproduction and transmission entitled *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Despite Sterne's commitment to the "interdisciplinary ferment" he describes in his introduction to the recently published *Sound Studies Reader* (2), the consolidation of a paradigmatic thought style founded on his example seems likely. Yet, Sterne's signature ability to defamiliarize naturalized sociotechnological systems relies on a singularly non-paradigmatic approach layering multiple fields and disciplines with a broad assortment of theoretical traditions, literacies to which there are no "royal roads." Particularized interdisciplinary formations like Sterne's refract imitation, which may be part of the reason that critical sound studies has been able to remain for so long in the non-paradigmatic, pluralistic state that Jacques Attali celebrated in 1985 by making "*a call to theoretical indiscipline*, with an ear to sound matter as the herald of society" (Attali 5).

Sterne's encyclopedic familiarity with diverse and crowded theory worlds represents a serious contribution by itself. He traverses critical domains in sociology of technology and science, philosophy of science, disability studies, music studies, cultural studies, political economy, continental and occasionally analytic philosophy, information studies, and gender studies. Meanwhile, as digital mediation becomes a universally primary concern, his home discipline of critical communications studies stands poised to assume an increasingly crucial role in interdisciplinary discourse by providing pivotal understandings of technologically assisted socioeconomic change. Thus, Sterne's example as a polymath of both theory and method is auspicious in its flexibility and strength. While in *MP3* a small number of thinkers, including Heidegger, are read lightly and deployed for the most part as sources of descriptive vocabulary, very few of Sterne's many disciplinary and philosophical alliances could be described as casual; his decision to cite the mid-20th century American neo-Marxists Baran and Sweezy is never explained, but this is atypical. Those ontological and phenomenological influences that he rarely mentions, such as Deleuze and Guattari, maintain a consistent

presence legible to initiates and, of course, are inscribed in the bibliographies of Sterne's books. Undeniably, however, the most salient and foundational elements of Sterne's critical apparatus remain a co-constructivist view of society and technology grounded in Bourdieu's contributions to social and cultural theory and in Foucauldian genealogical and archaeological method. Sterne's work avoids any clichéd valence Foucault's techniques may have acquired in less capable hands, as is evident in the force and elegance of *MP3*'s argument: "the conjuncture that gave rise to MP3s will retain a certain significance—as the moment when the dream of verisimilitude was publicly troubled, when perceptual processing washed over the digital landscape, and when an uneasy truce over the materiality of sound and music was spectacularly disturbed" (31).

Political economy has become increasingly central in Sterne's work, providing what may prove to be one of the most influential foci of *MP3*. Instead of locating the generation of value within processes of labor or consumption as traditionally understood, Sterne focuses on a less direct form of exploitation, one that utilizes limitations of the physiological structures of human perception during the consumption of temporal media. As Sterne explains in the first chapter, "Perceptual Technics," research and development in communications technologies produces methods for regulating the transmission of potentially meaningful information by reducing its flow to meet minimum perceptual requirements. New levels of medium and format efficiency afforded by increasingly refined and standardized schematic conceptualizations of human perception correspond to opportunities for communications enterprises interested in market consolidation and expansion—and, in the digital era, for hackers and pirates. *MP3* ends with a historicization of this development as one of many conditions of possibility determining contemporary ambiguities in intellectual property rights and in the ethics of digital piracy. Without a clear understanding of the relationships Sterne traces among perceptual coding in the MP3 protocol, the format's ease of transmission and duplication, and the music file-sharing that has inspired so much Internet libertarianism, certain details of Sterne's arguments may become ambiguous, especially for the many readers who will study single chapters rather than the entire book. Actually, however, what defies stable definition is the reality of contemporary economic indeterminacy necessarily preserved in Sterne's careful avoidance of forced conclusions.

Framed by a radical decontextualization of auditory perception and interpretation, Sterne's discussion of subjectivity and technology in the context of "perceptual capital" adumbrates genealogical relationships between, for instance, objectified listening cyborg-subjects and the networked vivisected cats used in early cybernetics experiments. In addition, the widespread contemporary practice of online music file-sharing provides an opportunity to link emerging socioeconomic forms with older constella-

tions of technologies and practices, including the ones excavated in such detail in *The Audible Past* (*MP3* 30). In this long tradition of research, communications reception devices "stand in for ears" in 20th century examples much as they did for the 19th century inventors of telephony and phonography (*MP3* 60). Unlike many postmodernists, Sterne does not celebrate the loss of the subject to statistical data manipulation (or to any other fate), though he, too, consistently denounces bourgeois subjectivity. Rather, he stresses the "irreducible dimensions of intersubjectivity and culture, however superficial" as a source of excess and plurality. Consequently, for Sterne there can be no mass or universal listening subject defined by "hearing *as such*," because it is a radically contingent social construct (*MP3* 58). In spite of his insistence on intersubjective plurality, however, his analysis remains staunchly critical and broad in scope. "Perceptual technics" amounts to nothing more nor less than "the specific economization of definition [bandwidth, in analog terms] through the study of perception in the pursuit of surplus value," the generation of surplus and its transduction into capital (*MP3* 51-3). It is an unsurprising conclusion, perhaps, but in comparison with other proposed economies of digital mediation (such as can be found in theories of "prosumption" and "produsage"), Sterne's explication provides a nondeterministic and outstandingly useful vocabulary for describing the way in which "perceptual technics *monetizes* the flow of media in terms of a measured, estimated, and modeled perceptual capacity" (52). Unlike many theorists, Sterne wisely avoids "dilut[ing] the term *labor* to meaninglessness" by, for instance, uniting all economically ambivalent media practices under the aegis of "immaterial labor" (51; cf. Brennan). Perceptual capital is merely another, very specific and heretofore ambiguous, form of capital; the fundamental process of capitalism remains unchanged (*MP3* 48-49). However, despite the lucidity of the basic argument, Sterne occasionally invokes terminology associated with controversial theoretical vicissitudes on affective and cognitive labor, such as "the general intellect," yet neglects to situate his readings of them by providing explanation and justification (49); the result is somewhat mystifying. Thus, the most significant issue in perceptual capital the redistribution of wealth and power made possible by accelerated value extraction, receives inadequate attention. More specific information on the extent to which data compression translates into surplus value might help to clarify the magnitude of this particular form of uneven exchange, thereby facilitating an evaluation of its effective importance as a form of exploitation. In addition, a discussion of the important qualitative differences between this and other forms of exploitation, such as those shaping lives in manufacturing and agrarian economies in so-called developing nations, would then become possible.

By rereading Jacques Attali's *Noise* in association with perceptual capital and cybernetics, Sterne discovers renewed relevance in a text long understood as canonical in sound studies, and in doing so, he inherits a productively ambiguous hermeneutics. Extending Attali's argument, Sterne hears music, in this case mediated digitally and

contained by the MP3 format for circulation, as an indeterminate harbinger of socioeconomic change. One of Sterne's most provocative moves is to generalize the principle of perceptual capital according to the mercurial figure-ground relationship between music (signal, in the context of perceptual technics) and noise theorized by Attali in the mid-1980s (*MP3* 122). While Attali used cybernetic jargon ironically in his critique of instrumentalized society, he nevertheless theorized music—even in this context—as a form that "signified order, but also…prefigured subversion" (*Noise* 3-4). Sterne obscures the oppositional portion of Attali's stance even further, perhaps in light of the latter's influential and controversial role in economic and cultural policy in France, the EU, and the world. As a socialist official, Attali advocated a degree of order, but only to an extent designed to ensure freedom of cultural expression. He saw music as "an immaterial pleasure turned commodity" and therefore emblematic of modern capitalism and social reification—greyness and repetition (*Noise* 4-5). At the same time, Attali hailed noise as an antidote to the rationalization of music and social production in general to the profit motive (*Noise* 3). In other words, Attali's historicization reveals music as increasingly subverted by noise, those sounds deemed socially undesirable by the ruling regime. The result is that order or music is supplanted by an increasingly ambiguous "exchange of signs" to be read as a "mutation [that] forecasts a change in social relations" (*Noise* 4). One of the sources of Sterne's ambiguity, then, lies in Attali's own layered ambivalence: "For Attali, noise was a threat to order, but also a force for change" (*MP3* 122). Simply put, Sterne and Attali view noise as an exemplification of struggle. Thus, Attali advocated that music and sound discourse should become noise-like in practice and in theory (5). Sterne, however, proffers a symptomatic and Foucauldian reading in which "Attali's treatise posited the control of noise as a metaphor for all social control precisely at the moment when communication engineers began to articulate a paradigm where noise no longer needed to be eliminated or reduced if it could simply be rendered imperceptible to the ear" (124). Specifically, noise was vanquished by co-optation through perceptual technics derived partly from cybernetics, such as the use of masking techniques in perceptual coding. At this point in his analysis, Sterne makes no conjecture as to whether this shift renders resistance pointless in the face of increasingly subtle forms of subsumption under capital. Rather, he suspends prescription until the last two chapters of *MP3*.

Since the analog era in which Attali wrote *Noise*, numerous other theorists from a variety of fields and disciplines have attempted to elucidate the dynamic and contingent nature of value extraction as it coevolves with digital mediation, an endeavor Sterne amplifies in *MP3* while also situating it within a tradition of critical sound studies. Frequently, emerging musical practices surrounding new audio technologies have attracted scholarly attention as early indications of large-scale socioeconomic changes complicating the boundary between production and consumption. Lisa Gitelman,

for instance, has identified hybrid economic forms in the agency of female users during the early developmental history of phonography (Gitelman 15-16, 60-62). In addition, as Sterne notes, Paul Théberge has discovered a blend of production and consumption facilitated by the computer and communications industries' influence on musical practices during the early development of digital musical instruments (Théberge 37-38, Sterne 203). According to Sterne, contemporary noise is not "composition," as Attali called it, but rather an even more oppositional method of "decomposition," which nevertheless possesses a "managerial streak"—that is, a tendency toward instrumentality (125-26). Sterne proposes that new socioeconomic understandings and practices are not just emerging, but also needed. Therefore, *MP3* culminates in a proposal that plurality be protected through regulation, at the level of format design if not official policy (240-44). Like other contemporaneous theorists providing an economic contextualization of online phenomena, such as user-generated content on social media sites, he emphasizes the function of demonetization in attenuating the role of exchange value while maintaining or even enhancing the importance of use value (212). Questioning both optimistic and pessimistic technological and economic determinisms, Sterne suggests that this social shift may lead to a panoply of empowering possibilities rather than inevitably toward crisis; at the very least, such potential is "available for discussion" (226).

While Sterne's well-considered critiques are sometimes bundled together with less measured arguments, such as his essentializing dismissals of academic music and the lacunae where readers might expect to find analyses of the plight of music workers, the importance of this book for critical sound studies is undeniable. Furthermore, by bringing diverse theories and disciplines together, Sterne produces a dense and rugged texture demanding manifold and often elite theoretical and technical literacies; inevitably, some readers will hear only clashing dissonances. And despite Sterne's efforts to explicate concepts and processes in lay terminology, non-academic readers may feel excluded. At the same time, playful visual design elements, clever and perfectly timed comic relief, and a warm and conversational tone provide counterpoint to the gravity and detail of the critique; while readers in various quarters will find this refreshing, it may also provoke resistance in conservatively trained audiences. Nonetheless, while not every stakeholder in the areas comprising critical sound studies will enjoy Sterne's challenging and occasionally hyberbolic—even *noisy*—style, by the end of the book the interested reader will recognize it as integral to a committed demonstration of political praxis.

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Becoming Analogical
CHAD VOLLRATH

Gilbert Simondon. *Two Lessons on Animal and Man*. Trans. Drew S. Burk. Univocal, 2012. 88 pp.

In 2009, *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy*, published a special issue dedicated to "the occasion of the forthcoming publication of the English translation of Gilbert Simondon's *L'individuation psychique et collective*" (De Boever et al. 2). In the years since, anticipation of this and other translations of Simondon's work has continued to grow, yet none of his primary texts have been published in their complete form in English (although translations of several excerpts circulate on the Internet). The English translations of Muriel Combes' wonderful *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual* (2013) and of the second two volumes of Bernard Stiegler's *Technics and Time* (2009 and 2010), as well as the publication of *Simondon: Being and Technology* (2012), a collection assembled by the *Parrhesia* team, have no doubt greatly contributed to this anticipation. Yet there are also several "macro-academic" trends helping to prepare for a (re)discovery of Simondon which Brian Massumi describes in terms of a general reconsideration of the constructivism that dominated academic discourse in the 1990s:

> [Constructivism's] posture is that things can't be taken as givens, rather they come to be….What was considered to come into being was less things than new social or cultural takes on them. What is constructed are fundamentally perspectives or paradigms, and the corresponding subject positions. Within the 1990s constructivist model these were understood in terms of signifying structures or coding, typically applying models derived from linguistics and rhetoric. (21)

For Massumi, what has emerged in the wake of this dominant constructivist posture is a resurgence of concern for *things* and with this a renewal of interest in questions of ontology. New Materialism; the figure of the posthuman; the work of Friedrich Kittler, Bruno Latour, and Stiegler; Object-Oriented Ontology and Speculative Realism; and Italian Autonomists' reconceptualizations of materiality, to name just a few relevant lines of flight, all testify to the idea that the most salient questions in our current cultural moment orbit around technics and being. Simondon's reflections on these questions in the 1950s and 60s coalesced into a radically unique ontological argument that was articulated in his major works: *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (1958), *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* (1964), and *L'individuation*

psychique et collective (1989).

The dearth of English translations of Simondon is what makes the appearance of *Two Lessons on Animal and Man* a bit strange. This small book was never intended for publication: it is composed of two recorded lectures that served "as an introduction to an annual course of general psychology (which he taught until 1967) addressed to first year humanities students" (Chateau 7). Thus, one should not approach *Two Lessons* expecting to engage directly with Simondon's complicated theoretical apparatus. It is, rather, a book that offers a glimpse into the way Simondon understood the historical development of a question that is central to his work: What is the human? He does not answer this question from the perspective of his own philosophy of becoming in *Two Lessons*, but he does draw a lucid map of the answers that precede him.

The overarching narrative of Simondon's argument in *Two Lessons* is that Western philosophical reflection on the relationship between human and animal life has, from Antiquity to the present, proceeded through the dialectical movement of continuity and discontinuity. Simondon's first lesson teaches that the ancient world tended to affirm continuity between the animal and the human, although the means by and extent to which philosophical schools did so differed greatly. For Pythagoras and Anaxagoras, Simondon writes, the human and the animal (as well as the vegetal) were similarly endowed with a "vital principle," and "the great dividing line passes between the reign of the living and the non-living much more so than between plants, animals, and man" (*Two Lessons* 32). Socrates and Plato cordon the human from the animal in a way "which is not completely dualist, but which puts man before natural beings" (38).

Simondon's surprisingly affectionate discussion of Aristotle, which takes up the lion's share of his first lesson, demonstrates the originality and complexity of Aristotle's thinking on the subject. Although Aristotle preserved the idea that reason belongs solely to man, thus ensuring a discontinuity between forms of life, he also recognized that "there exist continuities and functional equivalents within the various levels of organization between the different modes of living beings" (49-50). This is to say that animals, plants, and humans have adaptive capacities that are functionally analogous, and from this perspective, reason is just one way among others that life thrives. Bees and ants, for instance, develop protective-reproductive structures (hives) in ways that are analogous to plants' production of seeds or bark: there exists for these forms of life an instinctual "structure of development" that does not require experiential learning. Aristotle also, however, finds analogous functions between the higher animals and the human: animals learn through experience to foresee, as Simondon puts it, "the different inconveniences of possible events" (49), and this capacity imitates the human *function* of employing reason to predict consequences, even as it is wholly different

(in Aristotle's model) in terms of the *structural* composition of the human mind.

Aristotle is crucial to Simondon's theory of individuation—primarily because he provides the fodder for Simondon's well-known attack on hylomorphism. Hylomorphism, the philosophical perspective "which regards the individual as having been created from the conjunction of a form and some matter" (Simondon, "Genesis" 297), is most associated with Aristotle's treatment of the relationship between the soul and the body; this way of thinking is Simondon's most frequent and persistent enemy. Interestingly, however, in *Two Lessons*, Simondon emphasizes Aristotle's *insight* into the analogical functions of living beings. We see here that Aristotle provides a clue to how it is possible "to know the individual through the individuation, rather than individuation through the individual" (Simondon, "Position" 5). His discussion of Aristotle is one of the few places in the book where he launches into a more recognizably "Simondonian" vocabulary:

> [Y]ou can see to what extent Aristotle went in developing the notion of function, in flushing out the different vital drives of the notion of function, which allow us to align parallels between beings whose mode of existence and structure are very different, but from the point of view of life, are conceived as a chain of functioning which is nonetheless comparable. (50)

The foundation for recognizing comparability between forms of life, and thus a form of continuity, is absolutely essential to Simondon's own work. To summarize in a completely inadequate nutshell, Simondon's theory of individuation conceives of the living individual as a *process* that brings elements of a milieu into relation for some duration of time. As Muriel Combes writes, "Thus, in a general manner, we may consider individuals as beings that come into existence as so many partial solutions to so many problems of incompatibility between separate levels of being" (4). Combes explains by way of example:

> A plant, for instance, establishes communication between a cosmic order (that to which the energy of light belongs) and an inframolecular order (that of mineral salts, oxygen, etc.). But the individuation of a plant does not only give birth to the plant in question. In dephasing, being always simultaneously gives birth to an individual mediating two orders of magnitude and to a milieu at the same level of being (thus the milieu of the plant will be the earth on which it is located and the immediate environment with which it interacts). (4)

We must think of the living individual as a mediating *point-de-capiton* that establishes a relation between relations in a process of ongoing individuation: the relation of relations that *is* the living individual is dynamic and perpetual because the living being

internalizes and processes elements of its milieu; the living being is thus, Simondon notes, "a theater of individuation." Deleuze and Guattari, whose collaborative writing was deeply influenced by Simondon, provide a particularly theatrical example of living individuation in their discussion of the orchid dupe wasp, an insect that is tricked into copulating with *Cryptostylis* orchid flowers that mime female wasp sex organs:

> The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome….a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp. (11)

It would be a mistake to reduce Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis to a single source of inspiration, which is to say that the passage above should not be understood as a mere translation of Simondon's terminology. Nevertheless, the passage allows us at once to understand how the process of individuation that Simondon describes both descends from and is set in opposition to Aristotle. Aristotle's gesture toward replacing structural analogy (fingernail-claw, for instance) with functional analogy as the basis for a comparative study of forms of life stimulates Simondon's philosophy of ontogenesis even as Aristotle's hylomorphic schema operates as a counter-foundation for Simondon's whole system of thought. The relationship between the orchid and the wasp above is, for Simondon, very much like the relationship between the clay and the mold in the production of a brick. Rereading Aristotle's famous example, Simondon argues that the mold does not impress a form from without on a formless lump of clay. Rather, the clay "is potential for deformations; it harbors within it a positive property that allows it to be deformed, such that the mold acts as a limit imposed on these deformations" (Combes 5). This point is perhaps easier to understand in relation to the orchid and the wasp: the adaptive capacities of both of these forms of life, or what Simondon would call the "preindividual" conditions that function as a metastable potential for becoming, allow for the establishment of "communication" between the orchid and wasp that results in the individuation of a new relation (the wasp-orchid rhizome) whose potential for deformation (deterritorialization, dephasing) is limited by the milieu in which the individuation takes place (a milieu that is simultaneously created by the process of individuation).

Simondon's second lesson addresses the antithesis of the continuity thesis put forth in Antiquity. He first summarizes the contributions of a number of Christian thinkers to the project of promoting the discontinuity of humans with all other forms of life, but his real foil is Cartesian duality. As Jean-Yves Chateau notes in his informative introduction to *Two Lessons*, Simondon's reading "corresponds to a certain tradition

of [Descartes'] reception, which is of the greatest of consequences from the point of view of history, not in regards to philosophical doctrines but to the ideas which contributed to concept formation in psychology and even to the determination of its effective object" (18-19). In other words, there is less focus on developing a nuanced reading of Descartes in *Two Lessons* than there is on making the name Descartes stand in for a type of thinking that is capable of mistaking animals for machines (a mistake Simondon finds repeated in cybernetics). As Simondon writes,

> [Descartes'] is an automatism of matter, of the *res extensa*, namely something comparable to the functioning of a machine, due to the form of its pieces. When a spider constructs its web, it acts precisely like a weaving machine (a loom). When a mole digs its molehill, it acts like a shovel, namely as a tool made to disperse with the dirt in a specific manner. (74)

Given Simondon's interest in functional analogy as the basis for a comparative study of forms of life, one might assume that he would also find some functional basis for comparing the modes of existence of animals and machines. This is to some extent true, but against Cartesian dualism, which reduces non-human living organisms to machines, Simondon "opts to look at the operations of machines by analogy to the structures and functions of organisms" (Lamarre 82).

An important implication of Simondon's rejection of dualism-substantialism and development of an "analogical" understanding of individuation is that the modes of existence of the technical and the biological come to be seen as continuous with one another. We might think of this point as a more philosophically developed version of Marshall McLuhan's twin observations that technologies are extensions of man and that man has become the "sex organ of the machine world," another orchid-wasp rhizome. In other words, what we call the human and the technical co-produce the sustaining relations of their own individuations. A substantialist reading of the relations between humans, animals, and machines prioritizes the individual, taking it as a given. For Descartes, the functional analogy between a spider and a loom begins with ontologically distinct objects (spiders and looms) and reads functional similarity backward from the assumption of this distinction. For Simondon, ontogenesis begins with pre-individual potential, the emergence of problems, and the subsequent emergence of a solution, which is understood as the individuation of a new set of relations that establish a milieu.

Simondon thus flatly rejects the analogical comparisons between animals and machines that populate Cartesian metaphysics. This rejection extends to the discourse of cybernetics, which relies on the functional identification of machines and living beings with respect to communication and control (Combes 10). Simondon resists

the analogical act which posits one term in the analogy as ontologically primary to the other because such a misuse can only end in reductionism. As Combes notes:

> Yet, reading Simondon's definition of analogy, we understand precisely why he could not but think of cybernetics in terms of an imprecise use of analogy, which from the outset exposed it to the danger of reductionism: in effect, bringing together the logical structure of functioning of systems independently of the study of their concrete individuation leads purely and simply to identifying the systems studied—living, social, and so on—with automatons, capable only of adaptive behavior. (10)

Analogical thinking is the cornerstone of Simondon's theory of ontogenesis. Yet we must be careful to distinguish between structural analogy (which he calls mere re-semblance), functional analogy that is heuristic or diagnostic (which Simondon as-sociates with cybernetics), and functional analogy that recognizes co-originary and co-constitutive individuations, as in the case of the orchid and the wasp. It is, of course, only this third form of analogy that Simondon develops as the perspective through which it becomes possible to recognize processes of individuation. Accord-ing to Jean-Hugues Barthélémy, "Simondon calls this analogy between geneses *that is also the operation of genesis itself*'transduction'" (205). Transduction is ultimately a mental process: "the course taken by the mind on its journey of discovery" (Simon-don, "Genesis" 314). However, the "possibility of using an analogical transduction in order to understand a given area of reality shows that this area is really the place where an analogical structuration has occurred" (314). Individuation thus *takes place* analogically *and* it is *grasped* analogically, which places analogy at the center of Si-mondon's system of thinking.

It is here that the importance of *Two Lessons* itself crystallizes from the pre-individual of Simondon's untranslated corpus. If we let Simondon's lectures illuminate for us his understanding of the history of analogical comparison between the human and the animal, we may have a much easier time discerning how his rethinking of analogy differs from those that have been dominant in the past. While we may learn very little from this book regarding how Simondon himself defines the human and the animal or about his opinions of their relative biological continuity or difference, we do learn much about the analogical "and" that both separates and connects "animal and man."

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Culture, Technology and Hyper-Industrial Capitalism

TAI NEILSON, LISA DAILY, GAVIN MUELLER AND DAVID RHEAMS

Bernard Stiegler. The Decadence of Industrial Democracies. Trans. Daniel Ross and Suzanne Arnold. Polity Press, 2011. 194 pp.

In *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies* Bernard Stiegler presents a singular take on the culture industry in the hyper-industrial age and offers a radical understanding of technological and cultural change. Stiegler applies his philosophical approach developed in *Technics and Time* to the Americanized culture industry at the heart of industrial democracies. Echoing the Frankfurt School, he describes the willingness of consumer citizens to trade leisure time for consumptive habits. This entails the technological externalization and rationalization of leisure, and undermines capitalism's reasons for existence. Consumers cede the capacity to imagine a different future as they are integrated into the markets of a globalizing culture industry. Certainly these observations are familiar territory to students of culture. However, Stiegler reminds us that the current American monopoly on consumer technology does not have to continue in its current form. Stiegler calls for people, in particular those within the European Union, to reclaim their culture through individuation as the process of becoming oneself by imagining a different future. While Stiegler is ambiguous about how individuation takes place, he proposes that we go beyond acts of resistance in order to combat the grammatizing tendency of hyper-industrial cultural capitalism. This requires the reorganization, or transvaluation, of the composition of technology and culture and the composition of doing and thinking (*tekhne* and *logos*) towards new forms of individuation.

Individuation and grammatization[1] are trends in technological and social change that are engaged in complex constitutive relations. Stiegler advocates for the composition

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[1] Grammatization is borrowed from Sylvian Auroux and refers to "The technological condition (in the sense that it is always technical and logical) of all knowledge, and which begins with its exteriorization… To grammatize means, according to Auroux, to discretize in order to isolate the gramme, that is, those constitutive and finitely numbered elements that together form a system" (Stiegler 172).

of these two tendencies, rather than a political project that intends for one tendency to win out over the other. Stiegler, following Gilbert Simondon, employs the concept of individuation to designate the process by which an *I* and a *We* are produced in relation to one another. Individuation is a "metastable equilibrium," a form of becoming that changes and is never final (Stiegler 28). It relies on a shared history made concrete in technological apparatuses or hypomnemata; the technologies such as writing that record memories and, in Foucault's use of the term, specifically, those recorded memories that pertain to the production and care of the self. For instance, Stiegler argues for a European project of rebirth that redirects Europe's historical proliferation of recorded memories in literature, art and legal institutions toward a new cultural and political individuation. The culture industry, with its origins in the US, has contributed to the accumulation of hypomnemata and their subjection to the logic of capital. As such, new political projects must employ the technologies and content of the culture industry toward new forms of community: "Politics is above all the motivation and organization of a psychic and collective individuation process, and… in our epoch this process is produced essentially via information and communication technologies" (Stiegler 17).

Individuation always encounters the counter-tendency of grammatization which refers to the externalization of any formal system. The obvious example of grammatization is the process by which speech is externalized and reduced to discrete units within the technical system of the phonetic alphabet. However, grammatization should not be limited to systems of graphemes. For Stiegler, grammatization also encompasses the externalization and rationalization of production in machinery and leisure in the communication technologies of the culture industry. On one hand, grammatization works as a Derridian supplement, cognitively and corporally archiving intergenerational memory and providing the preindividuated funds for new forms of individuation. On the other hand, the proliferation of hypomnemata in technical systems of grammatization has been disarticulated from cultural change and has subjected culture to techno-logical imperatives leading to cultural disindividuation. This second effect is consonant with contemporary technologies that turn everything, even libidinal desires, into standing reserves for exploitation. The subjection of production and consumption to grammatization "has the effect of producing a standardization and a formalization, submitting everything that it formalizes to calculability" (Stiegler 38-9). As such, new political projects must take up the task of rearticulating the composition of grammatization and individuation.

The culture industry has generalized the process of grammatization, superseding the opposition of classes in Marxist accounts, and so Stiegler calls for different forms of political intervention. For Marx, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie are defined by their positions within relations of production. For Stiegler, following Simondon, the

externalization and mechanization of the productive capacities of the worker, rather than one's position within the relations of production, is the central feature of proletarianization in the sphere of production: "Thus the reality of proletarianization is, more than pauperization, the worker's loss of knowledge, the worker tending to become unskilled pure labor force - and lacking any motive to work beyond the need to subsist" (Stiegler 62). He characterizes proletarianization as "the retreat of the hand understood as the retreat of the corporeal organ of fabrication, to be replaced by the machine" (Stiegler 146).

The ascendancy of marketing and the culture industry extends the process of proletarianization into the sphere of consumption and leisure: "Just as the proletarianization of the worker is the rationalization of subsistence such that it ends in a pure becoming-commodity of labor force, that is, of the body, so too the proletariatization of consumers is the rationalization of existence as the becoming commodity of consciousness" (Stiegler 63). This echoes arguments made by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer whom Stiegler praises for being "the first to understand that the culture industries form a system within industry in general, the function of which consists in fabricating and controlling consumer behavior" (Stiegler 108). Following Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry thesis, Stiegler contends that leisure in capitalist society resembles mechanized work practices and thus erases the ability for an individual to engage in leisure time altogether. The culture industry aims to make the "singularities" of cultural products "comparable and categorizable by transforming them into empty particularities" (Stiegler 126). In a word, producing difference but prohibiting against individuation. Stiegler's argument differs, however, by positing that the technical and mnemonic resources of the culture industry provide the basis for a cultural politics of memory. Further, the grammatizing process of the culture industry is unsustainable in that it undermines its own reason for existence.

According to Stiegler, singularity is the desire of libido, and in our societies of control the culture industry is primarily involved in controlling and exploiting libidinal energy. The culture industry is at the heart of the shift from disciplinary society to "societies of control" - a Deleuzian term that describes the "advent of very advanced control technologies emerging from digitization, and converging in a computational system of globally integrated production and consumption" (Stiegler 5). Stiegler contends that in societies of control "it is not merely a matter of making the population into a production machine… it is a matter of making it into a consumer market, and the training involved becomes that of consumer behavior" (Stiegler 81). The society of control is concerned with the exploitation of libidinal energy on a voluntary rather than coercive basis. Herbert Marcuse famously sketched the relationship between the

culture industry and libido. His concept of repressive desublimation[2] describes the way in which capitalism induces individuals to perceive their desires as consonant with those experiences made instantly available by the culture industry, thus reducing the necessity of sublimation and the domain of libido (Marcuse 76). For Stiegler, singularity is the object and desire of the libido which in turn directs all consumption and in hyper-industrial capitalism: "the principle motive has become capturing and harnessing the flows of libidinal energies and the only way to harness them is to make them standardized, in effect disrupting and destroying these flows. As such, the implementation of this goal becomes self-destructive" (Stiegler 150). It is the exhaustion of libidinal energy in a society that "demotivates those who constitute it" that Stiegler calls "the decadence of industrial democracies" (Stiegler 30).

Stiegler calls for "combating" the overwhelming tendency of grammatization in hyper-industrial cultural capitalism by deploying hypomnemata toward new forms of individuation. Rather than an opposition wherein one tendency wins out, combat must take into consideration the composition of grammatization and individuation. That is, collective political projects are not possible without drawing on cultural resources that are externalized in formal systems. Stiegler's approach to combat is rooted in a critique of Marxist class struggle.

For Stiegler, the weakness of Marxism is its understanding of "class struggle as the possible and necessary elimination of one tendency of the exteriorization process in which social life consists by another, contrary tendency" (Stiegler 52). This oppositional thinking that pits the working class against the forces of capital serves to reproduce relations of production and remains "reactive in the Nietzchean sense" (Stiegler 52-53). First, class conflict assumes empirical class positions that, according to Stiegler, have been rendered untenable by the process of generalized proletarianization in all sectors of society. Second, Marxist class struggle attempts to pit one force against another, which can reproduce rather than overcome existing conditions.

Stiegler also breaks with the Derridian focus on art and the archive in favor of a more radical composition of *logos* and *tekhne*. In "Culture Industry Redux: Stiegler and Derrida on Technics and Cultural Politics," Robert Sinnerbrink (2009) emphasizes Stiegler's "cultural politics of memory" that calls for the strategic deployment of the archive of culture amassed and commoditized in the culture industry in pursuit of new projects of individuation. Sinnerbrink correctly reads in Stiegler's oeuvre a break with Derrida on several fronts. Against Derrida's concept of "democracy-to-come"

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[2] Repressive desublimation is the process by which libidinal (instinctual and sexual) desires are liberalized and transformed into socially useful and acceptable activities which reinforce rather than challenge the status quo.

which advocates for the openness of liberal markets to permit future justice and the entrance of the Other, Stiegler sees the market as a site of domination and reification that needs to be swept up in a radical cultural politics (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 212). In *Decadence* Stiegler goes a step further calling for a direct intervention, potentially involving the state, in the technologies of the culture industry: "this would thus be a combat against [for instance] all television, which is always either totally or partially financed by advertising, and this is what it is a matter of changing" (Stiegler 157). Sinnerbrink further notes Stiegler's "materialist reinscription of the logic of différance into the history of technical supplements." Stiegler posits technology as an original support for human existence and argues for the composition of consciousness and technics (*logos* and *tekhne*).

In the section "Wanting to Believe: In the Hands of the Intellect," Stiegler makes it clear that combat is, at its heart, cultural individuation that requires technology as a supplement and a weapon. In his account *logos* and *tekhne* are different tendencies within a composition: the composition of the intellect and the hand in "the hands of the intellect." He transvalues the two sides of the composition: first, the intellect or *logos* is able to act: "the intellect has some hands [and] having hands, here, means being able to do something" (Stiegler 132). Second, the hand or *tekhne* is able to act, but is also a libidinal drive that seeks singularity: it "remains nevertheless the flesh that desires to desire—and that calls forth the will that wants to want, and wants to be able to believe, and to be able to want to believe" (Stiegler 162). In addition to reversing the valence of these terms, Stiegler takes up Nietzsche's concept of the will as a vital element of combat. Individuation requires a will to believe: politics is a leap forward without knowing what a new phase of individuation will bring.

Decadence brings Stiegler's philosophy of technology to bear on important questions regarding media and culture. He draws on a number of philosophical strains of thought to produce a distinctive account of the culture industry and the irrationality of industrial societies. This work raises important questions about the efficacy of Marxist understandings of class struggle, because of the general process of proletarianization and the tendency for oppositional politics to reinforce rather than overcome existing conditions. Further, Stiegler avoids some of the more complacent and celebratory offshoots from Derrida with his call to combat. However, Stiegler's approach cannot assign the task of social change to a specific group as the process of change is concomitant with the individuation of that agent. That is, individuation is the process by which change is enacted and the process by which the agent of that change is brought into being. Stiegler avoids the historical problem of assigning agency to particular groups such as the working class, intellectuals or students, but this leaves the question of agency open and susceptible to capture by more insidious forms of the state and class domination. Further, in terms of strategy, Stiegler leaves

it to others to consider how specific digital technologies may serve as supplements to individuation. Still, *Decadence* includes a powerful reimagining of our contemporary relation to technology and the types of combat which would work through the tendencies of industrial capitalism rather than reproducing persistent oppositions.

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The Shape of Things

SAM HAN

Peter Sloterdijk. *Bubbles: Spheres Volume I: Microspherology*. Trans. Wieland Hoban. Semiotext(e), 2011. 664pp.

For anyone even remotely interested in philosophy, when a figure sets out to "correct" Heidegger, you want to pay attention. This is not necessarily out of admiration for the author of *Being and Time*, or his ideas, but rather out of a genuine curiosity made up of equal parts amazement and horror. The interest would be compulsory, akin to intellectual rubbernecking, for it is more than likely that he or she, the subject of such an utterance, will, like Heidegger, be vulnerable to intense scrutiny and interpretation. Therefore, when MIT Press describes the much-anticipated *Spheres* trilogy by Peter Sloterdijk as "the late-twentieth-century bookend to Heidegger's *Being and Time*," there is reasonable expectation for it to be disastrous.

Ever since the English translation of his *The Critique of Cynical Reason* in 1988, Sloterdijk has been known in English-speaking intellectual circles as somewhat of a mercurial figure. Not much, still, is known about him. From where, that is, what intellectual milieu or tradition, did he emerge? Is he a Frankfurt guy? Is he a Luhmannite? Is he Heideggerian? The rather out-of-nowhere character of Sloterdijk's work, as well as the inconsistent reception of his work outside a handful of watchers of developments in continental philosophy and social theory, placed Sloterdijk in the category of "heard of him" (otherwise known as "oh right, he wrote that one thing") in North American cultural theory.

But Sloterdijk's trajectory differed tremendously in his native Germany. When copies of *Cynical Reason* started leaving the shelves at a rapid pace upon its release, the then-journalist was boosted into the highbrow German intellectual scene traditionally filled with academics. Today, we can count Sloterdijk among the country's public intellectuals, a group that also includes luminaries like Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth (more on these two later). Sloterdijk is also host to a show called "Das Philosophische Quartett" (The Philosophical Quartet), which airs on ZDF, the German equivalent to PBS in the United States or NHK in Japan. It features Sloterdijk alongside guests of various intellectual pedigrees, from academics to journalists.

More recently, Sloterdijk has made himself known among the wider American reading

public for a controversy involving welfare state politics, class, *ressentiment* and Axel Honneth. As a blog post on the *Global Post* summarizes:

> According to an article published this past summer in one of Germany's most widely read newspapers, the country's welfare state is a "fiscal kleptocracy" that has transformed the country into a "swamp of resentment" and degraded its citizens into "mystified subjects of tax law." The text, by philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, goes on in that vein for some 3,000 words[…]

> Among the country's intellectual class, the article has served as kindling for a fiercely fought and wide-ranging conversation about the national economy that, six months on, still shows little sign of abating. (Abadi)

The article, entitled "Die Revolution der gebenden Hand" ("The Revolution of the Grasping Hand"), must be read as a polemic. While it includes some semblance of genealogical (in the Foucauldian sense) analysis of the modern democratic welfare state, its primary purpose is to offend. He begins with a meditation on the birth of the democratic state as the compromise between classical liberalism and anarchism, each of which was amenable to the declining significance of the state. For liberalism, the state needed to be minimal and imperceptible to its subjects, the citizens. For anarchism, the state needed to be destroyed. Hence, the "modern democratic state gradually transformed into the debtor state, within the space of a century metastasizing into a colossal monster—one that breathes and spits out money" (Sloterdijk, "The Grasping Hand"). For a Europe that is currently under much economic turmoil, and with a Germany that is currently embroiled in a national debate, hinging in large part on a parochial stance toward Southern Europe as fiscally irresponsible debtees, about whether to "bail out" Greece and Spain, this article, for many of its critics, amounted basically to "piling on." Further, according to its critics, it preyed on extant, albeit latent, nationalist sentiment, which culminated in the infamous book by Thilo Sarrazin, which all but placed the entirety of Germany's economic woes on its immigrants.

This was the context for the retort by Honneth, one of the last remaining flag bearers of the Frankfurt School. There he accused Sloterdijk of, among many things, being an ideological mouthpiece for advanced capitalism, "a mystical or speculative [interpreter] of history and the world," and, rather strangely, a reader of Michel Foucault.[1]

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[1] While most of this exchange never made it to English-language publications, much of it has been chronicled on blogs. See Gregersen, Thomas. "Axel Honneth Versus Peter Sloterdijk." *Political Theory - Habermas and Rawls.* 26 Sept. 2009. Web. 25 Sept. 2012; Shingleton, Cameron. "The Great Stage: Axel Honneth: Against Sloterdijk (Die Zeit, 24 September, 2009)." *The Great Stage.* 11 Feb. 2010. 25 Sept. 2012.

The gist of Honneth's critique, which I cannot fully assess in this space, is that Sloterdijk has taken *ressentiment* as "first psychology" of the lower classes and has attempted to pull the rug from up under the very foundations of European liberal democracy—the welfare state—by criticizing it. I bring up Honneth's public spat with Sloterdijk in order to portray a picture of the latter that presents not only his prominence in the German intellectual scene but also his embattled public image. While Sloterdijk may only recently be gaining mass recognition in North America, he has, in Europe, at least, been a visible presence for the past two decades or so.

For Sloterdijk, the problematic of inhabitation is that which courses through the veins of Western metaphysics and philosophy. The "old cosmology of ancient Europe," as he calls it, "that rested on equating the house and home with the world," can be seen in even the disparate philosophies of Hegel and Heidegger. Humans in this view were "inhabitants in a crowded building called cosmos"(Sloterdijk, "Spheres Theory"). As it was for his most obvious predecessor, Gaston Bachelard, the motif of the house—signifying order, unity and certainty—is one that unduly holds too much purchase in the West. For Sloterdijk, the Enlightenment should have dispelled the need for a "universal house in order to find the world a place worthy of inhabiting" (Ibid.). Yet, it remains, thanks in part to philosophers such as Heidegger, whose self-proclaimed task to "end metaphysics" as such did not do away with the, if we can call it something, the "metaphysics of the universal house." Sloterdijk's project, therefore, in his three-volume study called *Spheres*, is to forge a path beyond Heidegger, by providing a general theory of "associations."

For Heidegger, the overarching question of metaphysics was temporal—with the key-words "being" and "becoming." For Sloterdijk, it is spatial; the keyword is "world." While it is the case that Sloterdijk views Heidegger to have been wrong all along, there is something about the current technological, socio-political moment that has occasioned a particular response. Sloterdijk writes:

> It's the final stage of a process that began in the epoch of Greek philosophical cosmology, and whose present vectors are rapid transportation as well as ultra-high-speed telecommunication. At the same time, it's the product of a radical disappointment, whereby human beings had to abandon the privilege of inhabiting a real cosmos—which is to say, a closed and comforting world. The cosmos, such as the Greeks conceived it, was the totality of being imagined under the form of a great, perfectly symmetrical bubble. Aristotle and his followers were responsible for this idea of a cosmos composed of concentric, celestial spheres of increasing diameters, the majority of which consisted of a hypothetical material they called ether. For us, this model of the world is obviously no longer operational. (Sloterdijk, "Foreword to the Theory of Spheres" 223)

In response to this "inoperability,"[2] Sloterdijk offers a "spherology," beginning from the micro, which is the subject of volume I of Spheres entitled *Bubbles*, all the way to the macro, the subject of volume III, entitled *Foams*. Sphere, for Sloterdijk, does not assume a totality or finality as the phenomenologically inflected "lifeworld" or "world" entails. As he puts it rather paradoxically, "the primordial existential sphere is created every time a moment of inter-psychic space happens" (Sloterdijk, "Foreword to the Theory of Spheres" 223–224). Against the weight of "existence," Sloterdijk puts forth a succession of events, of happenings, wherein meaningful and significant connections are made but do not suffocate. Hence, the microsphology he presents in *Bubbles*, the volume under review, is, at root, a theory of "atmosphere" or as he likes to say, of "air." He chooses these ethereal metaphors as he believes that spheres, the closest Heideggerian cognate being *Stimmung* (more on this later), "never speak but…brings everything together and makes everything possible…a treasure that that allowed human beings to realize the fact that they're always already immersed in something almost imperceptible and yet very real, and that this space of immersion dominates the changing states of the soul down to its most intimate modifications"(Sloterdijk, "Foreword to the Theory of Spheres" 225).

The development of this "spatial vocabulary" is necessary, therefore, because the concept of "world" is simply too bulky to do anything analytically. "Sphere" works better for several reasons. For one, it is more in tune with the development of modernity, which is characterized by "the increasing removal of safety structures from the traditional theological and cosmological narratives" (Sloterdijk, *Bubbles* 25) that used to provide human subjectivity with a degree of ontological security by providing human beings a place in the world, which was fixed, identifiable and orientating. Yet, these "safety structures" in the form of "worlds," according to Sloterdijk, remained. While the emergence of the Figure of Man, allowed for humans to become the subject *and* object of knowledge, the "empirico-transcendental" as Foucault so rightly put it, it did not mean the complete "end of metaphysics." It just diverted the sublimated energy. "People," Sloterdijk precisely notes, "no longer wanted to receive their inspired ideas from embarrassing heavens"(Sloterdijk, *Bubbles* 28). Instead of God, these ideas came from within, so to speak, albeit mediated via technology, which reflected the "distance between what God was capable of in *illo tempore* and what humans will, in time, themselves be capable of" (37). Hence, supposedly secular models of subjectivity that emerged in the wake of the scientific revolutions of Galileo, Copernicus and later Newton, nonetheless remained closely tied to the *imago Dei*. The image of man *as* God simply shifted the flow of power from one end to another. It did not reconsti-

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[2] One cannot but help to think of the continual resonance between Sloterdijk's project and the recent work of Jean-Luc Nancy. This is the case not only with the recent work by Nancy on religious themes and globalization but also his earlier work on "communality" and "singular plurality."

tute the very elements of the prior cosmological system. The shape of the world, even after the emergence of the Figure of Man, did not much change.

But it was not just the shape of the system that did not budge, but rather the way things in it related to one another. While Sloterdijk takes much care to provide various illustrations having to do with the contours of what he is describing, he is in fact attempting to describe relationality. One could even go so far as to say that for him the way in which certain elements in a system relate—let us call this the "relational quantum"—gives the system itself shape. Thus to call something "foam," "bubble," or "sphere" is really an attempt by Sloterdijk to theorize a "connecting force." Spheres, then, are "the original product of human coexistence." In other words, spheres form out of the relations of certain existing ontological objects, or as Sloterdijk tends to call them, "nobjects." Spheres therefore are unlike environments. "Environment," while certainly a milieu for the facilitation of elements in action therein, is nevertheless a top-down way of thinking about social forms. Environments are determinants and causes, though perhaps not linear or direct ones. They are, still, somehow initiators. Spheres are more "atmospheric-symbolic places." They are like "air" or even "air-conditioning systems in whose construction and calibration, for those living in real coexistence . . . is out of the question not to participate" (46). "Living in spheres" is indeed a condition, a structure but one which is dynamic and ethereal. It "means inhabiting a shared *subtlety*" (46, emphasis added).

Bubbles, the first volume of the project, is a "theory of the shared inside" (542). The bubble is the first step, the most elemental, the smallest unit of sphere. The question, of course, is what kind of bubble are we talking about here? In describing it, Sloterdijk references a variety of illustrations, including vaginas, wombs and soap. Stranger still is Sloterdijk's embrace of the term "soul," not the Cartesian variety but the Platonic one. Spheres are a form of "soul expansion" that would have previously been associated with "spirit," although Sloterdijk claims that what was "meant was always inspired spatial communities" (19). But today, there is no thinking about spatial communities without thinking of networks, which has triggered "a general space crisis," or what Paul Virilio calls "the annihilation of space." This complicates, in particular, age-old ideas about subjectivity.

According to Sloterdijk, the annihilation of space finally reveals the myth of individual autonomy, which he describes as the "basic neurosis of Western culture," that is, "to dream of a subject that watches, names and owns everything, without letting anything contain, appoint or own it, not even if the discreetest God offered himself as an observer, container and client" (86). The Enlightenment emphasized and augmented loneliness as the default setting of the human being. This is the case not only with the ancients but also with Hegel and Heidgger in particular. To the contrary, for

Sloterdijk, there is, what we can call, a *primary* "intimacy" between beings. Even phenomenological conceptions of "intersubjectivity" took as its quantum the individual, perceiving subject—a point made loud and clear most acutely by post-structuralist critics. But more to the point, the Modern Age too easily discarded the primacy of, what Sloterdijk describes as a magolological and erotological tendency. He writes:

> Among humans, fascination is the rule and disenchantment the exception. As desiring and imitating begins, humans constantly experience that they not only hold a lonely potential for desiring the other within themselves, but also that they manage, in an opaque and non-trivial manner, to infect the objects of their desire with their own longing for them; at the same time, individuals imitate the other's longing for a third element as if under some infectious compulsion… Where philosophy of the early Modern Age mentions such effects of resonance and infection, it spontaneously draws on the vocabulary of *magological* traditions. As easy as antiquity, it was reflection on affective causalities of the magical type that initiated the clarification of the interpersonal or inter demonic concert, which, from Plato's time on, was interpreted as a work of eros. (208)

Tracing this genealogy magolological of relation from the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age allows for Sloterdijk to contrast the spheres' model of relationality to that of subjectivity, which he, after Lacan, refers to as the psychoanalytic model. In large part, he does this to tie it to Judeo-Christian understandings of The Law, which "does not encourage merging, but constantly makes the case for constructive separations; its focus is not intimate fusion, but rather the discretion of the subject in relation to the other" (217). The Law model of subjectivity, we can argue, is the basis for so many of the recent theories of the subject that are no doubt derivative of Lacan and Althusser. In the Althusserian version, which I think Sloterdijk has in mind although he more explicitly takes aim at Lacan, the subject is the subject of ideology, constituted in and through the ISAs (Ideological State Apparatuses) that have surrounded the subject's entire identity through various layers of institutional identity formation and recognition. Thus, when the police officer hails you, the subject was always already interpellated, as evidenced by the subject's assumption that it is *he* that office is addressing. Put in juxtaposition to Sloterdijk, this model seems to be top-down in that there is no theory of "bindability" beyond the superstructural notion of "ideology." This amounts to sacrificing the "relationships between things" for "being-in-itself" (220). Put differently, Sloterdijk identifies in this model of subjectivity an *overemphasis* on the ontic.

The question of the ontic most certainly leads to questions around notions of thinghood and objects. Especially nowadays, there has been a flurry of philosophical interest in ideas of object-oriented ontology. "Things" or objects are a subject of serious

theoretical inquiry. Sloterdijk, hardly a source for many of the thinkers associated with OOO and speculative realism, nevertheless shares these analytic concerns.[3] Subjectivity is but one rather convenient level for him to begin. It is a point of entry, not his primary intellectual concern. Nevertheless, the importance of relationality brings Sloterdijk to theorize objects, those very entities whose relations he expresses such profound interest in. In large part, he use the term "nobject" from Thomas Macho, a German cultural theorist whose work has not quite reached the English-speaking theory world quite yet.[4] In Sloterdijk's rendering, nobjects are "things, media or persons that fulfill the function of the living genius or intimate augmenter for subjects" (467). They are "objects that…are not objects because they have no subject-like counterpart" (294). His examples of "nobjects" include air as well as placental blood. Air, he writes, "possesses unmistakable nobject properties as it affords the incipient subject a first chance at self-activity in respiratory autonomy, but without ever appearing as a thing with which to have a relationship" (295). Placental blood is one of the many images of the gynecological register that Sloterdijk draws from throughout the work. The womb is of particular importance to Sloterdijk as it functions to counter the assumed importance of "primary narcissism" (320). Instead, he says that there is a primary duality, which is born out not only in art (a privileged area of evidence for Sloterdjik) but also in mythology.

This leads him to venture into some rather odd places. For instance, in a chapter on what he calls "the primal companion," he spends a lot of space on what he calls the "sanitization of afterbirth." There, he argues that the importance of afterbirth which subsequently suffered from a "bourgeois-individualist" attempt to retroactively isolate the subject. He even goes so far as to offer a periodization. He notes that "modern individualism could only enter its intense phase in the second half of the eighteenth century, when the general clinical and cultural excommunication of the placenta began" (384). Thus the "lonely modern subject" is a "fission product from the informal separation of birth and afterbirth. Its positively willful being is tainted by a fault to which it will never admit: that it rests on the elimination of its most

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[3]   There are many books and other writings, mostly on the World Wide Web, on object-oriented ontology. The best definition of OOO has come from videogame theorist Ian Bogost. That can be found at: Bogost, Ian. "What Is Object-Oriented Ontology?" IAN BOGOST - VIDEOGAME THEORY, CRITICISM, DESIGN 8 Dec. 2009. Web. 26 Sept. 2012. Of the books, the following anthologies provide suitable introductions. Bryant, Levi, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman. The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism. re.press, 2011. Harman, Graham. Towards Speculative Realism: Essays and Lectures. O Books, 2010.

[4]   There seems to be almost nothing of Macho's translated into English. He does, however, have a web site. http://www.culture.hu-berlin.de/tm/

intimate pre-object" (386). Hence, the Modern Age can be thought of as defined by "placental nihilism."

Undoubtedly this is stylization taken to the *n*th degree. But there is something to Sloterdijk's overuse of the metaphor. He views the maternal relationship as the proto-type for his theory of relationality in spheres—"proto-subjectivity." "[I]ntimacy is a transmission relationship . . . not taken from the symmetrical alliance between twins or like-minded parties, where each mirrors the other, but from the irresolvable asym-metrical communion between the maternal voice and the fetal ear" (511). While one could not blame any reader for being fed up with Sloterdijk's "illustrative" method, there is, in my mind at least, a method, that is, a clear intention on the part of Sloterdijk. The imagistic aspect of his illustrative method is born out in not only the dearth of examples that he uses, but in the countless photographs and illustrations that Sloterdijk includes in *Bubbles*.

But returning to the issue of spheres and proto-subjectivity, Sloterdijk does not neces-sarily spend all of his efforts in a nostalgic explication for a time where ontological thinking was not devoid of magolological or erotological elements. Instead, he sug-gests that "modern mass culture" already exhibits this sort of reality of spheres as it "offers new, direct ways of fulfilling the desire for homeostatic communion." He goes on to argue that "pop music and its derivatives" allow for the "possibility of diving into a body of rhythmic noise in which critical ego functions become temporarily dispensable" (527). These sorts of communions share in common with religious com-munions the opportunity for "absorption," as he calls it. The most telling of examples he provides is that of the Love Parade, held in Berlin for a long time but later moved to other cities in Germany. Up until its recent cancellation, the Love Parade was char-acterized by its particularly EDM (electronic dance music)-heavy focus, exhibitionist ethos, and the sheer number of attendees with figures (though disputed) reported to be in the hundreds of thousands. Of this festival, Sloterdijk writes:

> …[T]hey could easily be called "Truth Parades," as their aim is to absorb large numbers of people, all of whom value the attributes of their individuality, into happy, symbiotic reversible and thus "true" sonospheres. These communions with the audio gods or the rhythmic juggernauts are based on the same truth model as post-Freudian psychoanalysis—with the difference that the latter rec-ommends that its clients develop a strict individual rhetoric of mourning for the lost primal object, while integristic music therapy in the streets relies on drug-assisted group euphorias that may advance flirtation with absorption into a spheric primal body in the short term, but yield little profit for the participants' media competence in the sobering periods that follow (527–528).

It is in this unlikely example of the Love Parade, where I believe the key to Sloterdijk's

"theory of the shared inside" lies. By viewing this music festival as "communion," and thus employing a religious register, Sloterdijk arguably betrays, what I view to be, his true intellectual concerns—theology. In showing that "life is always a life-in-the-midst-of-lives, Being-in, then, should be conceived as the togetherness of something with something in something" (542), Sloterdijk ends up using the theological concept of "perichoresis," which the Protestant German theologian Jürgen Moltmann in his *God in Creation* describes as "the principle of mutual interpenetration."

In Moltmann's theology, all relationships "are analogous to God." This is characterized by a "primal, reciprocal indwelling and mutual interpenetration," which in theological terms is called *perichoresis*: "God *in* the world and the world *in* God; heaven and earth *in* the kingdom of God, pervaded by his glory." This mutual interpenetration disabuses the notion of a solitary life. Against a panpsychic Leibnizian monadology, which sees ontologically individual beings that coordinate with another through a divine pre-established harmony, Moltmann describes the principle of mutual interpenetration as all living things "[living] in another and with one another, from one another and for one another"(Moltmann 17). This is analogous to Sloterdijk's "onto-theology."

Yet, no matter how novel Sloterdijk's overall argument, and mode of argument, in the end, it is rather familiar because it is, even according to him, a *corrective*. *Bubbles*, and the *Spheres* trilogy generally, is an attempt to demystify, a tact nearly identical to the theoretical methods of Rudolf Bultmann but also—surprisingly—the Frankfurt school, especially Adorno and Horkheimer. To demythologize is to suggest that if we simply understood the proper genealogy of a particular concept at the root of contemporary metaphysics, it would make for a better world. For Sloterdijk, it is "sphere," whereas for the Frankfurt School, it was "mass culture." For all of their public back-and-forths regarding the German welfare state, it seems that Sloterdijk and Honneth, the current director of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, have more in common than previously imagined.

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Beware the Rays of Imitation

CLAIRE BARBER

Tony D. Sampson. *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2012. 235 pp.

The cover of Tony D. Sampson's *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks* incorporates the image of a flock of crows sitting on power lines, a scene with the potential to inspire the type of fear captured by films like Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963). While Sampson does not examine avian behavior, emotions like fear and the encounters in which they are produced constitute an essential part of this text's overarching argument. In *Virality*, Sampson proposes that biological explanations of virality insufficiently explain the movement and effects of contagions. Memetics and the work of Émile Durkheim are two such explanations that distinguish between the biological and the social in what Sampson regards as an unproductive and unrealistic manner. In contrast, Sampson balances contagions' productive opportunities with the threats that they pose by integrating these two fields. Because of this altered emphasis, *Virality* participates in a growing scholarly trend within the humanities in which researchers criticize and propose alternatives to the reification of a methodological division between biology and culture.[1] While dense, *Virality* treats a wide range of relevant scholarship as it presents a refreshing approach to contagion theory in what has been a stagnant area of scholarship.

Sampson presents *Virality* as a "resuscitation" of theories proposed by late nineteenth–century French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (7). By situating his argument in this way, Sampson acknowledges Tarde's relative obscurity while suggesting that *Virality* does not merely apply Tarde's social theories to contemporary networks. Instead, he brings Tarde into contemporary conversations about contagion, which account for the movement of "financial crisis, social influence, innovations, fashions and fads, and even human emotion" through networks of individuals (2). Sampson investigates the potential for politicians, computer hackers, and neuromarketers, among others, to prime social atmospheres and affect our desires. In the process, he proposes several connections between Tarde's work and that of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Sampson's readers are likely to be more familiar with assemblage theory, so this tran-

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1 Research that takes a similar approach includes the "Biocultures Manifesto" written by Lennard J. Davis and David B. Morris (*New Literary History* 38.3 [Summer 2007]: 411-418) and Samantha Frost's work-in-progress *Biology for Humanists*.

shistorical pairing elucidates Tarde's infrequently discussed theories while providing a different way of understanding the function of imitation in assemblages.

The complex first chapter of *Virality* lays out Tarde's theories of the social, which are essential for understanding Sampson's argument. Within this chapter, Sampson includes a spatial representation of the rays and nodes that constitute the social field, which can be productively read as overlapping with the illustrations of scale-free networks in Chapter Three, a connection that the author could have made more explicit. Instead of considering individuals as self-contained and self-governing, Tarde argues that "subjectivity is open to the magnetizing, mesmerizing, and contaminating affects of others" (29). These others include diverse bodies and energies because Tarde refuses an ontology that assigns the greatest value to humans, as do many contemporary supporters of object-oriented ontology. Instead, Tarde presents the social as an atmosphere in which relations are constantly changing between bodies—read as nodes—in response to the imitative rays of energy that move among them. These rays produce imitative behavior like yawning or blushing that obscures the distinction between self and other as well as the origin of this behavior. An essential part of this argument is that we are largely unconscious of these currents or waves of energy because they affect us at the level of the nonconscious, which leads Tarde to argue that "[s]ocial man is a somnambulist" (13). While such a claim may disconcert us, researchers in the biological sciences would be the first to remind us that our bodies are such complex ecosystems that we are aware of only a small portion of the stimuli that we encounter.

Over the course of the text, Sampson touches on many examples of encounters with these imitative rays and the possibility for their manipulation, as with the housing bubble in Chapter Three or the videos of Lonelygirl15 in Chapter Two. In his treatment of these examples, Sampson differentiates his approach from Tarde's. While Tarde classifies these waves as accidental and capricious, Sampson supports Nigel Thrift's proposal that "Tarde may well have overestimated the accidentalness of contagion" (99). Sampson relies on this modification as he argues that many of today's technologies can be used to exploit the nonconscious movement of these rays. According to Sampson, "small events can be encouraged to become bigger contagious overspills" because we exist in "an epidemiological atmosphere that can be affectively primed, or premediated, so that imitative momentum can be anticipated and purposefully spread" (58). As a supporting example, he introduces the wasp–orchid assemblage from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. In this example, the orchid anticipates the male wasp's desire by both looking and smelling so much like a female wasp that the wasp attempts to mate with it. The wasp leaves the encounter unsatisfied, but the orchid has predicted and exploited the wasp's biological desire to achieve pollination. In this assemblage, wasps allow seemingly unthreatening actions

to be suggested to them by the orchids whose biological adaptation facilitates such encounters. Based on this encounter and others like it, Sampson defines contagion as "a convergent imitative encounter in which one assemblage captures the fragments of another's desire" (45). He returns to this example throughout the text to distinguish his approach to social contagion from theories proposed by Gustave Le Bon, Émile Durkheim, and Charles Darwin.

Sampson waits until Chapters Two and Three to directly contrast Tarde's approach with other well-known theories, such as memetics and threshold theory. Popularized by Richard Dawkins (*The Selfish Gene*), memetics contains theoretical weaknesses based on the metaphor created between a gene, a biological unit transmitted hereditarily, and a meme, a cultural unit transferred through social interaction. Sampson lays out five problems with this neo-Darwinian theory, including the difficulty that researchers have had locating this unit and the treatment of "the medium in which an idea is transmitted…as an inert channel" (72). His issues with threshold theory also center on "the *infectability* of the affective atmospheres" themselves (112). Proponents of threshold theory—including Malcolm Gladwell (*The Tipping Point*) and James Q. Wilson (the broken windows theory)—propose that the preferences and behaviors of certain elite individuals trickle down to others. As an alternative, Sampson advances physicist Albert-László Barabási's research on scale-free networks, in which any node can start an epidemic based on an accidental encounter. This theory overlaps with that proposed by Tarde, which demonstrates that rather than refuting any of these theories entirely, Sampson seeks a middle ground from which he can emphasize that individuals or organizations with sufficient knowledge can affect the mood of the marketplace or the political atmosphere.

By presenting two examples of contagion in affective atmospheres, Sampson uses Chapter Four to explore the ways in which individuals or organizations can prime a community to facilitate the virality of certain affects—here, fear and love. The reader is likely to be more familiar with Sampson's argument about fear than with his argument about love, which is one of the highlights of *Virality*. Based on an immunologic approach, fear of the other or of the unknown must be created in order to propagate the desire for heightened network security. To describe such encounters, Sampson raises the specter of the 1980s Bulgarian Virus Factory. In cases like this one, attack becomes part of a constantly circulating rumor triggering biological predispositions that can be appropriated to serve another's purposes. Love is a second affect that makes individuals more susceptible to imitative rays; in fact, Tarde argues that love and other positive affects like faith and hope are *more contagious than* fear. We want to fall in love and also to receive professions of love; therefore, politicians and corporations can employ love as a strategy to affect the behavior of voters or consumers.

Sampson's application of Tarde's theories is insightful; however, this section could be usefully developed in a further work if he expanded upon the five political arenas in which love operates and the phenomenon that he calls "Obama-love." Here, Sampson explains that the way in which President Obama deployed love convinced voters to fall particularly hard for him just as voters' affective responses to him have now begun to fluctuate "between unrequited love and a love gone bad" (157). Prior to the 2008 election, President Obama used his published memoirs and his visible social media presence to cultivate informal relationships with voters as previous presidents had not. Based on these encounters, voters came to trust him, and by changing the country's mood, he won the election. After the election, though, this love began to sour; for many people, it turned into "open contempt," a transition that Tarde predicted (qtd. in 150). Tarde's social theories begin to explain the violent emotional fluctuations that many voters have experienced. This argument could have been further developed if Sampson expanded the details of the president's marketing strategies or analyzed narratives of encounters between voters and the president's imitative rays.

Virality's final chapter tracks the current trend toward neuromarketing—a discipline that employs technologies of neuroscience to read bodily reactions to certain products or messages—and its potential to affect consumer desire in social encounters. Individuals who participate in this process try "to capture the fascinations of the unconscious social medium, guiding attention to affectively primed encounters" using previously gathered data (162). Social media provide one site in which individuals and organizations are developing new ways to turn accidents in their favor. At this point, Sampson introduces technologies like eye tracking tests and fMRI, which provide what he calls more "objective measurements of eye movement, electrical activity in the brain, heart rate, and skin conductance and temperature" (177). His coupling of a nineteenth-century sociological argument with twenty first–century technology is both original and significant, but Sampson has framed scientific findings in such a way that he understates the role of interpretation in the reading of test results. While his argument has potential, it would benefit from more direct engagement with neuroscientific research on mirror neurons and feminist science studies. For example, in *The Lying Brain: Lie Detection in Science and Science Fiction*, Melissa Littlefield refutes this widespread belief "that the body provides us with objective data that do not require interpretation," a trap that we fall into when we assume that "[t]he body speaks for itself largely because the aspects of physiology being measured are not under direct, conscious control" (5). Additionally, neuroscientists like Ilan Dinstein have suggested that many factors besides the mirror neuron system contribute to imitation, and based on primate studies, they have shown that our understanding of an action's meaning is not necessarily tied to our repetition of that action. Therefore, Sampson's suggestion that the mirror neuron system is "the equivalent of human-to-human 'wireless communication'" remains premature (53).

In *Virality*, Sampson analyzes a wide range of materials, including theories proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, Teresa Brennan, Charles Darwin, Jonathan Crary, and Gustave Le Bon. Any reader of this text will gain exposure to an array of arguments cited across disciplines in addition to current methodological disputes in contagion theory. However, Sampson's argument can be difficult to locate amongst the many citations, and the book would benefit from more detailed explorations of the cultural and historical examples cited. Despite these suggestions, the book is both innovative and timely, which means that the work necessary to understand Sampson's connections will be well rewarded.

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Hegelian Untimeliness, or The Experience of the Impossibility of Experience

JULIAN JASON HALADYN

Rebecca Comay. *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution*. Stanford University Press [Cultural Memory in the Present Series], 2010. 224 pp.

Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution begins with the question of the cultural disenchantment facing Germany in the aftermath of the French Revolution, an historical condition that, following Marx and Engels, came to be called the "German misery." This disenchanted position results from the awkward acknowledgment that "Germany's experience of modernity is a missed experience," the trauma of which Rebecca Comay uses as a category of history, with the "German misery" being an exemplary model of her approach and Hegel representing "its most lucid theorist" (3-4). Hegel's philosophy stages history not only as a response to or record of events, but also as the history of making history. As spectators of the French Revolution, Germans were able to take on the feelings of thrill and terror while remaining at a privileged distance; yet, the possibilities of this encounter appear only as the lost possibilities of a "future already passed," with Germany being "in the melancholic position of mourning the loss of what it had never experienced as such" (3). In Comay's reading, this is the cornerstone of Hegelian history, which locates the modern subject within an unbridgeable temporal gap that separates an already lost past from a forever unattainable future. The French Revolution is "the burning center of Hegel's philosophy" precisely because it is experienced (as seen from Germany) as an indirect accounting of the experience that makes it an event (5).

Crystallized in Germany's response to the French Revolution, as Comay convincingly argues, is "the untimeliness of historical experience" that defines history—particularly in light of Marx's critiques of Hegel—as a virtual, vicarious and even voyeuristic encounter in which we are "forever latecomers and precursors to our experiences, outsiders to our most intimate affairs" (4-5). The most exceptional aspect of Comay's study is her argument for the untimely as a key feature of modernity. Through untimeliness, the "German misery" is extended into the more general malady of the *modern* misery, a condition resulting from the persistent incongruities of the self's

quest for meaning and 'truth' in a world increasingly understood as inherentlymeaningless and relative. As modern subjects we are (or consistently feel like) latecomers to a world whose experience seems beyond the capabilities of our bodily senses. From this perspective, to be human in the modern sense is to be untimely since our experiences are always already repetitions of previous experiences that we knowingly or unknowingly missed; or, as Comay eloquently states, our "experience is the experience of the impossibility of experience" (128). Comay's proposal for untimeliness, as she succinctly outlines in her introduction, describes the fundamental relationship that Germany in general and Hegel specifically has with the French Revolution: the trauma of the event is resolved by replacing the lived experience with a symbolic representation of experience that is aesthetically detached from the reality of the Revolutionary events in-themselves.

Let us consider this untimeliness in more detail. The Revolution, says Kant, "finds in the hearts of all spectators (who are not engaged in the game itself) a wishful *participation* that borders closely on enthusiasm, the very expression of which is fraught with danger; this sympathy, therefore, can have no other cause than a moral predisposition in the human race" (Kant 302). Distinctly outside of the event itself, a subject can experience the social and political upheaval of the Revolution as an aesthetic phenomenon, the judgment of which is not prejudiced by personal involvement or interest but is instead based within a contradictory mode of, to return to the major theme of Comay's text, anticipating a *missed experience*. And yet, through history we also feel like precursors to a world of greater knowledge that, since Kant, is the privilege of an interiorized subjectivity. The basic tenets of this move towards an inner subjective judgment are present in the 16th century Protestant Reformation, with Luther making a marked appeal for the ability of people to interpret the Bible for themselves without recourse to Church authorities. It is primarily on this basis that Germany laid claim to the legacy of the French Revolution, believing the Reformation to be its obvious predecessor, even while denying any direct link to the events taking place in France; Germany can thus "celebrate, surpass, and mourn, at a distance, what was never its own to experience firsthand" (1). This distance is all-important for German Idealism, since it is strictly through the separation of self and world that Kant believes freedom is truly possible—an untimely freedom that is the purview of spectators, those who passively look at rather than participate in, whose engagement with the world is authoritatively aesthetic.

Through the untimeliness of modern experience we enter what Comay terms "the Kantian theatre" (as she titles her second chapter), a space in which—drawing notably on Hannah Arendt's reading of Kant—"political judgment is an extension of the aesthetic judgment that simultaneously finds and founds the cosmopolitan collective as the *sensus communis* of the enlarged community; judgment performatively invents

what it discovers" (34). From this Kantian point-of-view, defined as it is through the common sensations of a generalized or universalized subjectivity, the events of the French Revolution are experienced as if originating in the viewing subject that wills it strictly as a representation divorced from any *reality*. This, stated simply, is the broken subject of which Comay speaks, a self for which the "world ceases to present a mirror in which I can recognize the objectified imprint of my own activity" (146). Such an untimely and broken subject is based upon Kant's "world spectator," who according to Arendt "decides, by having an idea of the whole, whether, in any single, particular event, progress is being made" (Arendt 58). Without a belief in the basic similarity of self and world, without a verifiable relation between (inner) experience and (outer) reality, the activities of the modern subject exist in the experience of untimeliness that is translated into *an idea of the whole*.

Through Kantian judgment, acts (or we might generally say events) are made real through the publicly shared opinions of *the people* who make the acts communicable. It is the collected judgments of these spectators that Hegel understood as contextualizing the event in a way that allows anyone to engage with it and perceive its *meaning* within the whole of history. This positioning of the subject as a spectator is fundamental to Comay's approach to Hegel and her overall discussion of the French Revolution, with experience being increasingly understood as archival in nature.

In her introduction to *Lost in the Archive*, Comay considers the dual etymology of *arché* as signifying both a promise of "command" or mastery and "the language of origins" that serves to suspend the reality of beginnings and rules because of the fact that the archive, as a "condition of the possibility of remembrance, exceeds and confounds the time of history" (Comay, *Archives*, 14). This interest in the archive is intimately connected to Comay's treatment of Hegel throughout *Mourning Sickness* and, more importantly, her argument for untimeliness. In the space of the archive, history masters the world ironically through an excess historicization, in which the 'truth' of subjective experience is determined strictly in relation to the untimely order of history. Whatever is not included as part of history has no definable reality in modern culture because, in Foucaultian terms, its identity and the series of its differences cannot be discovered until measured with a common unit. This epistemological shift from similitude to representation is, however, not as definitive as it has often been interpreted and Comay's untimeliness reflects this ongoing problematic; as she makes clear, the untimely operates not within the strictly representational mode that we associate with modernity, instead negotiating between this mode and the (supposedly) pre-modern search for similarities. To see the Reformation in the French Revolution represents a national act of similitude meant to override inherent differences—particularly, as Comay remarks, "the startling contrast between the breathtaking modernity of France and the general decrepitude of a Germany still mired in the swamplands

of feudal absolutism" (2). Hegel's conception of history attempts to reconcile this problematic by making similitude a category of representation, turning the Kantian in-itself into a by-product of the act of representing.

It is this Kantian spectator who is able to "enjoy fearfulness without fear" and thereby to rewrite physical failure, such as "the mortal finitude of the frail, suffering body," as a spiritual triumph of "the infinitude of moral freedom"— a subjective sublimity that operates within the untimely realm of inner experience (31). Because of this, it is also the Kantian spectator who most suffers from the "German misery." Keeping in mind Arendt's observation that spectators (as plural) are always involved with fellow spectators, we can better situate Hegel's claim that consciousness

> is not a *single* self which could be confronted by the object as equally having a self of its own, but is pure Notion, the gazing of the self into the self, the absolute seeing of *itself* doubled; the certainty of itself is the universal Subject, and its consciousness is the essence of all actuality. (Hegel 356)

What remains of this encounter—as we see with the German interest in the French Revolution—is the experience of an object stripped of experience, a specter of the world repeatedly created through the gazing of history into history.

Proclaiming an end to history—along with the over abundance of other *ends* that mark a sense of modernity—theorists from Hegel on have avoided confronting this untimely quality of our existence by structuring limitations into our represented existence (within an infinite universe). This ideal of the *end* functions as fulfillment through a type of death, an escape from the eternally recurring trauma of missed possibilities that plague the wills of modern subjects. We can relate this desire for an 'end' to a key structuring mechanism associated with the French Revolution, namely the guillotine, to which Comay devotes much of her third chapter. For Comay, this instrument of terror can in many ways be seen as the materialization of the untimely on the human body itself. "It generates a virtual theater and a theater of a virtualization—a spectacle of the unspectacular where objects and conjured up in their disappearance, disappearance is materialized, and repetition itself acquires an aura" (71). Comay's description of the guillotine speaks to the general conditions for modernity and the source for the cultural disenchantment facing the modern subject, since within this *theatre* meaning is only the meaning created.

Yet part of the cultural meaning of the guillotine is the inherent fascination of witnessing the spectacularly violent *endings* of an excessive number of lives, which notably occurs in front of mass audiences of spectators. This fascination operates on the interest in and need to discover meaning in experience, which the subject encounters

most fully after the fact as a spectator—like Hegel and the French Revolution. Hegel's fascination, however, is also a type of boredom that is crucial to the untimeliness of both the move towards history and the possibility of its end. For Comay, "Hegel is the first to notice the strange mixture of thrill and boredom" specifically in relation to the guillotine, the repetitive and inexpressive functions of which prove a short-lived experience that is soon recognized as an impossible experience (72). Subjective will in this context is the desire to find or create meaning where none exists, turning the unspectacular fragments of a lost past into the spectacle of a future history. On the scaffold of the guillotine disappearance is materialized through the physical and temporal repetition of experiencing loss as history—which, to somewhat extend Walter Benjamin's proposal, allows objects to acquire an aura through the untimely balance of historical thrills and boredoms. Hegel, Comay tells us, suggests that boredom "is not just the antithesis of fascination," but instead the two are actually the same (72). It is this *boring* fascination that defines the modern subject-spectator as a discoverer of untimely meaning and a creator of the world as a representation of untimeliness.

The burning centre of Comay's argument is the question of the modern condition that she articulates in and through the notion of untimeliness, a concept of indisputable significance for many prominent theories of modernity and contemporary thought. I have been profoundly affected by *Mourning Sickness*, particularly in the strength of Comay's ability to communicate a vital area of philosophical research that, to my mind, is seriously underrepresented: the gap that we recognize beginning most powerfully in the 19th century between the self and world, in which subjectivity is experienced as out of step with lived existence. In this text, the French Revolution is to Hegel what Hegel is to us: an experience that is always already missed, even as we wait for it to occur. This is not to say that Comay herself fails to communicate this untimely relationship, quite the contrary. Her approach embodies the abstract power of untimeliness, presenting us with a representation of Hegel that (to borrow two important terms she employs) sways back and forth between a *horror vacui*—a fear of the void that Germany in particular experienced in comparison to the revolutionary events in France—and a *Tabula Rasa*—the blank slate that invites the terror of a missed experience. In this way Comay, like Hegel, "turns thought to the order of experience, even if it is a questions of a missed experienced, a lapsed experience, or even, in the end, another's experience" – such as my untimely experience of this timely book (153).

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Low Theory

MATT APPLEGATE

McKenzie Wark. *Telesthesia: Communication, Culture, and Class*. Polity Press, 2012. 241 pp.

Occupy Wall Street (OWS) is the new and enduring object of political and intellectual inquiry for the Left in the United States. Indeed, like the 1999 Seattle WTO protests before it, OWS is perhaps more momentous, more impactful, or even more 'revolutionary' in its after-effects and in its memorialization than it was in the time and space of its production. For some of us in academia that participated in local demonstrations or travelled to Zuccotti Park, OWS has become a thought experiment and a provocation as its physical manifestations have all but disappeared. Written in its wake, McKenzie Wark's *Telesthesia: Communication, Culture, and Class* (2012) is an artifact of the occupation. It is simultaneously an attempt to rewrite the method through which radical thought is articulated in academic contexts and an attempt to surpass academic constraints on intellectual production given the event of OWS—in Wark's words, *Telesthesia* is "a book about method […] but one that explains the method by performing it" (9). As a kind of action-oriented text, then, *Telesthesia* situates Occupy as both its launch pad and its medium, its provocation and its means of articulation.

Occupy bookends the text—here chapters feature meditations on the space and function of OWS, as well as one of its most famous slogans, "Shit is Fucked Up and Bullshit"—reminding the reader of the present political context from which *Telesthesia* emerges, but also of the malleable shape of political thought that Occupy demanded. In this way, *Telesthesia* is not so much a book *about* Occupy—perhaps one of its faults: Wark draws connections between the politics of maimed babies, hacking, 'Disco' and 'Techno' Marxism, growing up lower middle class, September 11th, the anonymous texts of anarcho-communist collective Tiqqun, and porn-star Sasha Gray (and more) to perform his method—but a book about remotion and relocation. These are not only the functional acts of occupation; they are the methodological imperatives of the text. The question, then, is precisely how does Wark allow thought to emerge from spaces that breach academic constraint and how is thought mobilized toward the transformation of intellectual labor?

Two concepts in particular guide the reader through this double movement: 'Low

Theory' and 'Telesthesia.' In the first case, Low Theory "experiments with the creation of new relations between practices and modes of communication" (206). As Wark is so eager to demonstrate, Low Theory 'makes up its own rules' as it is implemented. It is a mode of methodological improvisation. Given its medium, the conceptual mechanics of Low Theory might seem like a means of reinventing the form and function of the book as such. And in some ways, this is precisely what this concept is mobilized toward. Like Marshall McLuhan's *The Medium is the Massage*, *Telesthesia* is a kind of visual metaphor wherein the book-form manifests the theoretical work of the text. When one considers Wark's own intellectual history and the rise of Media Studies and digitally mediated literatures, Low Theory might be situated as a missing link between literary production and digital technologies. In the context of the text, however, Low Theory's conceptual intervention is most easily identified in its an attempt to rethink the function of genre. *Telesthesia* is simultaneously a compendium of concepts (Wark **bolds** a select set of vocabulary that he later defines in the book's 'keywords' section), a diary, a narrative of surveillance societies and technological development, and a revision of his 2004 *Hacker Manifesto*. Indeed, *Telesthesia* is a generic mix, often overlapping without explicit indication.

The generic fluidity definitive of Low Theory in this text is not only an avenue of experimentation; it perhaps offers a conceptual framework with which to make sense of Occupy's creative energy. By contrast to the narrative of major media outlets—Fox News' mocking OWS for its lack of coherency comes to mind here—Wark's own stylistic itinerary can be read as a means of legitimizing and offering credence to the idea that political projects are not necessarily united through a program, a party platform, or an immediately transparent set of political acts. Like an actual site of protest, the reader is met with a multiplicity of styles, voices, and concerns. In the vein of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze's dialogue in "Intellectuals and Power," the text enacts a kind of relay between theory and practice, prioritizing both simultaneously. But by doing so, Wark willingly removes his work from traditional theoretical discourse, recognizing that what we do as scholars is largely removed from popular discourse both topically and intellectually. What is necessary, then, is a process of its actualization, both textually and institutionally.

While there is a certain cacophony to this text, there is also a tactics. Telesthesia, the book's eponymous base concept, is the form through which Low Theory manifests. It is "perception at a distance;" "its key quality is to bring what is distant near, and make what is distant a site of action" (207). Although this speaks to the already realized possibilities of telecommunications and the Internet, it is also an opportunity for Wark to perform his method. On the one hand, Wark intentionally highlights the book's multiple sites of production in the title of each chapter: *Telesthesia* is written in 12 distinct locations with differences drawn between Zuccotti Park, NY and New

York, NY. From Taipei, Wark theorizes the "transopticon:" the surveillance state's homogenization of time, space, and information. In Gijón, he narrates the expansion of game space, claiming that digitization is a mark of privatization, and thus an extension of primitive accumulation. And writing in Delhi, Wark accounts for the transformation of information into private property, redrawing class lines and reorganizing resistance to capital. In this way, *Telesthesia* is a global text and it is only in its organization as a book that the times and spaces of Wark's writing are made to relate. The book brings disparate sites of production into communication, but also into view. On the other hand, the action-oriented component of this concept is also its political demand. In bringing what is distant near, and in making what is distant a site of action, telesthesia removes objectivity from the intellectual act; it places the reader in the midst of a hostile terrain and disallows her any point of remove.

Despite its modes of experimentation, Wark's readers will recognize the idiosyncratic vocabulary and theoretical mechanics developed in his *Hacker Manifesto*. The vectorialist class is still the corporate-fascist class, transforming all information and intellectual production into intellectual property, and the hacker class remains at the forefront of the struggle against the capitalization of everything. However, with *Telesthesia*, the vectorial/hacker binary transforms in at least two ways. First, Wark incorporates and introduces anarcho-communist collective Tiqqun's figure of the 'young-girl' from their recently translated *Preliminary Materials For a Theory of the Young Girl* into his critique of capital and the privatization of information. Here, Wark attempts to account for the means by which capital has become productive of our most intimate relations, indeed, our very subjectivity, under neoliberal economic regimes. Second, with his focus on Occupy, Wark foments new imperatives for the coarticulation of intellectual labor and political action.

First published in France in 1999, Tiqqun's *Theory of the Young-Girl* does not describe a gendered concept—the young-girl is *not* a 'young girl'—it is the "anthropomorphosis of capital," a technique of capitalist management at the level of subjectivity (18). Stated another way, the figure of the young-girl describes the condition by which subjectivity, desire, language, and affect are transformed into commodities. It is the concept that describes the force of real subsumption, or, as Jason Read indicates so succinctly in his *Micropolitics of Capital*, the force by which "the production of subjectivity itself becomes productive for capital" (136). In chapter seventeen of *Telesthesia*, "The Little Sisters are Watching You," Wark mobilizes the concept to describe a new interface of power through which the vectorialist class and the hacker class relate: a means of "making the inhuman look like something approachable" (177). Challenging the easy binary between friend and enemy, vectorialist and hacker, the figure of the young-girl accounts for the capitalization of desire, but also the means by which even those who resist capital are embroiled in its logic. Under real subsump-

tion every subject of capital is enmeshed in its apparatus' and is productive of them. In this sense, resistance to capital confronts an internal obstacle—resistance to capital is no longer a simple confrontation between individuals and institutions, it is a confrontation between our desires and our actions as well.

In a tangible sense, this refocuses the imperatives of the hacker class on the very question of technology. On the one hand, Wark cites a difference in modes of technology. Social-networking sites like Facebook trade precisely on the kind of commodification of the self so prevalent under real subsumption, whereas a platform like Tumblr allows for the proliferation of "anonymous and pseudonymous identities" (186). Here, if the privatization of information is to be resisted, we can no longer be the agents of its privatization. On the other hand, Wark's turn to the figure of the young-girl evokes a more fundamental question. At what point are these technologies their own obstacle in the attempt to overthrow capital? As Tiqqun insists, the life of the young-girl is littered with commodities and completely given up to advertizing. In both virtual and real space, so is the hacker. Nathaniel Troy Maye and Tiwanna Tenise Thomason come to mind here. Having acquired access to over 700,000 stolen identities in 2012 and 2013, the pair was arrested after they posted a picture of an expensive meal to Instagram. In this sense, one could argue that the proliferation of identity offered by digital technologies was not effective in overthrowing capital, but delivering subjects to it, and thus to the surveillance state.

Clearly, this focus on real subsumption extends into our modes of intellectual labor. If not a question of hacking as a practice, considering real subsumption in an academic context requires intellectual practices that oppose it or evade it. This is not an original claim; figures like Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, George Caffentzis, Sylvia Federici, Gigi Roggero and the Edu-Factory Collective have dedicated much more time and effort to addressing it. But as profit-bearing knowledges are prioritized, intellectual labor made more precarious, and as the next generation of scholars is met with a virtual non-response to these transformations by tenured faculty, the strength of Wark's text rests on linking struggles outside of a university context to the performance of intellectual labor. While not post-disciplinary, *Telesthesia* does demand that interdisciplinary scholarship take on new forms and find new modes of expression. This is what his turn to OWS allows. But, if the theory of the young-girl indicates anything, it is a need for a kind of transformation of the self in the face of capital. *Telesthesia* enacts a transformation of *who* and *what* the academic performs in the face of the university's thorough and immediate capitalization.

It is here, however, that Wark's text perhaps meets its own limitation. Who among us, especially those of us in the most precarious intellectual positions, can afford intellectual experimentation in this manner? Of the most tangible concerns for a

young academic, will Low Theory and Telesthesia find us a seat at the table and set a course for the tenure-track? While these are not the most glamorous or even the most desirable questions one might draw from reading Wark's book, it does speak to the position and kinds of action Wark demands of the reader. Where knowledge production in the university is becoming more and more accountable to the metrics of profit demands for more traditional work (think of the closure of so many language and interdisciplinary departments in the Humanities across the U.S.) also rises. What is necessary, then, at least for those of us on the precarious end the academic track, is perhaps a form of crypto-telesthesia. On that the figure of the hacker or the creative energy of Occupy might offer some insight, but it is yet to emerge, still to come, and only just glimpsed at the horizon of intellectual labor.

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The Strategies of White American Masculinity: Hamilton Carroll's *Affirmative Reaction*

FENN STEWART

Hamilton Carroll. *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity.* Duke University Press, 2011. 221 pp.

In *Affirmative Reaction*, Hamilton Carroll examines the "devices and strategies" through which "white masculinist privilege" is currently being "reorient[ed]," and thus maintained, in a "posthegemonic" context (2). Responding to widespread claims that masculinity is in crisis, Carroll suggests that, in the wake of "broad transformations that have radically altered the landscape of labor and opportunity in the United States," white masculinity recuperates itself through a transformation from the universal to the particular (for instance, queer, Irish, "white trash," working class) "whereby the particular becomes a location from which privilege can be recouped" (6). He provides close readings of a range of texts, including the films *Brokeback Mountain*, *Million Dollar Baby* and *Traffic,* post-9/11 superhero comics, the television series *24* and *American Chopper*, and the lyrics of Eminem; these analyses work to "chart the devices and strategies" through which "white heteronormative white patriarchal privilege" is currently being maintained in and through popular culture (2).

Affirmative Reaction tracks these formations as "symptomatic and opportunistic responses" to the pressures of "domestic multiculturalism and identity politics," as well as "the globalization of labour" (3). Carroll's main argument –his "central theoretical claim" – is that "the true privilege of white masculinity – and its defining strategy – is not to be unmarked, universal, or invisible (although it is sometimes one or all of these), but to be mobile and mutable" (10). Carroll uses the term "lability" to refer to this mobility and mutability, repurposing a word used in physics and chemistry to describe the quality of being prone to "displacement" or "change" (10, 9). Carroll offers a series of well-written, engaging, and insightful readings to support this argument. For example, Carroll suggests that *Brokeback Mountain* (which he refers to as "the least queer film about same-sex desire imaginable") subordinates a narrative about homophobia to a "representation of the erosions of white masculinist privilege"

in terms of labour and economic opportunity (17). Carroll exposes the ways in which the film appears unable to represent Jack and Ennis sympathetically without "citing [them] as "real men" and patriotic Americans," and suggests that the film offers an example of how white men "regain centre stage" by being called "gay men" (16, 12).

While the readings are lively and convincing, I found myself wishing the analyses had engaged more extensively with other contemporary analyses of gender and race. For example, the *Brokeback Mountain* chapter may well have benefited from a discussion of Jasbir Puar's work on "homonationalism," which she describes as a new form of "homonormativity," one that is implicated in "continu[ing] or extend[ing] the project of U.S. nationalism and imperial expansion endemic to the war on terror" (2007, 2). At other points in the book, I wondered how Carroll's analysis differs from, or complements, work on intersectionality. While Carroll does speak to the "symbiotic imbrications" of whiteness and masculinity, and points to the ways in which white masculinity "inhabits a contingent space in which it is altered" in relation to other axes of identity (8), a more sustained comparison of the concept of lability and intersectionality might help the reader to understand what exactly lability is, and how exactly it works, in Carroll's argument.

When the concept is first introduced, lability appears to be a quality that a thing possesses: "to be labile […] is to be "prone to undergo displacement in position or change in nature"" (10). And yet, when lability is invoked in terms of white masculinity's "*response* to sociopolitical transformations" through "various strategies," it appears to be something that is deployed or operationalized – thus, presumably, more than just a quality that something does or does not possess (10). Although Carroll defines white masculinity as a "process through which or a location in which heteronormative white masculinity attains or regains privilege," he also speaks about white masculinity as an entity with beliefs, desires and plans (181). For example: white masculinity is said to engage in "sleight of hand" by "citing itself as […] needy and […] worthy"; it "turn[s] to the representational politics of identity" as it "attempts to hold on to majority privilege" (10, 6, 23). I wonder, what is at stake in presenting "white masculinity" and "the discourse of crisis" as entities with intentions and strategies?

I'm sympathetic to what I take to be the political position behind this choice; Carroll wants to disrupt structures that maintain white supremacy (7), and to identify and critique the particular set of interests that are produced and maintained through white privilege. But for me this language of "strategy" remains problematic, both within the terms of Carroll's own analysis, and potentially also in relation to larger scholarly conversations around discourse and culture. What one might describe as Carroll's construction of white masculinity as a coherent and self-aware entity seems

to diverge from prevailing methodological trends in discourse-oriented cultural critique (as practiced by Judith Butler or Lauren Berlant, to give examples of two scholars cited by Carroll). Obviously diverging from trends is not a problem in and of itself, but in this case I found myself wondering what is gained or lost in attributing (even as rhetorical flourish or political strategy) such cohesion and intentionality to "white masculinity."

While Carroll also describes white masculinity as "incoherent, reactive and contingent" and, as cited above, as a process and a location (8, 181), the language of "strategy" makes me a little uneasy: if the identification of intentionality is a criterion (even an implicit one) for identifying and critiquing racism, it becomes all the more difficult to identify the myriad ways in which processes of racialization proceed not only without conscious racist intention but even in sites, venues, and discourses which consider themselves to be, broadly speaking, anti-racist. In other words, granting a level of intentionality to a discursive construct (or, in Carroll's term, a "process") such as white masculinity may obscure its workings, and may even inadvertently play into a kind of liberal anti-racism in which intentionality is key to questions of injustice. That said, there may be a trade-off here; perhaps Carroll wants to maintain the language of intentionality in order to attribute responsibility and to avoid what some consider the potentially apolitical results of an analysis that emphasizes the heterogeneity, incoherency, and contingency.

I'll end by briefly addressing one final aspect of the book that raised questions for me: to what extent are the social formations Carroll describes really new, or, in his language, "post-hegemonic"? As I mention above, Carroll is critical of the notion that white men are socially or politically marginalized in post-World War Two America (a prevailing view, as he notes in the first pages of the book), but he nonetheless seems to employ a framework of historical break or rupture in ways that I would have liked to see further clarified (4). Carroll makes it clear that, although neoliberal economic policies have contributed to an increasing gap between the rich and the poor, and to widespread deprivation, white people generally, and white men specifically, have nonetheless maintained disproportionate social, political and economic power (5). So if the crisis of masculinity may itself be "phantasmagoric," why describe contemporary formations as attempts to "reorient" (47), "reclaim" (73), or "reenfranchise" (159) white masculinity – if it was never disoriented or disenfranchised in the first place? For instance, discussing the immediate post 9/11 context, Carroll speaks of the "recuperat[ion] of a beleaguered masculinity" in the figure of the fireman (58). I'm not sure to what extent the model of the fireman as masculine paradigm was ever really beleaguered – to what extent the *re*cuperation of this figure was ever really necessary. My own inclination, for what it's worth, would be to highlight the continuities between the cultural formations Carroll describes and earlier iterations

Affirmative Reaction does offer useful interpretations of certain contemporary for-
mations of white masculinity, and I especially appreciate how Carroll critiques the
discourse of white male injury in the context of the social and economic changes that
have occurred over the last several decades in the United States.

Works Cited

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