Precarity and the Historicity of the Present:

American Literature and Culture from Long Boom to Long Downturn

by

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Abstract

Precarity and the Historicity of the Present provides a cultural history of rising precarity in the postwar US. I define precarity as a concept of the interregnum—precarity names the stretched-out moment of generalized decline currently unfolding as a crisis of social reproduction writ large—and I read its cultural history in order to uncover the social forms precarity takes, from racial invisibility and gendered violence to drug addiction and unemployment. But my aim is also to examine the ways in which these social forms shape subjective experience, and the chapters of this dissertation trace the negative affects, reduced expectations, distended temporalities and political impasses of precarious life, showing how precarious subjects are negatively defined by the conditions of their existence. I argue that precarity poses a problem for representation, since its subjective appearance takes the form of invisibility and disposability, superfluity and waste. Thus, in the nameless narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), in the riot poetics of Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka and Diane di Prima, and in the leftovers of the industrial proletariat that populate the pages of Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952) and the wasted landscapes of films like Harmony Korine's *Gummo* (1997) and Ashley McKenzie's *Werewolf* (2016), we find life as surplus. Linking these negative impressions of surplus populations to an economic history of cycles of accumulation in the capitalist world-system, this dissertation tracks the emergence of a crisis of reproductive futurity at the level of aesthetic form, noting how precarity shapes narrative structures, genre conventions, poetic strategies and cinematic techniques in a range of literary and visual media. But perhaps more tellingly, in readings of novels, poetry, cinema and television, it also traces a movement from integration to expulsion over the postwar period, the result of a historical transformation in the structure of the capital-labour relation and the circuits of its reproduction. I argue that this transition from an

expanding form of capitalism able to integrate vast populations into its cycles of accumulation, to a contracting one marked by dwindling rates of growth, mounting debt and a scarcity of work—a process of restructuring that has unfolded unevenly since 1945—implies another shift: one in which abstract identity categories are emptied of their positive social contents and political capacities, and come to be experienced as external constraints and limits to overcome.

My thesis thus sets out to historicize the conditions under which precarity emerges as a political and aesthetic problem at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Dividing the postwar era into two distinct periods, I thread Giovanni Arrighi's analysis of the US cycle of accumulation with Robert Brenner's account of the economic shift in the latter half of the twentieth century from long boom to long downturn. Drawing also on Fernand Braudel's structuralist model of the *longue durée*, with its seasonal logic of hegemonic transition in the capitalist world-system, the project includes four chapters that each correspond to what I identify as the four "seasons" of the American century: the spring of postwar American growth; the long, hot summer of urban rebellion; the autumn of economic downturn; and the endless winter of capitalist crisis. Chapter One reads Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Vonnegut's *Player Piano* against the backdrop of rising US hegemony to argue that a breakdown in narrative form anticipates the exhaustion of twentieth-century political possibilities. In Chapter Two, I develop a theory of riot poetics through a study of poetry by Brooks, Baraka and di Prima written during the tumultuous years of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Chapter Three examines Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* (1983) and Korine's *Gummo* to advance a new interpretive framework that I call the cinematics of downturn. Finally, Chapter Four considers McKenzie's Atlantic Canadian film *Werewolf* alongside the BBC police procedural *The Fall* (2013-) in order to demonstrate the global character of downturn and the transnational reverberations of American decline.

Preface

Research appearing in this dissertation has been accepted and is forthcoming in the journals *Cultural Critique* and *Discourse*, and as a contribution to Bloomsbury's *Companion to Marx*. Portions of the Introduction and Conclusion are included in "Accumulation," in *Companion to Marx*, eds. Imre Szeman, Andrew Pendakis, and Jeff Diamanti (New York: Bloomsbury, forthcoming). Work developed from the first chapter of my thesis is forthcoming in "Blacking Out: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and the Historicity of Anti-blackness," *Cultural Critique* (2018). Work undertaken for the final chapter of my thesis is forthcoming in "The Aesthetics of Stagnation: Ashley McKenzie's *Werewolf* and the Separated Society," *Discourse* (2018).

For Amy,

And for Mum.

Life is multiple, but it is also one.

— Fernand Braudel

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This dissertation was written in large part on Treaty Six and unceded Coast Salish territories. While living in Edmonton and Vancouver, I was constantly reminded by Indigenous peoples that politics is civil war, and this feels just as crucial from where I now write in London, UK. Indigenous peoples are at the frontline of struggles the world over, and having been an uninvited guest on their traditional territories, I am deeply grateful for all that I've learned.

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To Sue, Paul, Jack and Kate, thanks for welcoming me into your lives with such warmth and generosity. It has been a wonderful thing getting to know you and the night is young yet.

Thank you, Cli, for showing me how to stay the course. Thanks, Dad, for working so hard to support me and give me the freedom to find my way. And thank you, Mum, for teaching me what it means to be a feminist and a communist. Your wisdom shines through in this project.

To Amy, thank you for your intelligence, your politics, and your boundless love. I could never have done it without you.

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INTRODUCTION

Today's Empires, Tomorrow's Ashes[1]

> We can imagine a person slowly becoming aware that he is the subject of catastrophe. The form of consciousness might be likened to someone peering out the window of a plane. They have been aboard for a long time, years, decades. From cruising altitude the landscape below scrolls past evenly, somewhat abstracted. The stabilizing mechanisms of eye and brain smooth the scene. Perhaps they are somewhere above the upper midwest. Their knowledge of the miseries that have seized flyover country hovers at the periphery of a becalmed boredom. Steady hum of the jet engines, sense of stillness. Borne by prevailing winds the first balloonists detected no wind whatsoever. So this flight. Though the passengers will never travel faster than this they scarcely feel any motion at all. It is only coming in for a landing that the shaking begins. Structural shaking. Gradient wind at the boundary layer. The ground just below—say it is the terrain around Detroit Metropolitan airport—rushes past at inhuman velocity. It too seems to shake. The eye can't keep up, can't smooth things out, can't register passing objects before they're gone. Everything happens too quickly. A prelude to disaster? Disaster itself? The signs and portents come too swiftly to discern, replaced as rapidly as they appeared. Panic seizes the passenger. It feels like a sudden event, unsuspected, unforeseeable, begun from nothing, the world coming apart.
>
> — Research and Destroy, "The Landing"

> The disaster has already happened, and this is all aftermath.
>
> — Hannah Black, "New World Disorder"

What does it mean to speak of a precarious present? To answer by way of analogy, precarity can look and feel like reeling, a loss of balance and violent or staggering lurch that, as the artist and critic Hannah Black reminds us, "means both a dance and the preparation for a fall."[2] Over the past two decades, precarity has emerged as a key concept in critical accounts of the changing nature of work under post-Fordism and shifting strategies of governance in the neoliberal era.[3]

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[1] The title of this introduction is taken from an album of the same name by the Winnipeg punk-rock band Propagandhi, released in February 2001 by Fat Wreck Chords.

[2] Hannah Black, "New World Disorder," *Art Forum*, February 27, 2017, https://www.artforum.com/slant/id=66897.

[3] See, for example, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation* (London: Minor Compositions, 2009), and *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, trans. Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009); Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of*

For a few concerned academics like Guy Standing and Robert Castel, precarity threatens the health and wellbeing of the social order—whether in the guise of a new *classe dangereuse* or in a manner akin to a viral contagion—and precautionary measures must be taken if we are to avoid the breakdown of civil society.[4] But much of the literature on the topic optimistically turns to the creative and life-affirming aspects of what is otherwise understood to be a perilous condition. Leading theorists of precarity such as Judith Butler, Franco "Bifo" Berardi and Isabell Lorey celebrate precarious forms of subjectivity and collective life that are radically open to contingency and insecurity.[5] Calls to embrace a common precarity pivot on a conceptual distinction between "precarity"—a politically induced condition of differential exposure to risk—and a transhistorical or universal "precariousness," and a claim that an increasingly generalized experience of the former somehow approaches an ethical form of social life founded on the latter.[6] For these thinkers, precarity offers an experimental political choreography, a chain of improvised alliances that skip across difference. All in together, now.

Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market (New York: The New Press, 1998), and *Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (New York: The New Press, 2003); Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015); Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), and *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009); Robert Castel, *From Manual Workers to Wage Laborers: Transformation of the Social Question*, trans. Richard Boyd (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003); Judy Fudge and Rosemary Owens, eds., *Precarious Work, Women, and the New Economy* (Portland, OR: Hart, 2006); Isabell Lorey, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious* (New York: Verso, 2015); Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011); Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004); and Leah F. Vosko, *Temporary Work* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

[4] See Standing, *The Precariat*, 25; and Robert Castel, *L'insécurité sociale: Qu'est-ce qu'être protégé?* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), 29, quoted in Lorey, *States of Insecurity*, 51.

[5] See Butler, *Precarious Life*, 31; Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 9; and Lorey, *States of Insecurity*, 14.

[6] Max Haiven provides one of the most explicit articulations of this position when he writes, "What would a politics look like that promised not to end but to embrace precariousness, not as an inescapable economic "reality" (which is what our current system of financialized austerity pledges) but as a socio-ontological sine qua non? The answer is yet to be determined. But, ironically, an answer may be emerging out of the financialized paradigm that has driven precariousness to a new level of universality and acuity. The speculative ethos that animates financialization is one intimately and irreducibly acquainted with the ontological realities of precariousness." See *Cultures of Financialization: Fictitious Capital in Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 71.

Rejecting the terms of this debate, a number of critics have questioned the utility of precarity as a concept. Wary of a general presentism in the discourse, Angela Mitropoulos argues that contemporary forms of precarity appear exceptional only when measured against an idealized Fordist or Keynesian norm.[7] Bhaskar Sunkara claims that the concept simply slaps a shiny new nametag on an old problem, and suggests "it might be helpful to consider the ways in which the current situation resembles a return to pre-Fordism."[8] Others take issue with the concept's universalism, maintaining that it flattens difference or that it privileges the white, male knowledge-worker of the global North.[9] My own investigation takes a different approach. I argue that precarity remains an essential concept for a theory of the present, but my aim is not to recuperate precarity as a positive concept or experience. Instead, this study undertakes a negative critique of precarity, one that seeks the abolition not only of its object but also its conditions of possibility, including capitalist social relations and abstract identity categories such as class, race, and gender.[10] Rather than approach precarity as either a pathogen to contain or a cause for celebration, I define precarity as a concept of the interregnum: precarity names the prolonged and uneven collapse of a system of social reproduction grounded in the cycles of capital

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[7] Angela Mitropoulos, "Precari-Us?", *Mute* 1, no. 29 (2005): 88-92. See also Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, "Precarity as a Political Concept, or, Fordism as Exception," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 7-8 (2008): 51-72; and Charlie Post, "We're All Precarious Now," *Jacobin*, April 20, 2015, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/04/precarious-labor-strategies-union-precariat-standing.

[8] Bhaskar Sunkara, "Precarious Thought," *Jacobin*, January 13, 2012, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2012/01/precarious-thought.

[9] See Silvia Federici, "Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint" (lecture, Bluestockings Radical Bookstore, New York, NY, October 28, 2006), https://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/precarious-labor-a-feminist-viewpoint/; Angela McRobbie, "Reflections on Feminism, Immaterial Labour and the Post-Fordist Regime," *New Formations* 70 (2010): 60-76; and Malini Johar Schueller, "Decolonizing Global Theories Today: Hardt and Negri, Agamben, Butler," *Interventions* 11, no. 2 (2009): 235-54.

[10] Marina Vishmidt makes a "heuristic distinction" between "positive critique, which has the purpose of salvaging and rehabilitating its object into a more desirable state, and negative critique, which aims at the dissolution of its object, but also at the dissolution of the conditions which make that object possible." Marina Vishmidt, "Maintenance of What: On Reproduction in an Extra-Systemic Sense" (paper presentation, Annual Marxist Literary Group Institute on Culture and Society, Banff, AB, June 14, 2014), 1, https://www.academia.edu/7400243/On_Reproduction_in_an_Extra-Systemic_Sense.

accumulation. My study thus sets its sights on the unfolding disaster that is the precarious present: a stretched out moment of descent between the stumble and the landing, and a time of preparation for a fall.

To this end, *Precarity and the Historicity of the Present* offers a cultural history of rising precarity in the US-centered economic sphere since 1945. Precarity names a crisis of social reproduction writ large—a situation of generalized decline that underwrites a series of economic relationships to reproduction and the wage—and I read its cultural history in order to uncover the social forms precarity takes, from racial invisibility and gendered violence to drug addiction and unemployment. But my aim is also to examine the ways in which these social forms shape subjective experience, and the chapters of this dissertation trace the negative affects, reduced expectations, distended temporalities and political impasses of precarious life, showing how precarious subjects are negatively defined by the conditions of their existence. Building on the Marxian figure of a surplus population gradually expelled from the cycles of capital accumulation, I argue that precarity poses a problem for representation, since its subjective appearance takes the form of invisibility and disposability, superfluity and waste. Thus, in the nameless narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), in the riot poetics of Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka and Diane di Prima, and in the leftovers of the industrial proletariat that populate the pages of Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952) and the wasted landscapes of films like Harmony Korine's *Gummo* (1997) and Ashley McKenzie's *Werewolf* (2016), we find life as surplus.

Linking these negative impressions of surplus populations to an economic history of cycles of accumulation in the capitalist world-system, this dissertation tracks the emergence of a crisis of reproductive futurity at the level of aesthetic form, noting how precarity shapes narrative

structures, genre conventions, poetic techniques and semiotic arrangements in a range of literary and visual media. But perhaps more tellingly, in readings of novels, poetry, cinema and television, it also traces a movement from integration to expulsion over the course of the postwar period, the result of a historical transformation in the structure of the capital-labour relation and the circuitry of its reproduction. I argue that this transition from an expanding form of capitalism able to integrate vast populations into its cycles of accumulation, to a contracting one marked by dwindling rates of growth, rising debt and a scarcity of work—a process of restructuring that has unfolded unevenly since 1945—implies another shift: one in which abstract identity categories are emptied of their positive social contents and political capacities, and come to be experienced as external constraints and limits to overcome. The mobilization of precarity as a rallying call bears this out in the recent history of political protest. During the EuroMayDay movements of the 2000s, precarity was supposed to unite subjects as disparate as the underemployed, migrant labourers, creative entrepreneurs, indebted students and care workers. The subsequent failure of that project is testament to the fact that the precarious subject lacks a positive social identity, and in examining the relationship between precarity and forms of struggle, my study asks how postwar literature and culture grapples with the many impasses that precarious subjects and collectivities have run up against, both in struggles *for* political recognition and in struggles *against* the delimiting and reifying menu on offer from a politics of recognition.

My research is situated historically and geographically in the postwar US, the site of the most recent cycle of accumulation and hegemonic rise and fall in the capitalist world system, and the scene of a dramatic transformation in the structure of the capitalist class relation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For Giovanni Arrighi, the economic shift in the latter half of the twentieth century from industry to finance signals a crisis in American hegemony—the latest in a

series of systemic cycles of accumulation, each with its associated hegemonic centre and each coming to a close with a period of financialization—wherein capital, having exhausted the profitability of manufacture, abandons commodity production and leaps into liquidity.[11] In Robert Brenner's terms, this moment marks the transition from long boom to long downturn.[12] My study thus draws on economic history and world-systems theory to grasp the relationships between precarity and American culture, turning to the Marxian critique of value and the work of the French editorial collective Théorie Communiste to sketch a history of the capital-labour relation and periodic developments in its reproduction. Precarity is not a recent phenomenon, and its modern history follows the extended arc of capital accumulation, developing in tandem with long-term transformations in the structure of class society.[13] Rather than offering a normative background against which to measure rising precarity, the early postwar period—the so-called Golden Age of Capitalism, and the peak of the American century—provides a moment from which we might begin to examine the history of precarity over the *longue durée*.[14]

Toward an Aesthetics of Precarity

A strikingly similar story tends to be told about the fates of both labour and literature in late capitalism. Much contemporary cultural criticism reproduces the narrative of market ascendency, often using the Marxian category of subsumption—a concept that figures centrally in accounts of

[11] Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (New York: Verso, 2010).

[12] Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005* (New York: Verso, 2006), 267.

[13] See Aaron Benanav, "Precarity Rising," *Viewpoint*, June 15, 2015, https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/06/15/precarity-rising/; and Aaron Tauss, "Contextualizing the Current Crisis: Post-Fordism, Neoliberal Restructuring, and Financialization," *Columbia Internacional* 76 (2012): 51-79.

[14] As I discuss further below, this is the term Arrighi borrows from Fernand Braudel, drawing on Braudel's history of the Mediterranean to develop his theory of systemic cycles of accumulation as a theory of "long centuries." See Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 219-22; and Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

rising precarity—to describe a historical relationship between culture and capital whereby the distinction between the two breaks down. "What has happened," Fredric Jameson famously argues in *Postmodernism*, "is that aesthetic production today has been integrated into commodity production generally."[15] If the modernist era held out the possibility of aesthetic autonomy from the market, the argument goes, with the advent of postmodernism the distance between the artwork and the commodity has entirely collapsed.[16] For Jameson, this has meant at once "the dissolution of an autonomous sphere of culture" and "a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm."[17] Nicholas Brown identifies this "contemporary common sense" as the "aesthetic ideology" of postmodernism: "Unlike the Romantics (and the Modernists after them), we are wise enough to know that the work of art is a commodity like any other."[18] Brown is careful to distinguish his position from Jameson's, arguing that, "in fact, it is the claim to universal heteronomy that is implausible. Markets—and this was recognized in some of the precursors to neoliberal discourse—depend on a host of non-market actors and institutions, even as these are always at the same time under threat from the market itself."[19] At stake in Brown's account of "the real subsumption of aesthetic labour under capital" is "the closure of the world market," and it is against this encroaching fungibility that art struggles to assert its autonomy.[20]

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[15] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 4.

[16] For Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the distinction between the artwork and the commodity obtains in the distance between the art-commodities of the culture industry and its negative horizon, modernism. See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[17] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 48.

[18] Nicholas Brown, "Close Reading and the Market," in *Literary Materialisms*, ed. Mathias Nilges and Emilio Sauri, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 155, 148, 159.

[19] Brown, "Close Reading," 159.

[20] Brown, "Close Reading," 156, 152. Brown borrows the language of "the closure of the world market" from Jameson, for whom it describes a process that unfolds spatially as "uneven expansion." See Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (New York: Verso, 2009), 82. As Imre Szeman notes, in Jameson's earlier work "we find him introducing the idea that revolutionary cultural expressions can be found only in those places whose conditions

This line of reasoning follows from the notion that the development of productive forces has entailed a shift from formal to real subsumption—a transition that many theorists argue constitutes a distinct period analogous to postmodernity in the history of capital accumulation—creating a kind of social factory in which the totality of human activity contributes to an aggregate profitability. In "A History of Subsumption," the Endnotes collective offers an extended critical appraisal of the category of subsumption as it features in several strands of Marxian thought.[21] The group notes that real subsumption figures as a periodizing model in work by Antonio Negri, Jacques Camatte and Theorié Communiste, each of whom uses the term to denote an expansion of capitalist dominance beyond the immediate labour process into the realm of social life as such.[22] For Negri and other Italian Autonomist Marxists, real subsumption describes a transition from industrial commodity production to a socialized form of immaterial production, which they locate in the post-Fordist restructuring of the late 1960s and early '70s.[23] For Camatte, the most recent epoch in capitalist development has seen capitalist social relations come to replace some other, more authentic form of human community. Theorié Communiste argues that real subsumption entails not only the transformation of the labour process, but must

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of possibility—formal, but not yet real, subsumption into global capital—allow for forms of cultural production that don't obey the inexorable logic of affirmative culture," but in later work, "the phenomenon called 'globalization' seems to have eliminated this possible political opening in the gap between formal and real, so that now what we read in his work and that of other Marxist critics is an insistence on the fact that everything is now cultural." See Imre Szeman, "Marxist Literary Criticism, Then and Now," *Mediations* 24, no. 2 (2009): 43.

[21] Endnotes, "The History of Subsumption," *Endnotes* 2 (2010): 130-153.

[22] See Antonio Negri, "Twenty Theses on Marx: Interpretation of the Class System Today," in *Marxism Beyond Marxism*, eds. Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino, and Rebecca E. Karl (New York: Routledge, 1996), 149-80; Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community* (London: Unpopular Books, 1988); Théorie Communiste, 'Réponse à Aufheben,' *Théorie Communiste* 19 (2004): 103-30.

[23] As a result of real subsumption, Negri argues, previously opposing categories of political economy collapse into each other: simple and complex labour, productive and unproductive labour, labour time and non-labour time, production and circulation, production and reproduction. This conception of real subsumption, which Negri develops through a reading of the 'Fragment on Machines' in the *Grundrisse*, foregrounds Marx's notion of the 'general intellect': with the development of the productive forces, capital becomes increasingly reliant on technical expertise, communication and general social knowledge, dematerializing labour practices. Negri sees real subsumption as this shift from the centrality of the factory to an expanded field of social production, as social processes like communication are increasingly monetized. See Negri, "Twenty Theses."

also be understood as a transformation of society at large. While not without important differences, each adopts the language of real subsumption to describe the current period in terms of capitalism's complete colonization of social life or even the life process itself such that there is no longer an "outside" to capital.[24]

Spatial readings of subsumption—as capitalist expansion from the factory into previously separate or semi-autonomous spheres of social life—underwrite Marxian theories of both rising precarity and vanishing aesthetic autonomy. As Harry Harootunian reflects,

> This perspective on Marx was in part produced by the so-called Frankfurt School's earlier (prewar) intervention and appropriation of Lukács's analysis of reification and its successive expansion into cultural disciplines, as well as being reinforced in the later work of Antonio Negri and his followers, who have presumed the final completion of the commodity relation everywhere—the putative realization of "real subsumption"—to reaffirm capitalism's own self-image in the pursuit of progress. Both cases share the common ground of this changed perspective that assumes capitalism's final externalization and naturalization, where it has subsumed the whole of society. With Frankfurt Marxism, it is the explicit transfer to circulation, whereas in Negri, productive labor is envisioned as intellectual and immaterial, expressed now in the sovereign subject of the "General Intellect." What both commonly propose are the unimportance or

[24] This understanding of subsumption also appears in Negri's later collaborative work with Michael Hardt. In *Empire*, for example, Hardt and Negri write: "With the real subsumption of society under capital, social antagonisms can erupt as conflict in every moment and on every term of communicative production and exchange. Capital has become a world. Use value and all the other references to values and processes of valorization that were conceived to be outside the capitalist mode of production have progressively vanished. Subjectivity is entirely immersed in exchange." See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 386.

> secondary stature of industrial labor, as such, and the expansion of the commodity relation to mediate all sectors of society.[25]

But subsumption is a contested term in Marxist theory. Marx inherits the concept of subsumption from the German Idealists, for whom it denotes the process of cognitive abstraction by which the particular is brought into subordinate relation with the universal.[26] For Marx, however, the material act of exchange presupposes the abstract universal—value—under which particular concrete labour processes are subsumed. According to Marx, already existing labour processes are first formally subsumed in their pre-capitalist forms through the introduction of the wage. To produce surplus value under such conditions, capital must lengthen the working day beyond what is necessary for the reproduction of labour power, producing what Marx calls absolute surplus value. Driven by competition and limits to the working day, capital increases the productivity of labour via technological ratcheting, reducing the amount of socially necessary labour relative to surplus labour to produce what Marx calls relative surplus value.[27] Real subsumption for Marx thus describes the "form-determination" of the capital-labour relation *in anticipation of value*.[28]

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[25] Harry Harootunian, *Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 2.

[26] For Kant, subsumption is a cognitive process that organizes conceptual experience according to categorical truths, whereas for Hegel the universal resides in and is mediated by the particular. This understanding of subsumption will also find a place in Marxian thought, particularly in the work of Theodor Adorno. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Marcus Weigelt (New York: Penguin, 2007), and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on Logic*, trans. Clark Butler (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

[27] See Karl Marx, "Results of the Direct Production Process," trans. Ben Fowkes, *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 34, *Economic Works, 1861-1864* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1994). https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1864/economic/index.htm

[28] The idea that value "form-determines" the labour process derives from Marx's writings on the capitalist value-form. In *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx uses the German term *Formbestimmtheit* ("form-determination" or "determination of form") to describe the process by which money or commodities become forms of value for capital. See Karl Marx, *Theorien uber den Mehrwert*, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: J.H.W. Dietz Nachf, 1910), 531. For a cogent account of how value *forms* labour, see Diane Elson, "The Value Theory of Labour," where she writes, "The argument of *Capital*, I, goes on to show the dominance of the universal equivalent, the money form of value, over other commodities, and how this domination is expressed in the self-expansion of the money form of value i.e. in the capital form of value. Further it shows that the domination of the capital form of value is not confined to labour 'fixed' in products, it extends to the immediate process of production itself, and to the reproduction of that process.

Several critics have cautioned against using subsumption as a periodizing category to describe broad developments in society, including Brown, Harootunian, and the Endnotes group, as well as Andrés Sáenz de Sicilia and Massimiliano Tomba.[29] Where Endnotes, de Sicilia and Tomba stress the conceptual limits of subsumption for describing changes in society beyond the labour process and argue that shifts from formal to real subsumption occur unevenly across production, Brown and Harootunian effectively agree that real subsumption is a spatial process that began in the late twentieth century but argue that it necessarily remains incomplete. The limits of subsumption as an analytical category sufficient to explaining the social transformations of the twentieth century suggest the need for another approach – one that is nevertheless able to account for the centrality of subsumption to capital's general laws of motion. With this in mind, my project adopts a value-theoretical approach to concentrate instead on the significance of relative surplus value production, shifting the focus away from the gradual expansion of commodity markets and toward the history of the capital-labour relation and periodic developments in its reproduction (and, importantly, its tendency toward nonreproduction). "The capitalist process of production," Marx writes, "seen as a total, connected process; i.e. a process

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The real subsumption of labour as a form of capital … is a developed form of the real subsumption of other aspects of labour as expressions of abstract labour in the universal equivalent, the money form of value." Dianne Elson, "The Value Theory of Labour," in *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism*, ed. Dianne Elson (New York: Verso, 2015), 165-66.

[29] As both Endnotes and de Sicilia argue, capitalist dominance over social relations cannot occur directly through subsumption, since social processes are subsumed by capital (as distinct from, say, being indirectly dominated by capital) only if they have become an immediate part of the labour process. Moreover, they argue that capital does not develop according to linear historical shifts from formal to real subsumption, as real subsumption in one branch of production may lead to formal subsumption in another, so that phases of formal and real subsumption in fact coexist at a given historical moment. Like De Sicilia, Tomba has emphasized a disjunctive and hybrid synthesis of formal and real subsumption, arguing that the contemporary existence of slavery in the Global South, for example, should not be understood as residual, but as an integral part of capital accumulation. See Endnotes, "The History of Subsumption," 148-52; Andrés Sáenz de Sicilia, "Time and Subsumption" (paper presentation, 10th Annual Historical Materialism Conference, London, UK, November 8, 2013); and Massimiliano Tomba, "Historical Temporalities of Capital: An Anti-Historicist Perspective," *Historical Materialism* 17, no. 4 (2009): 44-65. Harootunian too argues that "Marx envisioned the operation of formal subsumption as an ongoing process, continuing with and alongside the development of capitalism." See Harootunian, *Marx After Marx*, 9.

of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus value, but it also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself; on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer."[30] Crucially, the shift from absolute to relative surplus value production transforms the structure of this relation between capital and labour, a historical process of integration often referred to in the shorthand as Fordism that mobilized mass production and consumption to tether the reproduction of capital to the reproduction of labour. This process was well underway by the close of World War II, but accelerated dramatically during the postwar Golden Age, proceeding not simply via the extension of commodity markets but through a systemic integration of the reproductive circuits of capital and labour. Key to my investigation is that the production of relative surplus value also undermines the process of capital accumulation, and, as we shall see, ultimately threatens the reproduction of the capital-labour relation itself.

Literary production, for its part, resists subsumption not because it retains a degree of formal autonomy from the market, but because aesthetic labour cannot be properly rationalized toward the production of relative surplus value. As Jasper Bernes and Daniel Spaulding note,

> Real subsumption, properly understood, would mean not only the dependence of artists on a market for their works. It would also mean their dependence on a market for their labour. It would mean the reorganization of artistic production in response to constant competitive pressure from other art makers. Only under such conditions could artworks represent crystals of socially necessary labour time—measured by the time needed, on average, to produce them at a given stage in the development of society's productive forces.[31]

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[30] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), 724.

[31] Jasper Bernes and Daniel Spaulding, "Truly Extraordinary," *Radical Philosophy* 195 (2016): 52.

Drawing on the concept of Hegelian externalization (*Entäusserung*), Brown marks the distinction between "an object whose use (or purpose or meaning) is normatively inscribed in the object itself—a meaning that is in Hegel's terms universal, which is simply '*allgemein*,' available for everyone and not therefore a private matter—and an object whose use is a matter of indifference from one position, and a matter of possibly intense but necessarily private concern from another."[32] This is, for Brown, the difference between the artwork and the commodity. From this perspective, an artwork can only be an artwork if it has intention, and can therefore be interpreted to have meaning. A commodity, on the other hand, is produced for its exchange-value; it does not matter to the producer what the commodity is used for, and is thus meaningless from the standpoint of aesthetic criticism. An artwork therefore can never be fully reduced to a commodity as long as it is produced with intention.

Brown uses the concept of real subsumption to describe production geared toward exchange-value, as opposed to use-value. By contrast, *formal* subsumption "allows for Hegelian externalization to continue under capitalism, since it is, for example, only accidental surplus that is sold."[33] Putting aside this curious use of subsumption, we might note that Brown adopts the historical and contradictory view of use-value as an "innocent" category—one that would subsist after the abolition of capitalist exchange-value, as if the coherence of use-value as an economic category did not in fact depend on its relation to exchange-value.[34] This is what Moishe Postone

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[32] Brown, "Close Reading," 152.

[33] Brown, "Close Reading," 154.

[34] Such an idea is also found in the work of Adorno, for whom the child at play offers an image of the innocence of use value. In a passage from *Minima Moralia* on child's play, he writes: "In his purposeless activity the child, by subterfuge, chooses use value over exchange value. Just because he deprives the things with which he plays of their mediated usefulness, he seeks to rescue in them what is benign towards men and not what subserves the exchange relation that equally deforms men and things. The little trucks travel nowhere and the tiny barrels on them are empty; yet they remain true to their destiny by not performing, not participating in the process of abstraction that levels down that destiny, but instead abide as allegories of what they are specifically for." See Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 2005), 228.

means to underline when he writes that, "the abstract domination and the exploitation of labor characteristic of capitalism are grounded, ultimately, not in the appropriation of surplus by the nonlaboring classes, but in the form of labor in capitalism."[35] To produce value, capital abstracts labour not once but twice: first from the myriad of human activities into an isolated activity, and second, from its concrete particulars into abstract labour measurable as socially necessary labour time. As Norbert Trenkle argues, concrete labour is already a capitalist abstraction, "cut off from the rest of its social setting,"[36] and so are the use-values of objects produced under conditions of formal subsumption.[37] In other words, if *use* ever did detach itself from use-*value*, how could it survive for more than a brief moment in a world still crushed by the value-form?

My suspicion is that contemporary accounts of rising precarity and vanishing aesthetic autonomy interpret subsumption as a spatial process because they take the commodity as their point of departure, conflating subsumption and commodification (or the spread of commodity markets, sometimes called marketization). This is partly a legacy of Western Marxism, which as Harootunian notes "represented a shift from preoccupations with labor and the production process, as such, to the force of the commodity form to structure thought and culture. In our time, this tendency has become so hegemonic or commonsense among Marxist and non-Marxian

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[35] Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 161.

[36] Norbert Trenkle, "Value and Crisis: Basic Questions," in *Marxism and the Critique of Value*, eds. Neil Larsen, Mathias Nilges, Josh Robinson, and Nicholas Brown (Chicago: MCM' Publishing, 2014), 3.

[37] Surely the notion of authentic creative expression is the ideology of the literary, as such. As Sarah Brouillette argues, "The interconnected ideals of unalienated labour, and of creating not for profit but from the centre of one's being, are absolutely integral to the literary field. There is no clear split between writing from the centre of one's being and writing for the market. [If] anything the relationship is dialectical: literary work is marketable to the extent that it appears to disavow its market status. Faith in the freeing possibilities of the 'labour of love' is central to the economy of literary production rather than a mode of opposition to it. Indeed there are few ideas with a more mystifying function than that of the creator producing from the centre of her being, as though the object's only purpose was its expression of the inner world of some genius thinker. This is how ignoring the actual nature of the production of capitalist culture gets justified." See Sarah Brouillette, "Whither Production? On Emily Apter's *Against World Literature*," *Historical Materialism* 23, no.4 (2015): 206.

interpreters of cultural studies that it has managed to mask its own cultural and politically specific origins and run the risk of making its claims complicit with capitalism's self-representation."[38] Such preoccupations are arguably understandable in light of the blinding affluence of the early postwar period in which they developed, but in an age of economic stagnation marked by a proliferation of what Michael Denning calls "wageless life,"[39] describing capital accumulation primarily in expansionary terms appears increasingly spurious. And given that the money form has superseded the commodity form in an era dominated by finance capital, it seems pertinent to note that, for Marx, both are mere moments of appearance in the movement of value through its circuits of reproduction. Yet, as Bernes has noted elsewhere, "even most Marxist critics approach the postindustrial age from the side of the market and the commodity, from the side of exchange and everyday life, rather than production."[40]

Starting from the position that the reproduction of the capital-labour relation grounds the history of the capitalist production process, *Precarity and the Historicity of the Present* sets out to historicize the conditions under which precarity emerges as a political and aesthetic problem at the beginning of the twenty-first century. By "historicity," I do not mean "historical accuracy," although, within the broader conversations into which this research intervenes, the precise nature of the economic history that I narrate remains a contentious and ongoing debate. Rather, I use the term in its philosophical sense, in order to underline the historical—as opposed to natural or inevitable—character of the present conjuncture. The historical present is one open to the possibility of radical alterity, but always within the constraints of its own historicity. In "Periodizing the 60s," Jameson writes that "the period in question is understood not as some

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[38] Harootunian, *Marx After Marx*, 1.

[39] Michael Denning, "Wageless Life," *New Left Review* 66 (2010): 79-97.

[40] Jasper Bernes, "Mark to Market: Michael Clune's Metafiction," *Lana Turner Blog*, February 3, 2011. http://www.lanaturnerjournal.com/blog/jbernes

omnipresent and uniformed shared style, or way of thinking and acting, but rather as the sharing of a common objective situation, to which a whole range of varied responses and creative innovations is then possible, but always within that situation's structural limits."[41] Following the approach to periodization that Jameson offers here, I argue that rising precarity in the postwar US—understood as the emergence of a crisis in the reproduction of the capital-labour relation—provides the period with its "common objective situation," and forms the "structural limits" placed on political possibility in the transition from boom to downturn.

The periodization of capitalist development that I adopt in this research, with its emphasis on relative surplus value and structural shifts in the reproduction of the capital-labour relation, draws on the work of Théorie Communiste (TC) and its reception in the Anglophone communization journals *Endnotes* and *SIC*. For TC, the production of relative surplus value entails "the integration of the reproduction of labour-power in the cycle of capital," and so changes the nature of the opposition between capital and labour such that the two increasingly relate to each other *internally*, and it is this process of integration that grants the capital-labour relation its periodicity.[42] In an essay on the history of the capitalist class relation published in *SIC* under the *nom de plume* Screamin' Alice, we find an argument that, "using TC's analysis as a point of critical departure, it might be possible to establish a periodisation of the class relation by distinguishing *phases of integration of the circuits of reproduction of capital and the proletariat*."[43] In this analysis, the process of integration undergoes a decisive reversal around

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[41] Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," *Social Text* 9/10 (1984): 178.

[42] Théorie Communiste, "Réponse à Aufheben." *Théorie Communiste* 19 (2004): 109; quoted in Endnotes, "The History of Subsumption," 145. In their model of periodization, Théorie Communiste uses the concept of real subsumption to describe "capital becoming *capitalist* society." Following the critique of subsumption made by Endnotes and others outlined above, my focus here is instead on the relationship TC describes between relative surplus value and the reproduction of the capital-labour relation. See Théorie Communiste, "Théorie Communiste," *Théorie Communiste* 14 (1997): 50; quoted in Endnotes, "The History of Subsumption," 145.

[43] Screamin' Alice, "On the Periodisation of the Capitalist Class Relation," *SIC* 1 (2011): 173.

1973, opening onto a new period in the history of capital in which labour increasingly finds itself expelled from the cycle of accumulation. As Endnotes writes, "it is no longer a reciprocal and cyclical relation in which the proletariat reproduces capital, and capital reproduces the proletariat. Rather, the proletariat increasingly becomes *that which is produced by capital without producing capital*."[44] The lived experience of this crisis in the reproduction of the capital-labour relation goes under many names: wasted life, wageless life, precarious life, disaffiliation, disposability, and expulsion.[45] This is the language of rising precarity, a proliferating series of theoretical endeavors to grasp the growing crisis at hand.

Rising precarity, as much an aesthetic problem as it is a political one, appears in the literature and culture of the American century as exhaustion and impasse, constraint and constriction. To recall Black's comments on reeling, there is a sort of stagger or lurch to the aesthetics of precarity, where formal and thematic techniques and strategies seem to scramble to secure a sense of balance or brace for a hard landing. But what dominates the novels, poems, films and television series I discuss in this dissertation is a suffocating sense of stasis. As Lauren Berlant notes, "an 'impasse' designates a time of dithering from which someone or some situation cannot move forward," a distended temporality that might look like boredom or frustration or simply biding one's time, and might even "be an aspiration, as the traditional infrastructures for reproducing life—at work, in intimacy, politically—are crumbling at a threatening pace."[46] As capital's capacity to expand and extract value declines, the possibility of

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[44] Endnotes, "Crisis in the Class Relation," *Endnotes* 2 (2010): 17.

[45] See Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004); Denning, "Wageless Life," 81; Butler, *Precarious Life*; Robert Castel, "The Roads to Disaffiliation: Insecure Work and Vulnerable Relationships," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24, no. 3 (2000): 519–35; Brad Evans and Henry A. Giroux, *Disposable Future: The Seduction of Violence in the Age of Spectacle* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2015); Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[46] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 4-5.

a progressively developing modernity gradually fades from the cultural horizon, and with it the promise of collective political *bildung*. Already in the transition from British to US hegemony, in an earlier moment of protracted economic downturn with its own financial booms and bubbles, Antonio Gramsci writes, "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."[47] But if the Gramscian subject of capitalist modernization recognized itself in social(ist) realism and the *bildungsroman*, then the onset of economic stagnation suspends not only older political forms tied to economic expansion and growth, but also an entire series of cultural forms and genres that developed to narrate and critique capitalist development in its expansionary phase. In the chapters that follow, I show how writers and filmmakers in the postwar period cultivate a series of political and aesthetic practices that each attempt to come to terms with a growing crisis of social reproduction that presents itself politically and economically as rising precarity and culturally as a foreclosure of futurity.

Theorizing Precarity

In the broadest sense, precarity describes the condition of being caught up in the volatile unfolding of historical dynamics, an experience of embodiment—as exposure and subjection—in relation to abstract determining structures. Emerging first as a sociological concept, precarity names the proliferation of informal work that has characterized advanced economies since the 1970s, but in its migration through academic discourse the term has undergone conceptual expansion from a narrowly defined economic phenomenon to a broader issue of structural embodiment. Berlant offers a useful point of departure for thinking about precarity as both a

[47] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 276.

structural position in a system of social relations, and as a set of deeply felt, embodied experiences, writing that "precarity is significantly more than economic: it is structural in many senses and permeates the affective environment too."[48] Berlant echoes the etymology of the ecclesiastical term "precarium," which refers both to a social arrangement in which one labours under the proprietary authority of another—a medieval form of land tenure in which the feudal lord can reclaim the land and evict the tenant at any time—and to an experience of existential insecurity and bodily exposure to risk.

Indeed, many theorists understand precarity as a relation between objective conditions and subjective experience. In Pierre Bourdieu's early formulation, "objective insecurity gives rise to a generalized subjective insecurity."[49] For Bourdieu, *précarité* refers to the spread of job insecurity across the private and public sectors, an objective condition of instability in the structure of the economy that he argues induces a subjective experience of insecurity:

> It has emerged clearly that job insecurity [*précarité*] is now everywhere: in the private sector, but also in the public sector, which has greatly increased the number of temporary, part-time or casual positions; in industry, but also in the institutions of cultural production and diffusion—education, journalism, the media, etc. In all these areas it produces more or less identical effects, which become particularly visible in the extreme case of the unemployed: the destructuring of existence, which is deprived among other things of its temporal structures, and the ensuing deterioration of the whole relationship to the world, time and space. Casualization profoundly affects the person who suffers it: by making the whole future uncertain, it prevents all rational anticipation and, in particular, the basic

[48] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 192.

[49] Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance*, 83.

> belief and hope in the future that one needs in order to rebel, especially collectively, against present conditions, even the most intolerable.[50]

As a concept, precarity therefore encompasses not only the structural proliferation of intermittent employment and informal labour, but also ontological experiences of existential vertigo that have distinct political consequences. While neoliberal reforms to government economic policy have pushed privatization and deregulation, dismantling the last vestiges of the welfare state, the nature of work has also changed under post-Fordism, becoming more intermittent and informal. For Bourdieu's economically-determined subject, these shifts in economic life have a significant impact on phenomenological experience: precarity has psychological and affective consequences for the subject's life in its temporal and spatial dimensions.[51] Bourdieu situates precarity on a spectrum of relations to work, from unemployment and underemployment to temporary, contingent employment. For Bourdieu, "precariousness" is tied to "the existence of a large reserve army," which "helps to give all those in work the sense that they are in no way irreplaceable."[52] Generating insecurity, precarity undermines the capacity for political engagement, but as I want to show, rising precarity also indexes structural shifts in the capital-labour relation that have eroded the material base of twentieth century political possibilities.

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[50] Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance*, 82.

[51] This *telos* of precarity—from job insecurity to ontological instability—will later shift in discourses that posit *precariousness* as the precondition of corporeal life for sentient beings which forces of capital and state power then exacerbate and manipulate, producing *precarity*. This will be true for discourses of post-Fordism, but also for those that deal with governmentality and administered violence. For Judith Butler, for example, precariousness names the phenomenological dimension of human and non-human corporeality, an existential and affective category that emerges from the vulnerability of being (*bios*). Precarity, on the other hand, "designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death." While the *telos* has switched direction in comparison with Bourdieu's model, so that precarity might be mapped differentially across populations, the concept still slides between the abstract and the concrete, the subjective and the objective. See Butler, *Frames of War*, 25.

[52] Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance*, 82.

The concept of precarity is associated most immediately with the Italian Autonomist tradition, especially with the work of Antonio Negri and other Autonomist Marxists on immaterial labour, seen by these theorists as hegemonic in post-Fordist production. For the Autonomists, precarity results from a paradigmatic shift in the 1970s from the regulated, physical forms of labour central to Fordism, to the flexible, dematerialized and contingent labour practices that characterize the post-Fordist economies of Western liberal democracies. Drawing on the work of the French Regulation School, Negri and Michael Hardt note that "Economists … use the terms *Fordism* and *post-Fordism* to mark the shift from an economy characterized by the stable, long-term employment typical of factory workers to one marked by flexible, mobile, and precarious labor relations: *flexible* because workers have to adapt to different task, *mobile* because workers have to move frequently between jobs, and *precarious* because no contracts guarantee stable, long-term employment."[53] Regulation School theorist Michel Aglietta responded to the economic restructuring of the 1970s by attempting to construct a historical model of capital accumulation adequate to the emergence of new economic and social forms. Emphasizing the role institutions play in the regulation of the capitalist economy, Aglietta founds his theory of regulation on two interrelated formulations central to the Regulation School: the *regime of accumulation* and the *mode of regulation*. A regime of accumulation is a historically bounded and relatively stable system comprising production, circulation, consumption and distribution, while a mode of regulation refers to the institutional networks of governance that provide supportive environments for a given regime of accumulation. Together they form a *mode of development*. When tensions between the regime of accumulation and the mode of regulation

[53] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 112.

reach a critical point, a structural crisis ensues, and from the chaos and conflict of crisis a new mode of development emerges.[54]

Marx's categories of absolute and relative surplus value form the basis of the Regulation School's periodizing model, which correspond in their theory to extensive and intensive regimes of accumulation understood, respectively, in terms of the domination of one over the other in a given phase of capitalist development. As Aglietta argues, "under the regime of extensive accumulation, where absolute surplus-value predominates, the length of the working day is the principal means of extracting surplus labour."[55] For the Regulation School, the extensive regime of accumulation leads for most of the nineteenth century until the rise of Taylorist scientific management around World War I, which increased productivity rates and cheapened consumer goods through investments in fixed capital. Taylorism thus marks the advent of the intensive regime of accumulation, but remains unstable until the shift, following the Great Depression of the 1930s, from the competitive to the monopolistic mode of regulation. The combination of an intensive regime of accumulation and a monopolistic mode of regulation inaugurates a mode of development they call Fordism. And yet, as Robert Brenner and Mark Glick have argued, "where capitalist social-property relations are fully established, we can, all else being equal, expect to find: development on the basis of relative surplus-value."[56] Brenner and Glick reject the notion of an extensive regime of accumulation based on absolute surplus value extraction, given that capitalist production tends to increase productivity cheapen consumer goods from the outset.

Nevertheless, the Regulation School's theory of Fordism proved decisive for Hardt and Negri, who draw on this work to narrate a historical shift from the mass worker of Fordist

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[54] Michael Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience* (New York: Verso, 2015).

[55] Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, 130.

[56] Robert Brenner and Mark Glick, "The Regulation Approach: Theory and History," *New Left Review* I, no. 188 (1991): 54.

industrialism to the socialized worker of post-Fordism in *Empire*. This logic of periodization posits paradigmatic modes of production that characterize phases of capitalist accumulation in terms of qualitative rather than quantitative shifts. For Hardt and Negri, it is not that post-Fordist immaterial labour replaces Fordist material labour quantitatively, but rather that immaterial labour becomes the hegemonic form of labour, transforming all other forms of labour in turn.[57] Maurizio Lazzarato describes immaterial labour as a kind of work that "involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as 'work'—in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion."[58] For Autonomist Marxists, capitalist expansion from the Fordist factory floor into activities previously outside the productive process entails a transformation in the very nature of work itself, collapsing the Fordist distinction between work and leisure so that labour becomes simultaneously immaterial and precarious.

Its contentious claims about value notwithstanding, this line of argument risks misrepresenting precarity as an exceptional circumstance in the history of capitalism. As Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter write, "precarity appears as an irregular phenomenon only when set against a Fordist or Keynesian norm," and that "if we look at capitalism in a wider historical and geographical scope, it is precarity that is the norm and not Fordist economic organization."[59] Similarly, Angela Mitropoulos argues that:

> Capital is precarious, and normally so. Stability here has always entailed formalizing relative advantages between workers, either displacing crises onto the less privileged, or

[57] As Hardt and Negri put it, "just as through the process of modernization all production tended to become industrialized, so too through the process of postmodernization all production tends toward the production of services, toward becoming informationalized." Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 286.

[58] Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133.

[59] Neilson and Rossiter, "Precarity as a Political Concept," 54.

> deferring the effects of those crises through debt, [and] on a global scale and in its privatised and/or unpaid versions, precarity is and has always been the standard experience of work in capitalism. When one has no other means to live than the ability to labour or—even more precariously, since it privatises a relation of dependency—to reproduce and "humanize" the labour publicly tendered by another, life becomes contingent on capital and therefore precarious.[60]

Mitropoulos's point here is not only that capitalism necessarily renders life precarious, but rather that even during periods of relative regulatory stability such as Keynesianism, with its Fordist forms of productive labour, many labouring bodies were made precarious by way of the same regulations that made certain labour practices more secure. Life under capital always entails a distribution of risk, and so it is the Fordist period, and especially its Keynesian methods of managing the twin surpluses of capital and labour, that is in fact historically exceptional. Precarity today is not a novel phenomenon tied to the post-Fordist socialization of production. The question, however, is whether the contemporary proliferation of precarity marks the return of economic and cultural logics held in abeyance in the mid-twentieth century, or if there is something historically distinct about the conditions of precarity that characterize the present.

In the Autonomist tradition, the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism signals a period of capitalist expansion, since from their point of view all forms of social activity produce value for capital. But other Marxist critics—most notably Brenner—have characterized the period following the Fordist "Golden Age" in terms of secular stagnation, or the persistence of negligible growth rates beyond normal business cycles. In *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005*, Brenner argues that

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[60] Mitropoulos, "Precari-Us?" 90-91.

"The evolution of the advanced capital economies since World War II naturally divides itself into two roughly equal parts, each about a quarter-century in length: a period of prosperity from the later 1940s to 1973 and an era of slowed growth and increasing economic turbulence from 1973 onwards, marked by deeper recessions and the return of devastating financial crises absent since the Great Depression."[61] For Brenner, capitalist competition tends to produce global overcapacity, exerting downward pressure on prices and lowering returns on capital investments. As a result, profitability declines, which in turn places downward pressure on wages and triggers rising unemployment rates.

In Brenner's account, over-competition between the US, Germany and Japan reached a point of saturation in the early 1970s, leading to a protracted period of economic downturn. As Brenner notes, "average rates of growth of output, capital stock (investment), and real wages for the years 1973 to the present have been one-third to one-half of those for the years 1950-73, while the average unemployment rate has been more than double."[62] The search for new sites of profit that Autonomism documents is in fact a response to this crisis. As Brenner writes, "measures of cost-reduction, neoliberalization, and globalization—unleashed with ever-increasing intensity from the start of the 1970s by the advanced capitalist countries—constituted little more or less than an ever more frenzied attempt to cope with the pervasive and persistent problem of reduced profitability."[63] Brenner thus provides a useful corrective to Autonomist accounts of the post-Fordist period, which appear in light of his intervention as descriptions of capital's own self-representation, making symptoms into objects of study and obscuring broader contexts.

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[61] Brenner, *Economics of Global Turbulence*, xix.

[62] Brenner, *Economics of Global Turbulence*, 4.

[63] Brenner, *Economics of Global Turbulence*, xxii.

Stretching the historical and geographical lens is therefore crucial when considering changes in the structure of class society. "Once we stretch the space-time horizon of our observations and theoretical conjectures," Arrighi writes, "tendencies that seemed novel and unpredictable begin to look familiar."[64] In his structuralist account of late-twentieth-century developments in the capitalist world system, Arrighi adopts Fernand Braudel's model of the *longue durée*, which Michael Ermarth characterizes as a model of historical time "not as it presents itself to the existential awareness of modern man, i.e., as the dramatic spectacle of surface events, but rather the deeper rhythms and structures hidden in layers underneath."[65] Following Braudel, Arrighi identifies four systemic cycles of accumulation (SCAs), each increasing in scope and intensity but contracting in duration:

> a Genoese cycle, from the fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries; a Dutch cycle, from the late sixteenth century through most of the eighteenth century; a British cycle, from the latter half of the eighteenth century through the early twentieth century; and a US cycle, which began in the late nineteenth century and has continued into the current phase of financial expansion.[66]

Each SCA follows a tripartite schema, beginning with a phase of debt-financed mercantilism, followed by a phase of industrial expansion, and coming to a close with a phase of financialization, the last of which constitutes a period of hegemonic transfer characterized by systemic chaos and overlaps the debt-financed mercantilism that opens the next SCA (see fig. 1).

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[64] Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 4.

[65] Michael Ermarth, Review of *On History*, by Fernand Braudel. *The Business History Review* 56, no. 1 (1982): 89.

[66] Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 6-7.

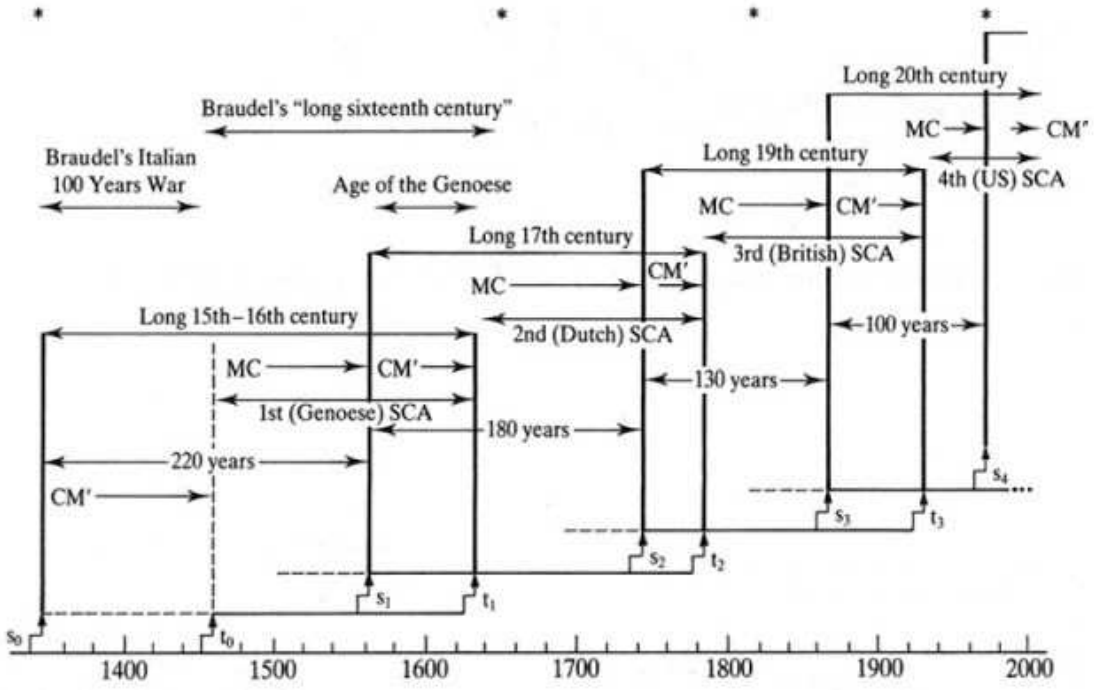

Figure 1. Long Centuries and Systemic Cycles of Accumulation.

Arrighi explains his model of SCAs as follows:

> These constructs all consist of three distinct segments or periods: (1) a first period of financial expansion (stretching from S_{n-1} to T_{n-1}), in the course of which the new regime of accumulation develops within the old, its development being an integral aspect of the full expansion and contradictions of the latter; (2) a period of consolidation and further development of the new regime of accumulation (stretching from T_{n-1} to S_n), in the course of which its leading agencies promote, monitor, and profit from the material expansion of the entire world-economy; (3) a second period of financial expansion (from S_n to T_n), in the course of which the contradictions of the fully developed regime of accumulation create the space for, and are deepened by, the emergence of competing and alternative

> regimes, one of which will eventually (that is, at time T_n) become the new dominant regime.[67]

Arrighi illustrates how periods of material expansion reach a point of market saturation, as capitalist competition exerts downward pressure on the rate of profit, at which point finance capital comes to dominate the hegemonic power, manipulating policy in a scramble to secure profitability. As Arrighi writes, "In phases of material expansion, money capital 'sets in motion' an increasing mass of commodities (including commoditized labour-power and gifts of nature); and in phases of financial expansion an increasing mass of money capital 'sets itself free' from its commodity form, and accumulation proceeds through financial deals."[68] For a time, financial expansion appears to signal renewed prosperity, but *this is an illusion*, concealing a crisis of over-accumulation. As Braudel so elegantly says, "every capitalist development of this order seems, by reaching the stage of financial expansion, to have in some sense announced its maturity: it [is] a sign of autumn."[69] Usually, autumn for a declining hegemon means spring for the next, although it remains unclear how this transition might ultimately unfold in present circumstances. In any case, Arrighi's model of the rise and fall of US economic hegemony provides a framework for contextualizing Brenner's transition from long boom to long downturn, as well as a series of related paradigm shifts: from Keynesianism to neoliberalism, Fordism to post-Fordism, and industrial production to financialization.

What is the engine that drives this cycle by which capital moves periodically from periods of expansion to contraction? Let us return to Marx. Marx distinguishes the function of the commodity in capitalist society with reference to "the general formula for capital," or M-C-

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[67] Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 219-220.

[68] Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 6.

[69] Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century, Vol. III: The Perspective of the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 246.

M', whereby monetary value congeals in the commodity-form only on the condition that it be realized at a profit.[70] Thus M-C-M' differentiates itself from simple commodity production, or C-M-C:

> The simple circulation of commodities—selling in order to buy—is a means to a final goal which lies outside circulation, namely the appropriation of use-values, the satisfaction of needs. As against this, the circulation of money as capital is an end in itself, for the valorization of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement. The movement of capital is therefore limitless.[71]

Further, Marx distinguishes between simple reproduction, by which he means a rate of accumulation necessary to sustain a society at a given standard of living—in which the production and consumption of capital goods is equal—and expanded reproduction, which refers to the reinvestment of capital to increase the scope and scale of production.[72] It is in this manner that the synchronic logic of accumulation assumes a diachronic form of expansion and reproduction. Capital accumulation therefore constitutes a historically distinct mode of social reproduction, which is the reproduction of capital as a social relation. As Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*, "the result of the process of production and realization is, above all, the reproduction and new production of the *relation of capital and labour itself*, of *capitalist and worker*."[73]

And yet the very movement by which capital accumulates compromises the conditions of its own reproduction. For Marx, "capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure

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[70] Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 247-257.

[71] Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 253.

[72] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 2, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Penguin, 1992), 144-166.

[73] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973), 458.

and source of wealth. Hence it diminishes labour time in the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form; hence posits the superfluous in growing measure as a condition—question of life or death—for the necessary."[74] Marx calls this process the "general law of capitalist accumulation":

> The greater social wealth, the functioning of capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore also the greater the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productivity of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve army. The same causes which develop the expansive power of capital, also develop the labour-power at its disposal. The relative mass of industrial reserve army thus increases with the potential energy of wealth. But the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour-army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to the amount of torture it has to undergo in the form of labour. The more extensive, finally, the pauperized sections of the working class and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism. *This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation*.[75]

Capital works, on the one hand, to create as much available labour power as possible, and, on the other, to steadily decrease the amount of socially necessary labour-time. Decreasing socially necessary labour time entails what Marx calls a "rising organic composition" of capital, which indexes "the progressive decline in the variable capital in relation to the constant capital."[76] In other words, capital accumulation proceeds with more hardware and software relative to the number of workers on the job. For Marx, then, "Proletarian must be understood to mean,

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[74] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 706. This is Marx's theory of crisis, according to which rising productivity leads to diminishing rates of accumulation and ever-slacker labour markets. But note here how capital acts as an independent subject, how its action takes place before anyone even shows up for work.

[75] Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, 798.

[76] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3, trans D. Fernbach (New York: Penguin, 1991), 318.

economically speaking, nothing other than 'wage-labourer,' the man [*sic*] who produces and valorises 'capital,' and is thrown onto the street as soon as he becomes superfluous to the need for valorization."[77] This process by which labour is made superfluous does not result in the disappearance of work, but rather in its precarization. Again, Marx is instructive here: "the higher the productivity of labor, the greater is the pressure of the workers on the means of employment, the more precarious therefore becomes the condition for their existence."[78] Expelled from production, labour is forced to seek the means of its reproduction in the sphere of circulation, greasing the wheels of capital as facilitators rather than producers of value.[79]

Project Structure and Chapter Summaries

Marx's general law—which describes the process by which increasing numbers of people are first integrated into and then expelled from the capitalist mode of production—not only provides a framework through which to comprehend this postwar shift in the capital-labour relation, but also grounds the historical dynamic between cycles of accumulation and cycles of struggle. Alongside the shift from industrial expansion to secular stagnation, Joshua Clover identifies a concomitant historical shift in predominance of struggles over production (such as the strike) to

[77] Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 764, fn 1. See also Denning, who writes, "Unemployment precedes employment, and the informal economy precedes the formal, both historically and conceptually. We must insist that 'proletarian' is not a synonym for 'wage labourer' but for dispossession, expropriation and radical dependence on the market. You don't need a job to be a proletarian: wageless life, not wage labour, is the starting point in understanding the free market." Denning, "Wageless Life," 81.

[78] Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 798.

[79] As Aaron Benanav and John Clegg write, "This surplus population need not find itself completely 'outside' capitalist social relations. Capital may not need these workers, but they still need to work. They are thus forced to offer themselves up for the most abject forms of wage slavery in the form of petty-production and services—identified with informal and often illegal markets of direct exchange arising alongside failures of capitalist production." This is the logic of precarity and its proliferation, for "in a society based on wage-labour, the reduction of socially-necessary labour-time—which makes goods so abundant—can only express itself in a scarcity of jobs, in a multiplication of forms of precarious employment." See Aaron Benanav and John Clegg, "Misery and Debt: On the Logic and History of Surplus Populations and Surplus Capital," in *Contemporary Marxist Theory: A Reader*, ed. Andrew Pendakis, Jeff Diamanti, Nicholas Brown, Josh Robinson, and Imre Szeman (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 606, fn. 4; 593.

what he calls "circulation struggles" (such as riots, blockades and occupations).[80] Clover joins a number of theorists working within the communization current in emphasizing the constitutive role of a surplus population in the post industrial economy, and in tying changes in class composition to the political significance of the proliferation of riots since the end of the long boom.[81] His theory of riot offers a compelling interpretation of the contemporary state of accumulation, as capital's self-undermining process of exploitation dissolves the social textures that previously reproduced (and were in turn reproduced by) the capital-labour relation. Importantly for Clover, this shift in the capital-labour relation is accompanied—indeed, is symptomatized—by new forms of struggle.[82]

During the phase of industrial expansion from the end of World War II through the early 1970s the various Keynesian accords and Fordist agreements of the period, which functioned both as instruments of economic growth and a means of pacifying class conflict, facilitated the rise of American hegemony in the capitalist world-system by integrating the reproductive circuits of capital and labour through standardised mass production and consumption.[83] In Arrighi's words, "the vertical integration of processes of production and exchange … became the single

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[80] Joshua Clover, *Riot.Strike.Riot: The New Era of Uprisings* (New York: Verso, 2016), 28.

[81] See, for example, Blaumachen, "The Transitional Phase of the Crisis: The Era of Riots," *libcom.org*, July 13, 2011, http://libcom.org/library/transitional-phase-crisis-era-riots; Endnotes, "A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats: Crisis Era Struggles in Britain," *Endnotes* 3 (2013): 92-171; and several pieces from the second issue of the international communisation journal *SIC* (2014).

[82] It is pertinent to note here that the militant research collective *Precarias a la Derive* was born of a failure of the Spanish general strike of 2002 to account for the dispersal and fragmentation of a production process that remained largely unaffected by conventional work stoppages and in which precarious workers held little power or security. See Precarias a la Derive, "First Stutterings of 'Precarias a la Derive'," *caring labor: an archive*, December 14, 2010, https://caringlabor.wordpress.com/2010/12/14/precarias-a-la-deriva-first-stutterings-of-precarias-a-la-deriva/.

[83] As Endnotes writes, "The relation between capital and proletariat in this phase of subsumption is one which is becoming internal, but mediated through the state, the division of the world economy into national areas and Eastern or Western zones of accumulation (each with their accompanying models of "third world" development), collective bargaining within the framework of the national labour-market and the Fordist deals linking productivity and wage increases." See Endnotes, "Afterword," *Endnotes* 1 (2008): 212-13.

most important feature of the US regime of accumulation."[84] This is true in the narrow sense of "bureaucratically managed corporations," which Arrighi notes "began expanding transnationally as soon as they had completed their continent-wide integration within the United States."[85] But the corporate model of vertical integration, as Arrighi suggests, also operates as a general socioeconomic principle governing capitalist society in the period of twentieth-century industrial expansion. As I argue in Chapter One, this moment marks the inauguration of what Jodi Melamed calls "racial liberalism," which mandated the incorporation of African Americans into the formal economy and civil society, as well as what Susan Thistle describes as "the market takeover of women's household work" and a surge of women entering the workforce.[86] The systemic integration of the two poles of the class relation—and the mediation of its reproduction by the Fordist and Keynesian contracts of the period—generated an arena of contestation *within* the frameworks offered by the formal economy and civil society: a cycle of struggle animated by a broad affirmation of and identification with categories of class, race, and gender internal to these frameworks. My readings of *Invisible Man* and *Player Piano* are interested to track these struggles as they appear in the late industrial novel as forms of antagonism under imminent threat of exhaustion and decline.

The second phase of this period is marked by economic contraction and the disintegration not only of the historical bonds between capital and labour—the Fordist family wage, for example, or the institutional forms of the workers' movement such as trade unions—but of the capital-labour relation itself and its reproductive circuitry. As the decline of US hegemony gives

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[84] Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century,* 290-1.

[85] Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 290.

[86] Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 1; Susan Thistle, *From Marriage to Market: The Transformation of Women's Lives and Work* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 36.

way to a protracted period of systemic crisis in the world system, labour finds itself increasingly dispossessed even of the commodity labour power. This transition from boom to downturn takes place between 1965 and 1973, a period of widespread social unrest that forms the backdrop for the poetry I examine in Chapter Two, and which, as I demonstrate in Chapter One, is already anticipated in the late industrial novel. The disintegration of the capital-labour relation erodes the material basis of workerism, but also of affirmationist politics more generally—including affirmative forms of feminist and anti-racist politics—as categories of race, gender and class come to be experienced as "external constraints."[87] As capital sheds labour (both from the production process and from the waged reproductive sphere), political identification with categories of experience historically tethered to the reproduction of the class relation becomes untenable. Chapters Three and Four explore these shifts in social reproduction—and the emergence of nonreproduction as a structural problem—in order to determine how precarity bears on political possibility in the present.

I examine the postwar history of precarity across these phases of integration and expulsion through the distinct but interrelated categories of race, gender and class. I consider these identity categories not through the intersection of subjective positions that precede mediation, but as moments of an integrated totality that are constantly reconstituted through cycles of accumulation. As one contemporary research collective puts it,

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[87] Throughout this dissertation, I borrow the language of "external constraint" from Théorie Communiste, who uses it to describe the relationship of the proletariat to its class identity after the capitalist restructuring of the late-twentieth century. See Théorie Communiste, "Communization in the Present Tense," *Communization and Its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles*, ed. Benjamin Noys (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2011), 53. Maya Gonzalez and Jeanne Neton also use the language of "external constraint" to describe the experience of gender under austerity. See Maya Gonzalez and Jeanne Neton, "The Logic of Gender: On the Separation of Spheres and the Process of Abjection," in *Contemporary Marxist Theory: A Reader*, ed. Andrew Pendakis, Jeff Diamanti, Nicholas Brown, Josh Robinson, and Imre Szeman (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 172.

> When considering unemployment, social exclusion or precarity, it is inadequate to simply take refuge within the empirical question of which groups live under these conditions. Contemporary sociological identities are themselves forms of appearance, moments of the totality of the reproduction of the capital-labor relation and therewith in the devaluation of the labor-power commodity presently unfolding through the category of the surplus proletariat.[88]

In the Marxian lexicon, these social forms might be understood as "real abstractions." Against both transcendental idealism and vulgar empiricism, Marx's materialism presents a world "ruled by *abstractions*."[89] First formulated and treated systematically by Alfred Sohn-Rethel, the concept of real abstraction aims to distinguish capitalist abstractions from purely conceptual abstractions, insisting that categories like exchange value and abstract labour exert a palpable force independent of human cognition.[90] Developing the theory of real abstraction from Sohn-Rethel and Roberto Finelli, Alberto Toscano argues that the concept captures "the properly *ontological* character of capitalist abstractions."[91] This is what Georg Lukács means when he says that abstract labour "has the same ontological rigour of facticity as a car that runs you

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[88] Surplus Club, "Trapped at a Party Where No One Likes You," *SIC*, Spring, 2015. http://sicjournal.org/trapped-at-a-party-where-no-one-likes-you/

[89] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 164.

[90] Sohn-Rethel writes, "In order to do justice to Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*, the commodity or value abstraction, revealed in his analysis must be viewed as a *real abstraction* resulting from spatiotemporal activity. Understood in this way, Marx's discovery stands in irreconcilable contradiction to the entire tradition of theoretical philosophy and this contradiction must be brought into the open by *critical confrontation* of the two conflicting standpoints." See Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel (London: Macmillan, 1978), 21.

[91] Alberto Toscano, "The Open Secret of Real Abstraction," *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Culture, Economics & Society* 20.2 (2008): 276. Where Sohn-Rethel locates the objectivity of exchange value in circulation, emerging from the dual character of the commodity, Finelli argues that real abstraction arises in production in relation to the dual character of labour. See Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 53; Roberto Finelli, *Abstraction and Dialectics from Romanticism to Capitalism: An Essay on Marx* [*Astrazione e dialettica dal romanticismo al capitalism: saggio su Marx*] (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1987), 191.

over."[92] Recently, theorists such as Maya Gonzalez and Jeanne Neton have expanded this set of real abstractions to include abstract identity categories like gender, race and class, categories that—insofar as they mediate the reproduction of the class relation—assume an ontological objectivity all their own.[93] Of particular interest to me here are historical transitions in the way these paradigmatic categories are experienced at some times as affirmable sources of identification and belonging, and at others as constricting categories to be overcome.

My contention is that literary texts and visual media provide unique opportunities to examine this tension between affirmative and abolitionist political horizons, and their relation to shifting and differentiated experiences of precarity. Taking up novels, poetry, cinema and television, I provide a new framework for reading aesthetic objects historically, one that traces the objective character and dynamic of the value-relation as it expresses itself unevenly across the social field. Advancing a thesis on the periodicity of the class relation, I track the integration and disintegration of the reproductive circuits of capital and labour in the postwar period in relation to what Marx calls a "rising organic composition" of capital.[94] Further, I suggest that this history provides a broad framework through which to examine developments in American literature and visual culture since World War II. I study a series of cultural artifacts that, at the level of aesthetic form, wrestle with contradictory tendencies toward affirmation and abolition from within their own historical moments and subjective spaces. My reading practice traces the constitutive relationship between concrete embodied experience and abstract determining structures, where lived experience precedes and determines conceived possibilities for

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[92] Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being*, vol. 2, *Marx's Basic Ontological Principles*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Merlin Press, 1978), 40.

[93] Gonzalez and Neton, "The Logic of Gender, 149-74. See also Amy De'Ath, "Unsociable Poetry: Abstraction and Antagonism in Contemporary Feminized Poetics" (PhD. diss, Simon Fraser University, 2017), http://summit.sfu.ca/system/files/iritems1/17177/etd10106_ADe%27Ath.pdf.

[94] Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, 318.

overcoming those structures. Mapping a movement from integration to expulsion in four chapters across two moments in postwar US history, my thesis documents the contradictory political horizons that emerge in relation to shifting experiences of precarity. These contradictions surface in literary texts and visual media as tensions between political orientations of affirmation and abolition, and conflicting relationships to abstract categories of identification such as "black," "woman" and "worker."

The project is "situated seasonally," to borrow a phrase from Marija Cetinic, "with its own seasonal discontents."[95] Dividing the postwar era into two distinct periods, I thread Arrighi's analysis of the American century with Brenner's account of the economic shift in the latter half of the twentieth century from long boom to long downturn, constructing a narrative arc that charts the rise and fall of American growth. Drawing also on Braudel's structuralist model of the *longue durée*, with its seasonal logic of hegemonic transition in the capitalist world-system, the project includes four chapters that each correspond to what I identify as the four "seasons" of the American century: the spring of postwar American growth; the long, hot summer of urban rebellion; the autumn of economic downturn; and the endless winter of capitalist crisis. Two chapters form Part I, which is situated historically within the framework of the period Brenner calls the long boom and its exhaustion, and two chapters form Part II, which examines film and television over the long downturn. Part I examines relationships between precarity and American literature in the context of postwar industrialism: Chapter One focuses on the American novel at the outset of the long boom, which Brenner dates between 1950 and 1965, while Chapter Two studies avant-garde poetics in the US during what he describes as "the fall in profitability and the

[95] Marija Cetinic, "House and Field: The Aesthetics of Saturation," *Mediations* 28, no. 1 (2014): 35.

turn from boom to crisis" that took place between 1965 and 1973.[96] Part II then turns to cinematic and televisual representations of precarity from the post-1973 period: Chapter Three explores the cinematics of downturn, while Chapter Four looks at two examples of visual media culture from the post-2008 financial crisis era.

Chapter One, "Spring Fever: The Golden Age and Its Discontents," examines two novels from the early postwar period, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952), against the backdrop of rising US hegemony. I explore the ways in which the postwar American novel confronts the liberal fiction of social and subjective plenitude to determine what we might learn from these texts about the socio-economic imaginary of the period. These narratives encode a series of contradictions tied to the movement of integration and disintegration that characterizes the US cycle of accumulation over the American century. I examine how the late industrial American novel attends to the ways in which, across multiple forms of subjective identification, the narrative and reality of social and economic inclusion concealed a more complex reality. I consider the consequences that arise from the systematic integration of class relation, and how this process complicates extant critiques of exclusion. Finally, I identify an anticipatory sense of a coming moment when this development will itself become obsolete, throwing into crisis an entire critical apparatus and leading to a new framework for thinking about political possibility in the postwar period. Ellison and Vonnegut anticipate the immanent exhaustion of industrial expansion, which registers in their novels as a crisis of narrative form and of affirmative political projects. The picture that emerges is not one of exclusion, but of a process of integration and expulsion that is formally inscribed in these literary texts as a tension between affirmative and abolitionist political horizons.

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[96] Brenner, *Economics of Global Turbulence*, 8-9.

In Chapter Two, "Long Hot Summer: Riot Poetics at the End of the Long Boom," I turn to the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka and Diane di Prima to examine experiences of racialized and gendered precarity in the 1960s and '70s, as the postwar phase of material expansion reaches its saturation point and enters into protracted decline. Charting the emergence of a "riot poetics" during the brief history of the long, hot summers, Chapter Two explores the relationship between cycles of accumulation and cycles of struggle as it is taken up in avant-garde poetics at the end of the long boom. I examine the work of three poets from the period to show how the riot poetics that emerge during the long, hot summers increasingly turn to apostrophe to summon a collective subject from the ruins of capitalist crisis. Brooks, Baraka and di Prima trace the shift from integration to expulsion, following the black worker into the world of unemployment and the rioter into the streets. For these poets, the intention is self-abolition through the total transformation of society, but their projects remain affirmative at the level of form because they derive their content from a positive sense of identity categories. I argue that this tendency characterizes avant-garde poetic responses to the transition from boom to downturn and 1970s precarity, as these poets attempt—through apostrophe and address—to conjure a collective subject capable of weathering the gathering storm.

Chapter Three, "Signs of Autumn: Arrighian Realism and the Cinematics of Downturn," advances a conceptual framework for interpreting films that emerge in the early decades of the post-1973 era that I call the cinematics of downturn, which I tie to Braudel's claim that financial growth signals the arrival of autumn. In this chapter, I recount two leading theories of the pivotal shift in 1973—Brenner's account of the long downturn and Arrighi's model of hegemonic cycles—and the subsequent period of economic stagnation and hegemonic unraveling, as well as the brief moment of restored profitability in the 1990s. I outline the debate between Brenner and

Arrighi regarding the post-1973 period, turning to the Marxian critique of value to distinguish the present downturn from previous moments of hegemonic transition. The chapter then considers Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* (1983) and Harmony Korine's *Gummo* (1997), which I read against the backdrop of an uptake in avant-garde realist techniques among filmmakers in the 1980s and 1990s, following Jed Etsy's Arrighian argument that "realism wars can be mapped onto tectonic shifts in the history of global Anglophone hegemonies in the modern world system."[97] Drawing on Etsy's work on Arrighian realism and Brenner's account of secular stagnation, I develop a theory of the cinematics of downturn as a realism of the *absent* real—the capitalist value-form—in an era of American decline. Confronting an impasse of capital density, *Born in Flames* exhibits a preoccupation with space and place that results from the exhaustion of narrative temporality, and the eclipse of affirmation political possibilities when circulation displaces production as the leading edge of capitalist profitability. In a similar focus on space and place, *Gummo* ties structural unemployment to generalized torpor in the former bastions of industrialism at the end of the long arc of accumulation. *Born in Flames* and *Gummo* pessimistically mark the autumnal phase of the US cycle of accumulation, a phase that—uniquely in the *longue durée* of capitalism—lacks the promise of a new cycle on the horizon.

In the final chapter, "Endless Winter: Stagnation, Separation, Nonreproduction," I turn to twenty-first-century cinematic and televisual works from outside the US to determine the transnational character of economic downturn in an age of American decline. Considering Ashley McKenzie's avant-garde film, *Werewolf*, alongside the BBC police procedural, *The Fall*, this chapter argues that contemporary forms of precarity in the West are tied to a crisis of reproductive futurity that follows from the terminal decline of the capitalist world-system. I

[97] Jed Esty, "Realism Wars," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 49, no. 2 (2016): 335.

examine rising precarity in these two examples of visual culture from the post-2008 moment through three interrelated concepts tied to the onset of winter: stagnation, separation, and nonreproduction. Stagnation provides both the political-economic context and affective register in which the two cultural objects I examine intervene. Separation emerges as the social form and cultural logic of the deindustrialized present in McKenzie's film. The final term, nonreproduction, names both the conditions of the current crisis of futurity and the horizon of a politics of radical rupture, a paradox I unpack in an analysis of *The Fall*. Although both *Werewolf* and *The Fall* arise from and are set in locations outside the US—in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, and Belfast, Northern Ireland, respectively—the hemispheric character of American decline means that the arc of American hegemony plays out beyond its national borders, as the consequences of American decline resound around the world.

PART I: BOOM

CHAPTER ONE

Spring Fever: The Golden Age and Its Discontents

> For a generation of people—anyone born after 1920 and before 1945 in the West—the Golden Age became the normal form of capitalism, with growth and full employment, and an expanding welfare state. They grew up to think that active state intervention to ensure full employment was a regular feature of capitalism.
>
> — Meghnad Desai, *Marx's Revenge*

> The transition from a society that was able to integrate the masses to a system of selection and apartheid though did not lead to a new round of the old class struggle between capital and labour. Rather the result was a categorical crisis of the opposing interests as inherent in the system as such. Even in the period of prosperity after World War II, the old emphasis of class struggle was on the wane. The reason for that was not that the "preordained" revolutionary subject (i.e. the working class) had been integrated into society by means of manipulative wheelings and dealings and the bribes of a questionable prosperity. On the contrary, the emphasis faded because the logical identity of capital and labour as functional categories of a common social fetish form became evident on the stage of social development reached in the times of Fordism. The desire to sell the commodity labour power at best price, as immanent in the system, destroyed any transcendental perspective.
>
> — Krisis Group, "Manifesto Against Labour"

A French neologism, the term *precarité* appears in the slogans and placards of European-left political movements at the turn of the millennium as a discursive means of designating a set of evidently novel economic conditions particular to contemporary life under late capitalism. Attending to the intensification of post-Fordist tendencies toward labour casualization and neoliberal policies of privatization and austerity, the discourse of precarity favours a logic of periodicity in which the exclusions and abandonments of the historical present deviate from a decidedly more stable past, namely the period Robert Brenner calls the long boom that began shortly after the end of World War II and came to a close with the capitalist restructuring of the

late 1960s and early 1970s.[1] As Giovanni Arrighi argues, this period, which marked high points for both Fordism and Keynesianism, saw the rise of American hegemony in the capitalist world-system.[2] Peacetime ushered in a new age of prosperity: after the long winter of war, a new optimism bloomed. Animated by liberal fantasies of social plenitude and infinite growth, the period became known as the Golden Age of Capitalism.[3] This postwar Golden Age, a period of unprecedented capitalist expansion, forms the normative backdrop against which contemporary experiences of precarity figure as aberrance and exception.

During the so-called Golden Age, output growth rates, labour productivity and real wages all rose rapidly, while expanding trade unions secured rights for workplace bargaining and living standards increased yearly. For many economists of the period, prevailing winds indicated that the contradictions that had precipitated the Great Depression had been resolved—or at least adequately contained—and that the industrial economy could maintain both growth and full employment indefinitely. Citing British economist Anthony Crosland's *The Future of Socialism* (1956) as an example of the general consensus, Meghnad Desai writes:

> Keynes had cleverly solved the problem of unemployment, and of course, steady economic growth was assured. Growth resolved the struggle between workers and capitalists over the share each got in income. The cake was growing, so that even if the share was the same, or declining, you got more cake to eat.[4]

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[1] Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005* (New York: Verso, 2006).

[2] Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origin of Our Times* (New York: Verso, 2010).

[3] See Stephen A. Marglin and Juliet B. Schor, eds., *The Golden Age of Capitalism: Reinterpreting the Postwar Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[4] Meghnad Desai, *Marx's Revenge: The Resurgence of Capitalism and the Death of Statist Socialism* (New York: Verso, 2002), 223.

The Golden Age names the industrial phase of capital accumulation between 1945 and the early 1970s in Western Europe, Japan, the North America—countries which would collectively become known in the period as the First World—wherein increases in real accumulation coupled with both low inflation and low unemployment signalled for Crosland and many others the death of Marx and the revolutionary proletariat. During the Golden Age, Fordist domestic mass production and consumption were supported by a range of governmental institutions and policies, including Keynesian stabilizing economic and social policies—a corporate welfare state apparatus that managed the dual surpluses of capital and labour.[5] While the implementation of welfare policies by corporations and governments was part of a general strategy to maximize profits and snuff out militancy, many of these concessions, or workers' "rights," were won through the struggles of the workers' movement. The Fordist regime of accumulation provided possibilities for collectivity among workers on the factory floor, who secured wage regulations, job security, and domestic work projects in large part through the tactical deployment of the strike, affirming their relation to capital *as workers*.

Postwar political projects rooted in an affirmation of abstract identity categories find their historical roots in the systemic integration of the reproductive circuits of capital and labour that

[5] According to Samuel Bowles, David Gordon and Thomas Weisskopf's influential book, *Beyond the Waste Land*, the US postwar corporate system was a social structure of accumulation supported by three pillars: the limited capital-labour accord, the capitalist-citizen accord, and Pax Americana. Pax Americana refers to the ascendency of the United States of America to the position of global hegemon following World War II and in particular the implementation of the 1944 Bretton Woods Agreement, which tied global finance to the US dollar via the gold-standard, placing America at the centre of the international monetary system. The capitalist-citizen accord names the creation of the American welfare state, a system of social insurance wherein the United States government provided a minimum of financial security and social services to its citizenry, although in an era before the advances of the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation movements much of the population was excluded from the accord. The limited capital-accord resulted from the rise to power of industrial unions, the leadership of which abandoned militancy in exchange for recognition of bargaining rights and an increased share in productivity gains (*limited*, because the accord applied almost exclusively to workers in core industries like auto or steel). For Bowles, Gordon and Weisskopf, these three pillars of the postwar US corporate system were "structures of domination" that worked to "[ensure] for a while the unchallenged preeminence of private corporate power and privilege," and "to moderate the tensions which hierarchical systems always produce." See Samuel Bowles, David Gordon, and Thomas Weisskopf, *Beyond the Waste Land: A Democratic Alternative to Economic Decline* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1983), 63.

began in the nineteenth century and accelerated rapidly in the wake of the 1947 Paris Peace Treaties. After the Great Depression of the 1930s and the mass destruction of World War II, the British Empire entered terminal decline, and the US emerged as global hegemon of the capitalist world-system.[6] In *The Long Twentieth Century*, Arrighi argues that the US secured global ascendency after World War II in part through absorbing "the propertyless masses of the West."[7] The "systemic chaos" of the period immediately following the war prompted the US to undertake a massive operation of capture, formally integrating populations both domestically and internationally in order to stabilize global capital and secure hegemony in the world-system.[8] Arrighi's theory of hegemonic transition draws on the work of Fernand Braudel, for whom the financialization of the global economy in the late nineteenth century marked the beginning of the end for the British, just as it had for the Genoese and the Dutch in previous "long centuries."[9] But if the British cycle of accumulation was in terminal decline by the end of World War II, the American cycle was just getting underway. As William I. Robinson writes, "In the *longue durée*, the declining hegemon's autumn is another rising hegemon's spring."[10] During the phase of industrial expansion from the end of World War II through the early 1970s, Keynesian accords and Fordist agreements facilitated the rise of American hegemony by integrating the circuits of reproduction of the two poles of the class relation through state-mediated patterns of mass production and consumption.

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[6] The British Nationality Act (1948) and the Suez Canal crisis (1956) mark the close of the British Empire.

[7] Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 65.

[8] Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 64.

[9] Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*, *Volume III: The Perspective of the World* (London: Collins, 1984), 246.

[10] William I. Robinson, "Systemic Cycles of Accumulation, Hegemonic Transitions, and the Rise of China," *New Political Economy* 16, no. 2 (2011): 273.

This moment at mid-century marks the birth of what Jodi Melamed calls "racial liberalism," the first in "a series of successive official or state-recognised U.S. antiracisms," which mandated the incorporation of African Americans into the formal economy and civil society as both a Cold War containment strategy and a means of expanding labour and commodity markets.[11] The systematic integration of African Americans into US civil society after World War II resulted in what Melamed describes as "a formally anti-racist, liberal capitalist modernity articulated under conditions of U.S. global ascendency."[12] Underlining these kinds of developments in African American economic status, Sidney Wilhelm notes that "Negro income relative to white reached an all-time high in 1952," and goes on to explain how African Americans would secure increasing economic progress relative to whites until the economic crisis of the 1970s.[13] Postwar prosperity was also fuelled by what Susan Thistle describes as "the market takeover of women's household work."[14] As Thistle observes, "only after World War II did the industrial economy have a substantial impact on women's household work, as factory production of goods increased, the basic appliances invented earlier became widely available, and many domestic tasks were converted into work done for wages."[15] At the same time, "growth generated a strong demand for new workers," and "married women were the key group

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[11] Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011): 1.

[12] Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 4.

[13] Sidney Wilhelm, *Who Needs the Negro?* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1970): 80. Black economic progress relative to whites would climb into the 1970s, after which the trend stalls, collapsing in full after the 2008 financial crisis to levels just above those of the pre-civil rights era. By 2010, black men earned 75 cents for every dollar white men made, and only 65 cents when adjusted for incarceration rates. For an analysis of the relationship between the sharp decline in black economic progress and the steep rise in black incarceration rates in the post-civil rights era, see Derek Neal and Armin Rick, "The Prison Boom and the Lack of Black Progress after Smith and Welch," *The National Bureau of Economic Research*, Working Paper No. 20283, July, 2014, http://www.nber.org/papers/w20283.

[14] Susan Thistle, *From Marriage to Market: The Transformation of Women's Lives and Work* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006): 36.

[15] Thistle, *Marriage to Market*, 38.

that still remained largely outside the wage economy."[16] As a result, "women surged into the labor force at unprecedented rates."[17] As I argue in my Introduction, the systemic integration of the two poles of the class relation generated an arena of contestation *within* the frameworks offered by the formal economy and civil society: a cycle of struggle grounded by an affirmation of—and *identification* with—categories of class, race, and gender.

Despite the rhetoric of full employment and a rising standard of living, the accelerated integration of the class relation after World War II was a process fraught with contradiction. As early as 1949, British sociologist T.H. Marshall marked the tangled relationship between citizenship and labour under Fordism-Keynesianism, a social metric indexed by the dyadic figure of the citizen-worker and its exclusions. In *Citizenship and Social Class*, Marshall notes that civil rights are predicated on social duties, and that alongside tax and insurance payments, "of paramount importance is the duty to work," an obligation increasingly enforced by industrial unions at the level of production.[18] Full employment was already dependent upon massive public expenditure, but the historical figure of the citizen-worker—that "universal" subject of liberal fantasy who enjoyed the securities of full employment and government welfare—*differentially* included the vast majority of people, and especially blacks and women, who through shifting relations to the wage and reproduction found themselves in a complicated relationship with the liberal narrative of social and economic plenitude in a rapidly growing economy.

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[16] Thistle, *Marriage to Market*, 52.

[17] Thistle, *Marriage to Market*, 37.

[18] As Marshall notes, "an attempt is being made by union leaders to inculcate a sense of this general duty. At a conference on 18 November of last year Mr. Tanner referred to 'the imperative obligation on both sides of industry to make their full contribution to the rehabilitation of the national economy and world recovery.' But the national economy is too large and remote to command this kind of loyalty and to make it a continual driving force. That is why many people think that the solution of our problem lies in the development of more limited loyalties, to the local community and especially to the working group. In this latter form industrial citizenship, devolving its obligations down to the basic units of production, might supply some of the vigour that citizenship in general appears to lack." See T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class, And Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950): 1-85.

To borrow a periodizing framework from Raymond Williams, exclusionary practices were *residual* but remained a primary social issue in a period in which integration was the *dominant* political-economic logic.[19] Meanwhile, a sense of impending exhaustion was an *emergent* feature of the US cycle of accumulation even early in its inception. Political horizons were accordingly contradictory. On the one hand, there were struggles for inclusion, visibility, recognition, and equality within the formal economy and civil society. On the other, integration carried its own series of tensions: white flight and the redevelopment of urban areas, waning institutional support for domestic labour, and—perhaps most fatefully for all involved—accelerated automation of production that anticipates the structural transformation of the class relation following the long boom. These contradictions become problems of form for the late industrial novel. As Williams writes, "what matters, finally, in understanding emergent culture, as distinct from both the dominant and the residual, is that it is never only a matter of immediate practice; indeed it depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form."[20]

This chapter examines two novels from the early postwar period, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (1952), in relation to the social experiences of these contradictions, following Adorno's basic premise in *Aesthetic Theory* that "the unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form."[21] In the following pages, I explore the ways in which the postwar American novel rewrites the liberal narrative of social and subjective plenitude to determine what we might learn from these texts about the socio-economic imaginary of the period. Whereas previous critical accounts of early postwar American literature—Thomas Schaub's *American Fiction in the Cold War* (1991), for

[19] See Raymond Williams, "Dominant, Residual, and Emergent," in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-7.

[20] Williams, "Dominant, Residual, and Emergent," 126.

[21] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 7.

example, and Alan Nadel's *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (1995)—broke from the nostalgic American exceptionalism of a calcified New Criticism with an emphasis on the anomie of Cold War containment culture, this dissertation joins recent work by Andrew Hoberek, Michael Clune, Jasper Bernes, Christopher Nealon, Heather J. Hicks, Grace Kyungwon Hong and Myka Tucker-Abramson in challenging the notion that literature in the period abandoned economic issues in favour of psychic life.[22] Casting its glance back to that early postwar moment in the US, this chapter asks: if the precarious present is marked by a crisis in the reproduction of the capital-labour relation and new forms of struggle, how does the American novel track the historical emergence of this crisis and its consequences for politics at the level of narrative form?

Tying racialization and the production of gender to structural transformations in the capital-labour relation, this chapter sheds new light on the political-economic conditions of a period in which liberal capitalism supposedly reached an apex from which it has since fallen. I read *Invisible Man* and *Player Piano* against the backdrop of rising US hegemony, exploring how the American novel in the early postwar period attends to the ways in which, across multiple forms of subjective identification, the narrative and reality of social and economic

[22] As Hoberek notes, even the more recent account offered by Morris Dickstein's *Leopards in the Temple*, which rejects the narrative of Cold War anomie in favour of a celebration of a nascent cultural revolution that Dickstein argues prefigures 1960s radicalism, nevertheless insists that "economic fears were largely put to rest." See Morris Dickstein, *Leopards in the Temple: The Transformation of American Fiction 1945-1970* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 6; Andrew Hoberek, *The Twilight of the Middle Class: Post-World War II American Fiction and White Collar Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1; Thomas Hill Schaub, *American Fiction in the Cold War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995); Michael Clune, *American Literature and the Free Market, 1945-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Grace Kyungwon Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Heather J. Hicks, *The Culture of Soft Work: Labor, Gender and Race in Postmodern American Narrative* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Jasper Bernes, *The Work of Art in the Age of Deindustrialization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); and Christopher Nealon, *The Matter of Capital: Poetry and Crisis in the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). For an extended study of political economy and the early postwar American novel, see Myka Tucker-Abramson, *Novel Shocks: Manhattan's Urban Renewal and the Origins of Neoliberalism* (New York: Fordham, forthcoming).

inclusion concealed a more complex reality. I consider the consequences that arise from the systematic integration of the two poles of the capitalist class relation—capital and labour—and how this process undermines extant critiques of exclusion. Perhaps most crucially for my project as a whole, I identify an anticipatory sense of a coming moment when this development will itself become obsolete, throwing into crisis an entire critical apparatus and leading to a new framework for thinking about political possibility in the postwar period. Given that both these novels were published at the peak of the American century, more than two decades before Arrighi's signal crisis of 1973, this might seem "a misapplication of the Arrighian logic of the long twentieth century," to quote Jed Esty, "according to which, strictly speaking, American anxiety of this kind would not appear until after the 1970s." And yet, "the cycles of hegemonic rise and fall accelerate over time so that the cultural awareness of American decline almost begins to overlap the cultural assimilation of American dominance."[23] The picture that emerges is not one of exclusion, but a movement from integration to expulsion that is formally inscribed in these literary texts as a tension between affirmative and abolitionist political horizons.

Blacking Out

Since the 2008 financial crisis, US labour markets have crept sluggishly toward recovery. Official unemployment rates have fallen from 10 percent in 2009 to 4.1 percent as of December 2017, even as real wages have stagnated and productivity growth has been negligible. Black unemployment rates, however, have remained high—at a historic low of 7 per cent, they are nearly twice the national average—while the discrepancy between black and non-black unemployment, regardless of educational background, has expanded since the years preceding

[23] Jed Esty, "Realism Wars," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 49, no. 2 (2016): 334, n. 18.

the crisis.[24] This figure skyrockets and the racial gap becomes a chasm when it is adjusted to account for black underemployment and incarceration rates, both of which began to climb after industrial growth tapered off in the latter half of the twentieth century, and spiked following the crash in 2008. African Americans swell the ranks of a bloated and precarious service sector, while the rate of imprisonment for black men has increased by more than *five hundred percent* over the past four decades, skewering claims that black precarity has simply become more visible in recent years through the proliferation of new media.[25] Meanwhile, in the post-2008 period, anti-black police violence has once again taken centre stage in America: in 2015, black Americans were nine times as likely as white Americans to be killed by police.[26] Under generalized conditions of rising precarity—and in response to the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland—a wave of riots swept the US. This triangulation of black unemployment, anti-black police violence and the spread of riots in moments of financial crisis suggests that racialization—that set of ascriptive processes that produces race as a sociological category and naturalizes dispossession along lines of

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[24] All employment data are taken from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. For a comparison of overall unemployment rates since 2006 and current black unemployment rates, see United States Department of Labor, "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey," *US Bureau of Labor Statistics*, accessed January 11, 2018, https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14000000; and United States Department of Labor, "E-16. Unemployment Rates by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity," *US Bureau of Labor Statistics*, accessed January 11, 2018, https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm. For a rundown of productivity gains (and lack thereof) in the US since the 2008 financial crisis, see Shawn Sprague, "Below Trend: The U.S. Productivity Slowdown Since the Great Recession," *Beyond the Numbers* 6, no. 2 (2017), https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-6/below-trend-the-us-productivity-slowdown-since-the-great-recession.htm.

[25] For an account of racialized underemployment rates since the 2008 financial crisis, see The Economic Policy Institute, "All Races Hurt by Recession, Racial and Ethnic Disparities Persist," *State of Working America*, December 22, 2017, http://www.stateofworkingamerica.org/charts/underemployment-by-race-and-ethnicity/. For an overview of the impact of black incarceration rates on the rate of black unemployment, and the discrepancy between black and white unemployment rates when adjusted for incarceration rates, see Jeff Guo, "America Has Locked Up So Many Black People It Has Warped Our Sense of Reality," *The Washington Post*, February 26, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/02/26/america-has-locked-up-so-many-black-people-it-has-warped-our-sense-of-reality/?utm_term=.61ec69145e8f.

[26] For comprehensive data regarding police killings in America, see the ongoing *Guardian* study by Jon Swaine, Oliver Laughland, Jamiles Lartey and Ciara McCarthy, "The Counted: People Killed by Police in the US," *The Guardian*, accessed January 11, 2018, http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-police-killings-us-database.

phenotypical difference—mediates the unfolding relationship between cycles of accumulation and cycles of struggle.

Turning to the early postwar period to historicize the entangled forms of precarity and struggle that mark the present, I read Ralph Ellison's visionary 1952 novel *Invisible Man* in relation to what Arrighi identifies as the US systemic cycle of accumulation.[27] In his structuralist account of late-twentieth-century developments in the capitalist world-system, Arrighi adopts Braudel's model of the *longue durée*, with its seasonal logic of hegemonic transition whereby autumn for one declining global hegemon means spring for the next. For Ellison's unnamed narrator, whose struggle for visibility is presciently tied to the rise and fall of American growth, spring too carries its "stenches of death."[28] When the US faces its own crisis of accumulation in the late 1960s, and the long American century enters its autumnal downturn in the early 1970s, the expulsion of labour from the site of production will sound the death knell for African American *bildung*. Anticipating the coming of autumn in terms of exhaustion and abjection, *Invisible Man* envisions the end of American economic hegemony as a crushing experience of social death. In what follows, I trace the relationship between racialized precarity and the late industrial novel across this transitional period, revisiting Ellison's literary milestone to chart the decline of the American century from within its zenith.

Invisible Man stages a series of expulsions from conventional sites of entrance into twentieth-century American civil society. Living in exile beneath the street, the nameless narrator recounts how he was expelled from college, jettisoned from the Liberty Paints factory,

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[27] Arrighi identifies four systemic cycles of accumulation, each increasing in scope and intensity but contracting in duration: "a Genoese cycle, from the fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries; a Dutch cycle, from the late sixteenth century through most of the eighteenth century; a British cycle, from the latter half of the eighteenth century through the early twentieth century; and a US cycle, which began in the late nineteenth century and has continued into the current phase of financial expansion." Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 6-7.

[28] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 580.

and cast aside by the Brotherhood before dropping from the radar of social life altogether to "take up residence underground."[29] His expulsion from each of these historic institutions—the industrial college, the factory union, and the political party—occasion shifts in narrative form: Ellison's realist first-person narration dissolves into surrealist passages that, through references to "*drowned passions*," confinement and transportation, gesture back to the violent discontinuity of the Middle Passage, in the process suspending the subject and narrative *telos* of this canonical modernist *bildungsroman*.[30] Set against the exhaustion of Jim Crow legislation, this series of expulsions represents not so much an exclusionary logic, but rather plots the systemic movement from integration to expulsion that characterizes the US cycle of accumulation in the long twentieth century. Navigating this dynamic over the course of the narrative in a protracted struggle between optimism and pessimism, the narrator's alternating experiences of social integration and abjection constitute distinct historical moments of racialization, and, as I will argue, track a movement by which racial blackness shifts for the narrator between an affirmative category of identification and an external constraint to overcome.

* * *

Set during the Great Depression of the 1930s and published on the eve of the postwar boom, *Invisible Man* is a novel of transition—its expansive scope and scale spanning the horizons of the American century—and, from the present vantage of American decline, offers a prescient glance at the contemporary reign of finance. In a pivotal scene, the narrator stumbles upon the possessions of an elderly couple "piled in a jumble along the walk over the curb into the street, like a lot of junk waiting to be hauled away."[31] The narrator is moved by the sight of the

[29] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 571.

[30] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 113, 235, 249-50.

[31] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 267.

eviction: "with this sense of dispossession came a pang of vague recognition: this junk, these shabby chairs, these heavy, old-fashioned pressing irons, zinc washtubs with dented bottoms—all throbbed with more meaning than there should have been."[32] As an angry crowd gathers near the entrance, he delivers a speech about dispossession that foregrounds the logic of plunder at work in the postwar project of urban redevelopment. Rallying the crowd in support of Primus Provo, an evicted eighty-seven year old former slave and day labourer, the narrator cries, "look at all he's accumulated in eighty-seven years, strewn in the snow like chicken-guts. … Where has all his labor gone?"[33] Galvanized by the narrator's speech, the crowd erupts into revelry, carrying the elderly couple's belongings back into the building in what feels "like a holiday" before the police arrive and shut down the festivities under the pretense of riot control.[34]

Drawing on Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, Myka Tucker-Abramson has argued that "*Invisible Man* records the process by which high finance and the state systematically 'raided' the 'internal colony' of African Americans in the post-war era."[35] In her reading of the eviction scene, she cites the Housing Act of 1949, which authorized the redevelopment of urban centres according to the racialized logic of "blight," as a key moment in the violent spatial reorganization of surplus organized by Washington and executed by Wall Street.[36] Ellison's narrator parrots this duplicitous logic of development, exclaiming, "Just look at this junk! Should two old folks live in such junk, cooped up in a filthy room? It's a great danger, a fire hazard!"[37]

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[32] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 217.

[33] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 277-8.

[34] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 282.

[35] Myka Tucker-Abramson, "Novel Shocks: Bureaucratic Surrealism and the US Novel from 1948-1962" (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2013), 57, summit.sfu.ca/system/files/iritems1/13579/etd7983_MTucker-Abramson.pdf.

[36] Tucker-Abramson, "Novel Shocks," 56.

[37] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 277.

In these representations of urban renewal, the novel harkens back to depression-era evictions in Harlem, but also prefigures the new slum clearance policies that characterize finance-driven urban planning projects in the early postwar period.[38] Balancing the novel's multiple timelines, Tucker-Abramson suggests that "*Invisible Man* is less a novel about the Great Depression than it is a novel about the space between its writing and its setting."[39] Rather than a straightforward critique of the racist exclusions that defined the Jim Crow era, Ellison's novel offers an ambiguous image of African American integration into the postwar regime of American hegemony.

Invisible Man depicts this integrationist racial regime in the Wall Street-led financing of the black southern college, anti-discriminatory hiring policies at the Liberty Paints factory, and the turn (however equivocal) to a politics of racial inclusion by the Marxist-Leninist party, the Brotherhood. The assimilationist logic of this process of integration is illustrated in the narrator's disturbing psychiatric treatment at a mental hospital—a program designed to pacify him so that, upon his release, "society will suffer no traumata on his account."[40] And yet, as Tucker-Abramson notes, insofar as "the state is only visible within *Invisible Man* through the figures of the police," the novel also seems to predict the collapse of this social-democratic arrangement.[41]

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[38] As early as 1977, John Callahan noted that "there is no mention of the Great Depression" in the novel, and that Ellison seems "unwilling to restrict the Provos' condition to one point in time … because of the danger that, if he did so, what has been archetypal in black experience might be laid simply at the door of hard time." Callahan's suggestion that Ellison's representation of African American experience exceeds any one particular historical moment is well taken, and I agree that the novel cannot be confined to the Depression era, but I want to insist nevertheless that there remains a historicity to the narrative's representation of anti-blackness that ties the postwar African American novel to the protean relationship between racialization and economic forces constituting (and reconstituting) blackness over the course of the American century. See "Chaos, Complexity and Possibility: The Historical Frequencies of Ralph Waldo Ellison," *Black American Literature Forum* 11, no. 4 (1977): 134.

[39] Myka Tucker-Abramson, "Blueprints: *Invisible Man* and the Housing Act of 1949," *American Studies* 54, no. 3 (2015): 11.

[40] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 236. Tucker-Abramson argues that "this scene marks a notable break in Ellison's focus and orientation," insofar as "the aim of this exercise, importantly, is not exclusion. The protagonist is not being expelled or moved to the basement, but is being prepared to re-enter society." See "Blueprints," 14.

[41] Tucker-Abramson, "Novel Shocks," 34.

Anticipating not only the integrationist logic of the postwar boom, as Tucker-Abramson suggests, but also a later neoliberal moment when the post-welfare security state would abandon its role as mediator, *Invisible Man* asks what possibilities exist for an anti-racist politics in a moment when post-Reconstruction era forms of critique that challenged the racist exclusionary practices of Jim Crow appear increasingly obsolete.[42]

I will return to this question of obsolescence in the novel, but I want to dwell for a moment on the sense of radical negativity that permeates the Harlem eviction scene. During his dispossession speech, the narrator shouts, "'Dispossessed,' eighty-seven years and dispossessed of what? They ain't *got* nothing, they caint *get* nothing, they never *had* nothing. So who was dispossessed?"[43] Highlighting an apparently absolute inaccessibility to property, the narrator calls into question the very framework of expropriation that underpins the discourse of dispossession, and in doing so undermines the possibility of an affirmative black identity politics that would seek to secure visibility in civil society. Drawing on Frantz Fanon's characterization of blackness as an experience of "crushing objecthood," Frank Wilderson has theorized this condition as one of "subjectivity under erasure."[44] For Wilderson, Jared Sexton and other theorists associated with the tendency in black studies known as Afro-pessimism, the ontological

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[42] My argument here owes a great deal to Tucker-Abramson's reading of *Invisible Man*, which also looks to the innovative formal structure of the novel in order to grasp its historicity against the backdrop of rising US hegemony. But where Tucker-Abramson traces the transition from exclusion to integration that characterizes the era of industrial expansion in the US, my focus here is on the subsequent movement from integration to expulsion that constitutes the novel's horizon. For Tucker-Abramson, the novel's horizon is keyed to the shift from Keynesianism to neoliberalism, which she identifies in its nascent form in the 1950s. This leads her to equate representations of the superfluity of black Americans in the novel with their integration into the postwar US hegemonic regime during the period of its ascent – as "simultaneously absorbing and dispossessing the black male body." My argument is rather that racialized superfluity appears in the novel as a threat of expulsion from the formal economy and the wage and a vision of impending exhaustion and decline. See Tucker-Abramson, "Novel Shocks," 49.

[43] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 279.

[44] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 109; Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xi.

objectification of blackness endures in what Saidiya Hartman calls "the afterlife of slavery."[45] This sense of an afterlife is suggested in the novel, too. As the narrator helps collect the elderly couple's items, he discovers Primus Provo's "FREE PAPERS," signed "1859," and is struck by how little time separates that moment from his own: "*It has been longer than that, further removed in time*, I told myself, and yet I knew that it hadn't been."[46] Looking at the couple's belongings, he feels the moment of dispossession recede into the past, "around a corner into the dark, far-away-and-long-ago, not so much of my own memory as of remembered words, of linked verbal echoes, images, heard even when not listening at home."[47] For the narrator, an originary and constitutive dispossession, cast back through generations, marks blackness in the present in terms of a generalized inaccessibility to social life, represented here in the image of the home. "These old ones are out in the snow," the narrator remarks to the Harlem crowd, "but we're here with them."[48] *Invisible Man* would, in this sense, appear to affirm the Afro-pessimist notion of a black ontology. While I engage these recent developments in black studies below, the present argument reconsiders Ellison's classic novel from a different angle. In its emphasis on the foreclosure of twentieth-century political possibilities, as I will show, *Invisible Man* recasts the idea of ontological blackness as the *appearance* of "race" in a logic of representation that encodes the process by which the class relation moves through phases of integration and expulsion over the course of the American century.

Kenneth Warren has argued that, with *Invisible Man*, Ellison "captured a bit of American

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[45] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 6.

[46] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 272.

[47] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 273.

[48] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 279.

reality … only as that reality was passing into history."[49] For Warren, the novel marks the historical eclipse of the Jim Crow period, and his reading of *Invisible Man* sets the stage for his later book, *What Was African American Literature*? There, Warren argues that African American literature began with the implementation of Jim Crow legislation—against which African American writers sought to establish a distinctly black American literary canon, one that would facilitate black uplift and counter notions of inferiority—and so definitively ended with desegregation. But if the African American novel charted a narrative of racial progress in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, then what constitutes the end of that moment of possibility for African American *bildung* needs to be understood within the context of a crisis of American "growth" more generally. Indeed, Ellison anticipates a moment in which, as Joshua Clover notes, "the literary novel moves to strip away or fracture the conventions of the *bildungsroman*, of the development of a character through consequent time," since the crisis of a subjective narrative *telos* that appears in *Invisible Man* will become a defining problem for the postmodern novel as such. Reading Arrighi alongside Marx's value-theoretical account of crisis, Clover suggests that "this subtraction of the singular and central character who familiarly populates the realist narrative is itself an expression of a homologous change in the sphere of production within the imperial core, which in the era of late capitalism is increasingly defined by … a decreasing ratio of workers to machines."[50] *Invisible Man* offers a surprisingly early and methodical instantiation of this postwar link between a rising organic composition of capital and paradigmatic shifts in narrative form. Tracing this dialectic of literary form and political economy, the following pages examine three sites of expulsion in the novel, each of which

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[49] Kenneth Warren, *So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 2.

[50] Joshua Clover, "Autumn of the System: Poetry and Financial Capital," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 41.1 (2011): 42.

represents an institution of twentieth-century American civil society predicated on and organized around the affirmation of labour: the university, the union and the party.

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Adopting the position of the polite labouring subject at a young age, the narrator finds promise in the reformist racial politics of Booker T. Washington at an unnamed university modeled after the Tuskegee Institute—the historically black college in the southern plantation districts founded on a vision of black progress through formal education, hard work and humility—where he learns to emulate his headmaster Dr. Bledsoe's "posture of humility and meekness."[51] However, an episode with Mr. Norton, one of the school's white northern benefactors, leads to a confrontation with the headmaster who consequently expels the narrator. A representative figure of economic support for racial reform efforts in the south, Mr. Norton is "a Bostonian, smoker of cigars, teller of polite Negro stories, shrewd banker, skilled scientist, director, philanthropist, forty years a bearer of the white man's burden, and for sixty a symbol of the Great Traditions."[52] When Mr. Norton recounts the school's historic founding on the former plantations of rural Alabama from the backseat, the chauffeuring narrator recognizes himself as a subject of History in Norton's narrative of African American *bildung*:

> As I drove, faded yellow pictures of the school's early days displayed in the library flashed across the screen of my mind, coming fitfully and fragmentarily to life—photographs of men and women in wagons drawn by mule teams and oxen, dressed in black, dusty clothing, people who seemed almost without individuality, a black mob that seemed to be waiting, looking with blank faces, and among them the inevitable collection of white men and women in smiles, clear of features, striking, elegant and confident.

[51] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 115.

[52] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 37.

> Until now, and although I could recognise the Founder and Dr. Bledsoe among them, the figures in the photographs had never seemed actually to have been alive, but were more like signs or symbols one found on the last pages of the dictionary.[53]

Otherwise appearing as an ahistorical nebulous "mob"—empty signifiers devoid of substance or subjectivity—the racialized figures in the pictures are granted the possibility of individuality through white financial investments in the institutions of black "industrial" education. As a trustee with ties to Wall Street, Mr. Norton points to a particular historical arrangement of twentieth-century global capital that provided possibilities for black social life in American civil society.[54] After the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing economic slump, "world capitalism retreated into the igloos of its nation-state economies and their associated empires."[55] During this period, the centre of *haute finance* began to shift from London to New York but Wall Street remained subordinate to the US government's New Deal, which directed investments toward black educational efforts in the South in order to secure and develop the national economy. It is this arrangement that the narrator jeopardizes when, driving through a former slave quarter, he and Mr. Norton encounter Jim Trueblood, "a sharecropper who had brought disgrace upon the black community" when he impregnated his own daughter.[56] The narrator is subsequently expelled and sent to New York City, his journey north mirroring the Great Migration between 1915 and 1960, during which over six million African Americans left the Jim

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[53] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 39.

[54] The ties between American finance and Tuskegee University can be traced through the school's history, reflecting an important relationship between the politics of racial progress and the financial interests of American capital. The normal school that became Tuskegee University was the invention of Lewis Adams, a former slave, and George W. Campbell, a banker, merchant and former slaveholder, based on their shared commitment to Black education efforts in the south. As a spokesman for Black "industrial" education, Booker T. Washington would develop a network of wealthy American philanthropists that included such illustrious figures of American finance as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller.

[55] Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 132; quoted in Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 238.

[56] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 46.

Crow south in search of social and economic freedom. Driven by agricultural mechanization in the rural south and employment opportunities in the northern and western industrial regions, the Great Migration challenged the basis of the Tuskegee institute, whose programs were in large part based on an agricultural economy. But these developments in American agriculture and industry must also be understood within the context of rising US hegemony, and the changing systemic conditions underlying American growth.

The second site of integration and expulsion appears in the guise of the Liberty Paints factory in New York, which represents the next institution of twentieth-century American civil society to meet its historical exhaustion as part of the US cycle of accumulation. Liberty Paints enjoys an exclusive contract with the US government, producing heavily symbolic "Optic White" paint for the White House. Like the university, the factory offers opportunities for black social life partly as a result of national and financial investments in the exploitation of black labour. Ostensibly engaged in anti-discriminatory hiring practices, Liberty Paints employs the narrator because he provides a source of cheap labour: facing taut labour markets, anti-discriminatory hiring policies enabled companies to reduce expenses and avoid the profit squeeze that rising worker militancy threatened. "They have a new racket around here," an office boy tells the narrator: "The wise guys firing the regular guys and putting on you colored boys. Pretty smart," he said. "That way they don't have to pay union wages."[57] Such hiring practices at Liberty Paints would suggest that the narrator now finds himself approaching the peak of the American century, the novel's timeline having progressed from the Great Depression, through the Great Migration, to the Great Acceleration of the postwar era.

[57] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 197.

And once again, it is the financial arrangements supporting the factory's economic vitality that the narrator appears to threaten, this time by fouling a shipment of "Optic White" due to leave for Washington. After botching the shipment the narrator is reassigned to the basement in a plot development that foreshadows his final subterranean entombment, but also offers an image of expulsion from the formal economy and the wage that characterizes the exhaustion of industrial manufacture in the late twentieth century. In the dark space of the basement, he meets the apprehensive and hot-tempered Lucius Brockway, who mutters to him furtively that they are the "machines inside the machine."[58] Here, Brockway invokes the slave relation wherein, in Marxist parlance, slaves are not identified with the variable capital of living labour power but with the fixed capital of dead labour embodied in the form of machinery. In this way, dispossession of the commodity labour power links the slave relation to unemployment in the novel, as both operate, approximately, as ascriptive processes of racialization tied to expulsion and abjection. It is telling, then, that when the two men get into a violent fight, Brockway sets off a chemical explosion that not only lands the narrator out of work but propels him entirely out of consciousness—an expulsion simultaneously economic and ontological.

The final site of integration and expulsion our narrator encounters arrives in the form of the Brotherhood, a fictional left political party modeled on the American Communist Party, and the third institution of twentieth-century American civil society to spiral into historical exhaustion in the novel.[59] Supported financially by the liberal intelligentsia, the Brotherhood offers the narrator a chance at public life through participation in party politics. Given a new

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[58] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 217.

[59] It is pertinent to add here that, as John Callahan has argued, Ellison's depiction of The Brotherhood represents not only the American Communist Party, but also the Democratic and Republican parties, supporting my claim that Ellison is interested in documenting the general exhaustion of the political party as a twentieth century political form. See "Chaos, Complexity and Possibility," 134. For a more recent and comprehensive account of the influence of Ellison's relationship with the communist left on *Invisible Man*, see Barbara Foley's *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's* Invisible Man (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

identity by Brother Jack, the narrator enjoys success with his speeches, and as the party increases its influence in Harlem he feels he is becoming "more human," able to "see sharp and clear and far down the dim corridor of history."[60] Embracing his new identity as a means to avoid the "disintegration" that threatens him, the narrator believes membership in the party grants him "a part in making the big decisions, of seeing through the mystery of how the country, the world, really operate[s]."[61] Having successfully harnessed the momentum generated by the narrator's speeches in Harlem, the Brotherhood then moves to contain the black radicalism developing in the city, and after being cautioned against pushing a "black agenda," the narrator is expelled from the Harlem office and sent to another office uptown. Drifting through the "black markets" of the informal economy one afternoon, the narrator witnesses a police shooting that sparks a riot, and in what might be read as the definitive expulsion of the novel, falls through an open manhole while being chased by black nationalists. They replace the cover, trapping him underground. Amid a convergence of unemployment, anti-black police violence and a spread of riots, the narrator drops from the radar of social life entirely. The novel thus links the narrator's ever-present fear of social death to the confinement and regulation of racialized surplus populations, and racialization emerges as a process entangled with developments in political economy that underwrite the rise and fall of US economic hegemony. In other words, it is not simply being embodied that is a problem, but the fact of being in history, caught up in its volatile unfolding.

Invisible Man formalizes this political-economic relationship to racial blackness in a series of black*outs*: situations that interrupt the progress of the narrator's *bildung* and formally disrupt the developmental narrative *telos* of the novel. In these moments of breakdown, italicized

[60] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 346.

[61] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 353-5.

surrealist passages in Ellison's prose conjure visions of the Middle Passage and highlight a play of tension between optimism and pessimism characteristic of the field of black studies. In an early passage, as the narrator is facing expulsion from the university, the inside of the campus church transforms into the hold of a slave ship:

> *Ha! a river of word-sounds filled with drowned passions, floating, Ha! with wrecks of unachievable ambitions and stillborn revolts, sweeping their ears, Ha! ranged stiff before me, necks stretched forward with listening ears, Ha! a-spraying the ceiling and a-drumming the dark-stained after rafter, that seasoned crossarm of tortuous timber mellowed in the kiln of a thousand voices.*[62]

These nightmarish musical passages accompany moments of blackout for the narrator, ontological ruptures in the narrative that resonate with Frantz Fanon's argument that, for those racialized as black, the Middle Passage "wiped out [their] metaphysics."[63] It is in the context of these blackouts that the narrator's treatment at the factory hospital following the explosion at Liberty Paints again raises the spectre of social death, as the grim events here gesture toward Orlando Patterson's three constituent elements of slavery: gratuitous violence, natal alienation and generalized dishonour.[64] The narrator awakens in a cage and is administered shock therapy without his consent, his imprisonment in confined space a "part of the treatment."[65] Unable to remember his name, his mother, or his place of birth, he is reduced to "blackness and

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[62] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 113.

[63] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 110.

[64] According to Patterson, "Slavery is the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons." See *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 13. Patterson maintains that social death, rather than forced work, is constitutive of slavery. As I want to show, however, it is less a matter of work *per se* than it is the dispossession of the commodity labour power that links the logic of slavery to the recomposition of American industry with the exhaustion of the US systemic cycle of accumulation.

[65] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 235.

bewilderment and pain."[66] Leaving the treatment facility, the subway train carries him as if crossing an ocean, as he is "moved now as against a current sweeping swiftly against me," and as "the train plunge[s]," he is "sucked under and out into late afternoon Harlem."[67] When he emerges onto Lennox Avenue, the sensation of drowning intensifies: "I saw myself going down, my legs watery beneath me."[68] As he begins to blackout again, two black people from the neighborhood catch him and carry him to safety under the watchful eye of the policeman "ordering the crowd to move on," their voices merging in erratically italicized staccato sentences that invoke scenes of post-Middle Passage collective survival on the plantation.[69] The final instance of surrealist prose follows the narrator's expulsion from the Brotherhood, when in the midst of the riot he falls through the open manhole into the blackness below, and in the thralls of a nightmarish vision, laments the "generations wasting upon the water."[70] These shifts in narrative form mark moments of transformation in his experience of racial blackness, as the weight of social death casts its shadow over the optimism of racial progress.

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In "The Fire Next Time," James Baldwin asks, "Do I really *want* to be integrated into a burning house?"[71] Calling into question the possibility of black emancipation in American civil society, Baldwin foregrounds what Sexton describes as "a tension emergent in the field of black studies … regarding the theoretical status of the concept of social death."[72] This tension lies at the heart

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[66] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 240.

[67] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 249-50.

[68] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 251.

[69] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 252.

[70] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 570.

[71] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 94.

[72] Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism," *In*Tensions 5 (2011), http://www.yorku.ca/intent/issue5/articles/pdfs/jaredsextonarticle.pdf.

of current conversations between two entangled tendencies in black studies: black optimism, a position associated most immediately with Fred Moten's critical output, but also with thinkers like Cornel West and Houston A. Baker Jr., which emphasizes the *experience* of blackness as testament to the vitality of black social life, and Afro-pessimism, a counter-tendency in black studies that stresses the *fact* of blackness as a marker of social death.[73] Black optimism underlines the improvisational and generative capacity of blackness, and indeed chimes with references to the black jazz tradition that appear throughout Ellison's novel. Drawing in part on black experimental music and literature, Moten argues blackness is a form of "stolen life" that is lived in and as "fugitive movement," an underground existence that is nevertheless irreducible to "whatever externally imposed social logic," since it precedes and exceeds "every enclosure."[74] Afro-pessimism, on the other hand, rejects all positive theories of black identity and affirmative political philosophies of black subjectivity. In Sexton's words, it is "an intellectual disposition … that posits a political ontology dividing the Slave from the world of the Human in a constitutive way," wherein "racial slavery" designates a "matrix of social, political and economic relations surviving the era of abolition." Despite their "dehiscence," as Sexton puts it, it would be reductive to cast this discussion in strictly binary terms. Indeed, in the course of his own reading of Moten, Sexton argues that the two tendencies are fundamentally entwined and imply one another: "Black optimism is not the negation of the negation that is afro-pessimism, just as black social life does not negate black social death by inhabiting it and vitalizing it. A living death is as much a death as it is a living."[75] At stake in my reading of *Invisible Man*, rather, is the

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[73] The term Afro-Pessimism is Frank B. Wilderson III's. See Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 58. It is important to note that neither black optimism nor Afro-pessimism represent consistent tendencies or schools of thought.

[74] Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness." *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2008): 179.

[75] Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death." What may have appeared to some as a divisive debate between Afro-pessimism and black optimism was only ever a difference of emphasis. Indeed, despite a "preference for the terms *life* and *optimism* over *death* and *pessimism*," Moten himself opens his highly influential essay "Blackness and

reproduction of this "relation of nonrelation"[76] as a form of continuity and recurrence over the course of the American century, bearing in mind Sexton's reminder that "one can account for historically varying instances of anti-blackness while maintaining the claim that slavery is here and now."[77]

Afro-pessimists contend that, in order to grasp the historicity of anti-blackness, we need to look beyond the wage relation to the racialized figure of the prison slave (and the prison slave-in-waiting). For Wilderson, the Gramscian figure of the formally "free" waged-worker cannot account for the gratuitous violence visited upon the black body, whose suffering is defined by a "relation of terror as opposed to a relation of hegemony."[78] This is because, according to Wilderson, Marxism expresses a "desire to democratize work and thus help to keep in place and insure the coherence of Reformation and Enlightenment foundational values of productivity and progress." It is therefore scandalized by "the Black subject's incommensurability with, or disarticulation of, Gramscian categories: work, progress, production, exploitation, hegemony, and historical self-awareness."[79] Whereas the Gramscian worker struggles against exploitation and alienation within the rational symbolic order of civil society, Wilderson argues, the slave suffers under the despotic irrationality of accumulation and fungibility. But Wilderson lets Gramsci stand in for Marxism *tout court*. Here is a resolutely humanist Marxism, one in which "the Gramscian subject, the worker, represents a demand that can indeed be satisfied by way of a

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Nothingness" with the claim that, "in the past decade, the most exciting and generative advance in black critical theory, which is to say critical theory, is the announcement and enactment of Afro-pessimism in the work of Frank B. Wilderson III and Jared Sexton." See Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (2013): 737-8.

[76] Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness," 749.

[77] Jared Sexton, "Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word," *Rhizomes* 29 (2016), http://www.rhizomes.net/issue29/pdf/sexton.pdf.

[78] Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal," *Social Justice* 30, no. 2 (2003): 22.

[79] Wilderson, "Prison Slave," 21.

successful war of position."[80] Wilderson demonstrates how the Gramscian grammar of suffering is predicated on the affirmation of wage labour, the "free" waged-worker and the institutions of civil society, all of which presuppose the conditions of black social death. Thus, Afro-pessimism's focus is the libidinal economy of anti-blackness, and the ontological position of the slave as a negative- or *non*-relationality against which the Enlightenment subject of Gramsci's humanist Marxism constitutes itself *qua* subject.

While this critique of the Gramscian theory of hegemony has been central to the development of Afro-Pessimist thought, the concept of social death can be read productively alongside and in relation to the Marxian critique of value, in which labour figures not as a humanist category to be liberated but a capitalist category to be abolished. Recent work in communization theory, for example, has sought to bridge Afro-pessimism with an analysis of the capitalist value-form by considering the process of racialization in relation to the production of surplus populations.[81] In this analysis, capital accumulation necessitates the expulsion of human labour from production, gradually dispossessing populations of the commodity labour power. For some theorists, this material process of abjection is what produces the abstraction "blackness" in an era of deindustrialization:

> When the commodity labour power no longer exists, the human container that would have possessed this labour power endures as an empty shell. All that is left is a physical residuum, an inert fleshy materiality that marks the lack of labour power, a purely

[80] Wilderson, "Prison Slave," 22.

[81] See, for example, Chris Chen, "The Limit Point of Capitalist Equality: Notes toward an Abolitionist Antiracism," *Endnotes* 3 (2013): 202-23, as well as a series of essays by the anonymous R.L., including "Wanderings of the Slave: Black Life and Social Death," *Mute*, June 5, 2013, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/wanderings-slave-black-life-and-social-death; "Inextinguishable Fire: Ferguson and Beyond," *Mute*, November 17, 2014, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/inextinguishable-fire-ferguson-and-beyond; and "Notes on Racial Domination," in *Bad Feelings*, ed. Louis Hartnoll, Lucy Killoran, Robyn Minogue, and Sophie Carapetian (London: Book Works, 2016).

> physical existence without a subjectivity. The human container is desocialised, or in other words, a thing that is without any social utility. Ultimately this purely physical existence is reduced to mere appearance, in which the phenotypical attribute comes to mediate and determine the form of social existence of this human container once it is integrated into the class relation. Consequently, "blackness" appears as a representation of the lack of labour power, its positive instantiation. The phenotypical attribute "blackness" comes to naturalise this lack as an inherent attribute of the human container itself whereas it is merely the social representation of the absence of labour power.[82]

This value-theoretical account of racialized surplus populations complements Arrighi's account of the integration of African Americans into the industrial economy during the rise of US hegemony, especially when considered in light of subsequent developments in black unemployment and incarceration rates.[83] The historical movement Arrighi traces from industrial expansion to financialization provocatively maps onto Loïc Wacquant's periodizations of slavery and its functional surrogates, the third and fourth of which track the movement of African Americans from the ghetto of the Northern industrial metropolis, defined by "the conjoint urbanization and proletarianization of African-Americans from the Great Migration of 1914–30 to the 1960s," to "the novel institutional complex formed by the remnants of the dark ghetto and the carceral apparatus" in which African Americans feature as "fixed surplus labour."[84] Moreover, the fortunes of both the Civil Rights and Black Power variants of twentieth-century black affirmationist politics are also tied to this history of American economic hegemony. If "the

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[82] R.L., "Inextinguishable Fire."

[83] For a sustained examination of mass incarceration as a governmental apparatus for the management of racialized surplus populations in the post-industrial era, see Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

[84] Loïc Wacquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the 'Race Question' in the US," *New Left Review* 13 (2002): 41-2.

century's apex of black radicalism" in the late 1960s marks "the beginning of the end of the short American century,"[85] as Sexton argues, this trajectory also mirrors the curve of black economic "progress" after World War II. The historicity of anti-blackness is thus anchored to the US cycle of accumulation, while racial blackness assumes distinct forms of appearance in particular historical periods over the *longue durée* of capital accumulation.

It is precisely through the systemic movement from integration to expulsion that racial blackness *appears* in *Invisible Man*. Wall Street finances the unnamed college modeled after the Tuskegee Institute, while Liberty Paints enjoys an exclusive contract with the White House, and the Brotherhood is funded by sympathetic members of a white propertied class from Manhattan. The obsolescence of the institutions to which finance capital, the state and the bourgeoisie attach themselves in the American century indicates new historical roles to come for each of them, but also reflects a declining demand for labour. This is what the narrator means when he says, in the novel's conclusion, "Thus I have come a long way and returned and boomeranged a long way from the point in society toward which I originally aspired."[86] In this way, the novel recognizes the persistent precarity of the black subject in a capitalist economy driven by logics that integrate and expel as the cycles of profitability dictate.

Each institution featured in the novel is predicated on the affirmation of labour and the historical promise of a social-democratic coalitional subject that will become increasingly untenable with the stagnation of American growth and the historical subjectivities it fleetingly made possible. Where the speaking subject of Ellison's narrative would otherwise substantiate categories of exclusion into positive identities, the "I" of Ellison's novel appears negatively, nameless and de-socialized. More than a meditation on the libidinal economy of the symbolic

[85] Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death."

[86] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 573.

and gratuitous violence that Afro-pessimists argue is constitutive of black ontology, *Invisible Man* offers an experiential analogue to what Clover has called "the political economy of social death," emphasizing its defining characteristics as "automation, weakening profits, and the Last Hired/First Fired policies that ejected vast numbers of African-Americans from the urban industrial jobs which had drawn them during the great migrations."[87] James Boggs, a black autoworker from Detroit, envisioned a similar future. In 1963, he published *The American Revolution*, arguing that the capitalist tendency to automate production would create a population of "surplus people who are the expendables of automation."[88] Making the dynamic between automation and racial blackness explicit, the final surrealist passage of the novel ends with the narrator's vision of "a robot, an iron man, whose iron legs clanged doomfully as it moved," before he awakens "in the blackness."[89]

A political economy of social death is demonstrated most substantially in the novel through the character of Tod Clifton, a talented organizer who leaves the Brotherhood in protest of their disingenuous stance on race to hawk dancing Sambo dolls in Manhattan. Clifton's death at the hands of police appears to anticipate the moment when American industry will give way to a financialized economy, governed by a post-welfare security state whose purpose, it seems, has been increasingly directed toward the violent policing of a growing and racialized surplus population. As Sianne Ngai notes, Clifton's puppet show, in which the dolls appear to dance of their own volition, registers "the increasingly ambiguous status of human agency in a Fordist

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[87] Joshua Clover, "Baltimore Riot. Baltimore Commune?" *Verso*, April 25, 2016, http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2614-baltimore-riot-baltimore-commune.

[88] James Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963), 36.

[89] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 570.

era."[90] For Ngai, "it is the cultural representation of the African-American that most visibly harnesses the affective qualities of liveliness, effusiveness, spontaneity, and zeal to a disturbing racial epistemology, and makes these variants of 'animatedness' function as bodily (hence self-evident) signs of the raced subject's naturalness or authenticity."[91] Ngai draws attention to the way in which Clifton must resort to a positive, racializing and identity-affirming performance-based work in an illicit economy in order to survive. Insofar as *Invisible Man* situates the process of racialization within the context of Fordist automation, and anticipates the subsequent shift to a performance-driven post-Fordist economy, Ellison's novel also allows us to see Clifton's death as a consequence of his expulsion from the formal economy and the wage. Race, having a material function for capital, emerges in the novel as an economically modulated demographic rather than an identity category that precedes mediation. Racialization figures as a feature of exploitation tied to the recomposition of American industry, while exploitation becomes properly legible only when read across the history of racial domination. As such, *Invisible Man* affirms Stuart Hall's assertion that "race is the modality by which class is 'lived,' the medium through which class relations are experienced, [and] the form in which it is appropriated and 'fought through'."[92]

By way of concluding my reading of *Invisible Man*, let us turn to the riot that erupts in the wake of Clifton's death. The periodic frequency of the riot, as Clover has argued elsewhere, follows the Arrighian logic by which capital moves cyclically from phases of circulation through periods of production and back to circulation (as in, for example, the contemporary reign of finance). Mapping the historical predominance of the riot onto the periods of mercantilism and

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[90] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 91.

[91] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 95.

[92] Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980), 342.

financialization that bookend industrial expansion, he argues that the riot is "a political antagonism that erupts in the sphere of circulation *and is proper to it*."[93] Unlike the strike, which occurs in the sphere of production, and where workers appear in their capacity *as workers*, the riot intervenes in the sphere of circulation and, rather than affirming worker identity, proceeds instead through the negation of the commodity relation and the world as it is form-determined by value. The prevalence of looting in riots typifies this logic, and the riot of *Invisible Man* is no different, featuring "a crowd of men and women carrying cases of beer, cheese, chains of linked sausage, watermelons, sacks of sugar, hams, cornmeal, fuel lamps."[94] Like the surrealist passages that suspend the narrative *telos* of the *bildungsroman*, the riot erupts in "a sudden and brilliant suspension of time."[95] What fills the void opened up by the riot, however, is not a sense of stasis but one of radical negativity and possibility. This is not to suggest that the riot is somehow impervious to capture; indeed, the Brotherhood helps orchestrate the riot in the novel to meet its own political ends. And yet, as this reading of *Invisible Man* suggests, it is in the arena of circulation that the question of politics will play out in the era of finance, as the site of struggle shifts from the factory floor to the streets. The novel offers no moral argument for the riot as a political form, but instead attests to the structural and cyclical shifts that will underwrite its proliferation in the decades to come. In the words of the narrator, whose lived experiences embody the history of such abstract processes, "This is not prophecy, but description."[96]

This is the shape the arc of African American experience takes over the course the American century, as shifting experiences of racial blackness first sustain then undermine the

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[93] Joshua Clover, "World-Systems Riot" (lecture, University of California Davis, Davis, CA, November 30, 2012). This lecture is an early presentation of the research that will form the basis for his theory of riot in *Riot. Strike. Riot: The New Era of Uprisings* (New York: Verso, 2016).

[94] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 555.

[95] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 535.

[96] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 577.

historical foundations of black *bildung* and the African American novel. *Invisible Man* is a narrative of changing circumstances for racialized people in the postwar US, a chronicle of black precarity that captures the possibilities and limitations of African American literary subjectivity in the twentieth century. The novel charts a series of contradictions tied to the movement of integration and expulsion that characterizes the US cycle of accumulation. The narrator knows that "there is a death in the smell of spring," since the horizon of the US cycle of accumulation appears, in the end, to promise only social death:

> There's a stench in the air, which, from this distance underground, might be the smell either of death or of spring—I hope spring. But don't let me trick you, there *is* a death in the smell of spring and in the smell of thee as in the smell of me. And if nothing more, invisibility has taught my nose to classify the stenches of death.[97]

It cannot be any wonder, then, that he becomes "ill of affirmation," as his optimism meets a pessimistic end at every turn.[98] Even as he decides, having told his story, that "the hibernation is over," and that it is finally time to "shake off the old skin and come up for breath," he understands that he is "no less invisible without it."[99] In this way, Ellison anticipates the exhaustion of industrial expansion in the postwar period, which registers in the novel as a crisis both of narrative form and of an affirmative anti-racist politics. The novel thus suggests that the history of literary forms and political possibilities are similarly tied to cycles of profitability, and that in the long American century some forms of invisibility are socially necessary. As the narrator concludes, "there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible

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[97] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 580.

[98] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 573.

[99] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 580-81.

role to play."[100] And here we see, too, the constitutive role of racialized unemployment and anti-black police violence in a post-industrial economy, and thus the necessity of an abolitionist anti-racism that is also categorically anti-capitalist.

As I demonstrate in the following section, this dialectic of affirmation and negation characterizes the early postwar American novel in additional ways. Like the tension between optimism and pessimism that animates the history of Black political horizons in Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the contradictory status of worker identity grounds the cycle of class struggle in Vonnegut's *Player Piano*. What does this period of transition entail for women, for gendered experiences of precarity, and for the horizons of feminist politics? Focusing on "the relationship between the post-World War II economy and women's domestic realm," Susan Thistle details how women in the early postwar period also experienced a shift in their relation to the formal economy and the wage from one of exclusion to one of integration, which can be read productively alongside Arrighi's model of the rise of US hegemony.[101] In what follows, I situate Vonnegut's novel in relation to postwar developments in the reproduction of the capitalist class relation, and especially the significance of automation and relative surplus value production for a society founded on labour. I conclude with a discussion of how rising productivity in the novel effects the gendered division of labour and the feminized sphere of social reproduction, and how *Player Piano* anticipates the exhaustion of a cycle of struggle tied to postwar industrial expansion and the emergence of new political horizons in its wake.

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[100] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 581.

[101] Thistle, *From Marriage to Market*, 37.

Cleaning House

"A corpse rules society – the corpse of labour."[102] The gothic opening line of the "Manifesto Against Labour," published at the close of the twentieth century by the German radical magazine *Krisis*, conjures the spectral presence of dead labour that haunts our precarious present, a moment Fredric Jameson has recently described as "the time of the desert of unemployment."[103] For Krisis-Gruppe as for Jameson, contemporary unemployment results from the tendential expulsion of living labour from the formal economy and the wage via rising productivity levels, a process of technological ratcheting referred to as automation in the conventional shorthand. In a 2013 study conducted by the Department of Engineering and Science at Oxford University, Carl Frey and Michael Osborne suggest that as much as 47 per cent of current work in the US is at risk of automation over the next two decades.[104] Citing the study in a review of two recent works that explore the revolutionary transformation of work vis-à-vis the development of technology—Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee's *The Second Machine Age* (2014), and Tyler Cowen's *Average Is Over* (2014)—John Lanchester envisions the dystopian future that capitalist automation portends: "Imagine an economy in which the 0.1 per cent own the machines, the rest of the 1 per cent manage their operation, and the 99 per cent either do the remaining scraps of unautomatable work, or are unemployed. That is the world implied by developments in productivity and automation."[105]

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[102] Krisis Gruppe, "Manifesto Against Labour," *Krisis*, December 31, 1999, http://www.krisis.org/1999/manifesto-against-labour/.

[103] Fredric Jameson, "On the Power of the Negative," *Mediations* 28, no. 1 (2014): 71.

[104] Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael A. Osborne, "The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation?" *Oxford Martin School*, September 17, 2013, https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The_Future_of_Employment.pdf.

[105] John Lanchester, "The Robots Are Coming," *London Review of Books* 37, no. 5 (2015), https://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n05/john-lanchester/the-robots-are-coming. See also Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies* (New York:

But concern about what Keynes called "technological unemployment" far predates the percentage-based language of Occupy's political slogans.[106] The early Frankfurt School economist Friedrich Pollock imagined a very similar future in his 1956 work, *Automation*:

> The principle of automation is simply the principle of conveyer-belt rationalisation pushed to its logical conclusion. We may see an ever-growing proportion of the population tuned into a sort of "surplus population." … We shall expect to find an *economic staff*—the real masters of both machines and men [*sic*]—at the apex of the social pyramid. Only this relatively small group, associated with its "corps of officers," will be in a position to take the major decisions on all questions of economic policy. With the help of electronic computers they will be able at any time to secure all the up-to-date information that is needed to reach such decisions.[107]

Following Carl Freedman's claim that we read science fiction novels as historical novels, I want to examine the horizons of the Fordist imaginary in Kurt Vonnegut's 1952 debut novel, *Player Piano*.[108] By Fordism, I mean to note the historical relationship between capital and labour whereby the reproduction of the latter increasingly came to depend upon that of the former, a relation Jeff Derksen has described as "simultaneously stable yet eroding."[109] Written during the dizzying heights of Fordist production in the US, *Player Piano* depicts a fully automated American society of the future that looks a lot like the world Pollock saw on the horizon and Lanchester worries is about to arrive: a dystopian cityscape divided between mechanized

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Norton, 2014); and Tyler Cowen, *Average Is Over: Powering America beyond the Age of the Great Stagnation* (New York: Plume, 2014).

[106] John Maynard Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," in *Essays in Persuasion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 325.

[107] Friedrich Pollock, *Automation* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 82-3.

[108] See Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000).

[109] Jeff Derksen, *The Vestiges* (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2013), 125.

production plants, a ruling managerial class of technocrats, and masses of workers rendered redundant through the development of what Marx in the *Grundrisse* calls the "general intellect."[110] In the novel, structural unemployment has not accompanied an economic downturn: make-work projects and a massive standing army absorb surplus populations, productive forces having developed to support an expansive welfare state. Even as the novel describes the expulsion of labour from the production process, it foresees no crisis of accumulation. Its dilemma is rather, as Heather J. Hicks notes, that the automation of work becomes "a metaphysical problem."[111]

Vonnegut's plot follows his protagonist, Paul Proteus, through a revolution that seeks a return to dignified labour. Representatives of a Fordist imaginary, the characters in the novel appear unable to imagine an automated future in which human beings might enjoy increased leisure-time. The novel focuses instead on the problem of what I call *capital density*, wherein the replacement of workers with machines constitutes an impasse that is at once social, historical, political, and narratological. And yet, insofar as the revolutionary struggle for meaningful work proves self-defeating and ultimately fails, the novel also gestures—albeit obliquely—toward a politics that takes as its horizon not the affirmation of the working-class but the abolition of work: that is, the abolition of capitalist categories of labour, and, I will argue, race and gender. In other words, *Player Piano* suggests that the intensified production of relative surplus value that underwrites capital accumulation in the Fordist period threatens to dissolve a system of social reproduction in which "the reproduction of labour-power, and hence of the proletariat as class, is

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[110] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973), 706.

[111] Hicks, *Culture of Soft Work,* 15.

integrated with the circuit of self-presupposition of capital."[112] Crucially, it does so in a moment immediately preceding the crisis of the Fordist compromise between capital and labour and, like Ellison's novel, anticipates a restructured capital-labour relation that will occasion a shift from a politics of affirmation to a politics of abolition.

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The automated society of *Player Piano* runs according to the dictates of "EPIPAC," a mid-century vision of a massive supercomputer designed to oversee a vast regime of commodity accumulation and to regulate the labour market accordingly, hyper-rationalizing production and consumption to maximize economic efficiency. The novel unfolds with the steady, durational rhythms of Fordist temporality, building toward its climax over dozens of brief chapters that together comprise the "finished product," so to speak, while the opening lines of *Player Piano* map the city of Ilium spatially according to a highly specialized division of labour: "Ilium, New York, is divided into three parts. In the northwest are the managers and engineers and civil servants and a few professional people; in the northeast are the machines; and in the south, across the Iroquois River, is the area known locally as Homestead, where almost all the people live."[113] Following a Third World War from which the US has emerged as sole global hegemon, an elite cadre of technocrats who oversaw wartime production has seized control of the national economy, managing a vast Fordist accumulation regime using Keynesian welfare state policies and the police in equal measure, and reproducing a rigid class system according to an I.Q. level test scheme. After an initial period of rioting, the state enforced anti-sabotage legislation whereby all unemployed people are automatically investigated as potential "saboteurs,"

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[112] Endnotes, "Afterword," *Endnotes* 1 (2008): 212.

[113] Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano* (New York: Dial Press, 2006), 1.

disciplining the labour force into accepting the new order.[114] For most people other than the relatively few engineers with doctoral degrees lucky enough to get a managerial position within the organization, it's a lifetime in the Army or doing busy work with the Reconstruction and Reclamation Corps, known colloquially as the Reeks and Wrecks. "The separation is sociological," as Jerome Klinkowitz explains in *The Vonnegut Effect*. "The managers and engineers live here; the machines, which scarcely need to be tended as everything has become automatized, are over there; and shoved off to the side are the people who have no defining identity at all—they used to be the workers, but in the new society this role no longer exists."[115]

The social geography of the novel further divides along gendered lines of reproductive labour and racialized lines of exclusion, spatialized through the nuclear family and the suburban home at the national level and through the First, Second, and Third world-system at the international level. This categorical sorting of populations according to economic function highlights not only the gendered and racialized dimensions of Fordist accumulation, but also a series of fundamental limits to automation. I will return to the question of racialization below, but I want to focus for a moment on the relationship between gender and rising productivity levels. Thistle connects early postwar developments in gendered experiences of domestic labour to technology-driven gaps opening up in the workday, but notes that legally enforced cultural institutions such as marriage prevented women from escaping the confines of domestic work:

> That most women in the 1950s and early 1960s put the time they gained into further housework, improving the care of their families and homes, highlights once again a key aspect of women's household work. Such work involved not only a set of chores but also a way of organizing and supporting the performance of these tasks, through the gender

[114] Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, 233.

[115] Jerome Klinkowitz, *The Vonnegut Effect* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004): 38.

> division of labor, in which women were expected to focus on domestic concerns under their husbands' control and support. Marriage was the central institution stabilizing this arrangement, reinforced by many laws and cultural practices.[116]

Player Piano registers what Thistle calls "the persistence of the gender division of labor"[117] with the character of Wanda Hagstrohm, who lives in the M-17, a postwar housing development loaded with technologies that reduce the amount of time spent on reproductive activities, and yet her "spare time" is spent minding her children. Maya Gonzalez and Jeanne Neton note that while the introduction of reproductive technologies like washing machines reduced the amount of time spent on domestic activities, "every spare moment had to be used to increase the standards of reproduction: clothes were washed more often, meals became ever more varied and healthy, and most importantly, childcare became … all-consuming."[118] The gendered labour of social reproduction in particular resists automation not simply because reproduction might always require a degree of human care, but because reproductive activities cannot be fully subjected to abstract Newtonian time. As Gonzalez and Neton put it, "You cannot look after children *more quickly*: they have to be attended to 24 hours a day."[119] And while recent developments have seen robotics introduced in elder care facilities, infant learning, and even laundry sorting, the fact of reproduction's resistance to efficiency measures means "there is always this remainder that has to remain outside of market-relations, and the question of who has to perform it in the family will always be, to say the least, a conflictual matter."[120]

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[116] Thistle, *From Marriage to Market*, 41.

[117] Thistle, *From Marriage to Market*, 32.

[118] Maya Gonzalez and Jeanne Neton, "The Logic of Gender: On the Separation of Spheres and the Process of Abjection," in *Contemporary Marxist Theory: A Reader*, ed. Andrew Pendakis, Jeff Diamanti, Nicholas Brown, Josh Robinson, and Imre Szeman (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 168.

[119] Gonzalez and Neton, "Logic of Gender," 169.

[120] Gonzalez and Neton, "Logic of Gender," 169.

Highlighting the primacy of the division of labour through the spatial tectonics of the city of Ilium, *Player Piano* situates the American society of the future in relation to the unfolding development of productive forces. As Adam Smith argues, mechanization—the invention of machinery that increases productivity—follows the division of labour; only after the labour process has been broken up into specialized components is its mechanization possible.[121] But if an earlier stage of rationalization saw the introduction of the mechanized assembly line, then automation, as a further development in this same process, expels living labour from production. This is what Marx calls a "rising organic composition of capital."[122] Before the events of the novel, America's engineers and managers were faced with a depleted workforce during wartime, and turned to automation to keep factory production apace. Through the scientific development of automated machinery, they provided the technological advantage to win the war. Ten years later, the automated society of the novel celebrates technical "know-how"[123] as the cornerstone of American prosperity, despite the fact that scientific knowledge has displaced the great majority of workers.

With the development of "the general intellect," which Marx describes in the *Grundrisse* as "the power of knowledge, objectified," the worker "steps to the side of production."[124] Automation requires on the one hand a deskilled workforce of interchangeable labourers, and on the other bourgeoning service and administrative sectors that absorb technological unemployment and oversee commodity exchange respectively, as labour moves from the site of production to circulation. And yet the novel imagines neither a post-work society nor a crisis of

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[121] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, eds. R.H. Campbell, A.S. Skinner and W.B. Todd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976): 14-22.

[122] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 318.

[123] Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, 1.

[124] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 705-6.

accumulation, but an extreme form of Keynesian management of surplus capital and surplus populations. In an ironic *deus ex machina*, technological developments in production resolve the logic of production's own internal contradiction, namely that capitalism produces a scarcity of work amid an abundance of commodities. Here, the ghost in the machine—the uncanny agency of automated production—is nothing other than the spectre of dead labour that haunts it, like the player piano of the novel's title. For Iliumites, the primary issue is the meaninglessness of busy work, and instead of a crisis of accumulation, there emerges a crisis of human meaning and a corresponding struggle for a return to meaningful work.

In this sense, *Player Piano* participates in that now familiar tradition of the critique of mass society, an index of social dissatisfaction that determines the form struggle takes in the novel. This is the world of Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1964), of false needs and unfreedom, boredom and monotony, passivity and homogeneity. For Marcuse, technology-driven mass production and consumption operates as a disciplinary system: "Technological rationality reveals its political character as it becomes the great vehicle of better domination, creating a truly totalitarian universe in which society and nature, mind and body are kept in a permanent mobilization for the defense of this universe."[125] A narrative definitively of its historical moment, "*Player Piano* seems to be another entry in that now clichéd category of 1950s middle-class representations of bourgeois *ennui* or social doldrums," as Robert Tally Jr. notes.[126] Take, for example, Wanda's husband, Edgar R. B. Hagstrohm, described as "statistically average in every respect save for the number of his initials." Edgar and Wanda live in "a postwar development of three thousand dream houses for three thousand families with

[125] Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London: Sphere Books, 1972): 28.

[126] Robert Tally Jr., *Kurt Vonnegut and the American Novel: A Postmodern Iconography* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 8.

presumably identical dreams." Their home—the M-17 model—and the gadgets it is filled with as well has their car are "all paid for by regular deductions from Edgar's R&RC pay check." Edgar has "a *complete* security package," and his "standard of living is constantly rising." All his earnings are efficiently allotted for him according to calculations made by machines, and he receives a small amount of "take-home pay—cigarette money, recreation money, small luxury money that the machines let him have."[127] He has no consumer choice, of course, a postwar sentiment that will later prove vital for the capitalist restructuring of the late-twentieth century. Most importantly for the plot, Edgar feels a profound sense of alienation in his job with the Reeks and Wrecks, and his desire for a more authentic existence is indicative of a general sense of social dissatisfaction among Iliumites that eventually leads to a struggle for the liberation and self-organization of labour.

This movement expresses itself contradictorily in the novel, as a struggle both within and against capital. According to Theorié Communiste, it is through the process of integration that the reproduction of capital and labour power forms an "organic system," and the affirmation of labour becomes at once the affirmation of capital.[128] The novel captures this "organic" relationship between capital and labour in references to the historical integration of the two in the form of the nuclear family. As Paul remarks, "he supposed he could only have come to this moment, this living room, into the presence of Anita. It was an appalling thought, to be so well-integrated into the machinery of society and history as to be able to move in only one plane, and along one line."[129] Struggle in the novel moves toggles between the collective self-management of labour, and, at its most radical horizon, the refusal of work and the sabotage of machinery.

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[127] Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, 161-6.

[128] Theorié Communiste, "Theorié Communiste responds," *Aufheben* 13 (2005), https://libcom.org/library/aufheben/aufheben-13-2005/theorie-communiste-responds.

[129] Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, 35-6.

Paul's college friend Ed Finnerty abandons his job and teams up with the preacher Lasher to form The Ghost Shirt Society, a revolutionary cell who "propose that men and women be returned to work as controllers of machines, and that the control of people by machines be curtailed."[130] As part of their plan, Paul is arrested and put on trial for treason, but rioters sack the courthouse and general insurrection ensues. The Ghost Shirt Society plans to sabotage some machines but to seize most others so that they can redefine and redistribute labour, but the majority of people want simply to destroy the dead labour that rules their society. The next day, however, the same people immediately set about rebuilding the same machines that put them out of work, setting in motion the same process all over again with the very act of labour. The Ghost Shirt Society levels a critique of rationalized planning, putting capitalist production into question, but cannot see that labour itself is a capitalist category tending toward its own superfluity.

The novel dramatizes the historico-logical decay of what Theorié Communiste call "programmatism," as the struggle of labour to affirm itself as a class both within and against capital collapses with the disarticulation of the capital-labour relation:

> Generally speaking we could say that programmatism is defined as a theory and practice of class struggle in which the proletariat finds, in its drive toward liberation, the fundamental elements of a future social organisation which becomes the *programme to be realised*. This revolution is thus the affirmation of the proletariat, whether as a dictatorship of the proletariat, workers' councils, the liberation of work, a period of transition, the withering of the state, generalised self-management, or a "society of associated producers." Programmatism is not simply a theory—it is above all the practice

[130] Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, 302.

> of the proletariat, in which the rising strength of the class (in unions and parliaments, organisationally, in terms of the relations of social forces or of a certain level of consciousness regarding "the lessons of history") is positively conceived of as a stepping-stone towards revolution and communism.[131]

The struggle of the novel fails not only as revolution but also as revolutionary possibility: neither the refusal of work nor its liberation and self-organization retain their logical consistency once capital and labour decouple. As the dynamics of capitalist social reproduction begin to break down in the postwar period, there occurs what Aaron Benanav and John Clegg have called "a *crisis of the reproduction of the capital-labor relation itself*."[132] Benanav and Clegg develop their argument through a careful reading of Chapter Twenty Five of Marx's *Capital* and what Marx calls "the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation,"[133] which charts the general movement of constant over variable capital as it is written into the most basic coding of capital over time. This movement characterizes the historical and logical trajectory of the proletariat itself, which Benanav and Clegg describe as a "class in transition, a working class tending to become a class excluded from work."[134] As they summarize, "On the one hand, people in capitalist social relations are reduced to workers. On the other hand, they *cannot be workers* since, by working, they undermine the conditions of possibility of their own existence."[135] The novel bears the mark of this contradiction, sustained as an aesthetic object both in its commodity form and by an idea of aesthetic autonomy that gestures to a world beyond the value form.

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[131] Theorié Communiste, "Much Ado about Nothing," *Endnotes* 1 (2008): 155-156.

[132] Aaron Benanav and John Clegg, "Misery and Debt: On the Logic and History of Surplus Populations and Surplus Capital," in *Contemporary Marxist Theory: A Reader*, ed. Andrew Pendakis, Jeff Diamanti, Nicholas Brown, Josh Robinson, and Imre Szeman (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 592.

[133] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), 798.

[134] Benanav and Clegg, "Misery and Debt," 593.

[135] Benanav and Clegg, "Misery and Debt," 592-3.

Suggestively, postwar mass-produced paperbacks appear in *Player Piano* as both a means of escapism, and as inspiration for Paul's political awakening. If the novel's horizon gestures toward the possibility of a post-capitalist future, it is a gesture into darkness, a "placeholder" for the missed moment of transition between a "fallen world" and "a future social order grounded on labour in the form of value and hence on reproduction of the class relation."[136]

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A quintessentially Fordist vision of post-Fordism, *Player Piano*, it turns out, is both of its time and of the future, a temporal slippage that the novel signals via its uneasy position between modernism and postmodernism. Caught up in the swirl of a great transition, the novel registers the historical limits of a politics of affirmation predicated on a positive conception of worker identity. It is not simply the gradual elimination of work through automation that is at stake, then, but what Moishe Postone describes as a distinction between "a critique of capitalism from the standpoint of labour" and "a critique of labour in capitalism."[137] And yet the novel is ultimately unable to transcend this horizon, stuck as it is within a workerist conceptual framework of the Fordist factory floor, even as it anticipates the erosion of the material basis of workerism and the historical eclipse of both the workers' movement and of work itself. Nevertheless, *Player Piano* registers the shifting structure of class composition and the coming crisis of the reproduction of the class relation that prefigures the end of the American century, which features here as an unfolding process of integration and disintegration of the reproductive circuits of capital and labour.

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[136] Here, I am borrowing language from Daniel Spaulding's account of the relationship between the politics of programmatism and artistic modernism. See "Value-Form and Avant-Garde," *Mute*, March 27, 2014, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/value-form-and-avant-garde.

[137] Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 29.

Player Piano thus anticipates a series of interrelated problematics that result from a crisis in the reproduction of the capital-labour relation: the gendered labour of social reproduction and the racialization of unemployment, as I discuss throughout this dissertation, and the emergence of a "feminized," post-Fordist service economy that I address further in subsequent chapters. Along with the barbers and bartenders whose vocations have not been subsumed by automation, the future society of the novel retains feminized forms of clerical work despite the distinct possibility of their automation, highlighting the way gender relations persist with women's entry into the work force. The feminization of work that *Player Piano* documents also threatens traditional notions of masculinity, as the professional managerial class in the novel see the rise of what Hicks calls "the culture of soft work" as an "infantalization of once free-thinking men."[138] At the same time, capitalist restructuring has seen previously waged reproductive activities like childcare foisted back onto women, as examples of what Gonzalez and Neton call "the abject."[139] The abject, in their formulation, points to those reproductive activities once naturalized as women's work that were denaturalized by becoming waged—often by the state, or in an extended sense through the Fordist family wage and institutional support systems for domestic labour—only to be "cast off" through austerity and privatization.[140] With rising productivity levels, the gendered labour of reproduction undergoes technological developments in the home, but also confronts the consequences of a crisis of profitability that follows in the wake of the long boom. In this light, class *and* gender appear not as categories to affirm in the face of rising precarity, but as external constraints that impose themselves from outside.

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[138] Hicks, *Culture of Soft Work*, 29.

[139] Gonzalez and Neton, "Logic of Gender," 169.

[140] Gonzalez and Neton, "Logic of Gender," 169-74.

The novel also registers the historical relationship between race, precarity and unemployment that features in *Invisible Man*, as well as the parallel play of affirmation and negation in the history of challenges to anti-black racism. The United Nations definitions of a First, Second, and Third World developed after the Second World War effectively models an exclusion of the global south from the Eastern and Western blocs of accumulation, wherein racialized people in the Third World occupy a kind of negative ontological space understood as pre-capitalist social forms. In the novel, the visiting Shah of Bratpuhr, "spiritual leader of 6,000,000 people somewhere else,"[141] is given a tour of America by Dr. Ewing J. Halyard, an "interpreter of America to provincial and ignorant notables from the backwaters of civilization."[142] All foreign potentates who visit America are welcomed in order to open up new export markets for American commodities, as their "common denominator was that their people represented untapped markets for America's stupendous industrial output."[143] The Shah calls the "average man"—whether a soldier or a member of the Reeks and Wrecks—*Takaru*, which is the word for *slave* in his language, causing Halyard a great deal of stress as he repeatedly attempts to correct the Shah's misinterpretation of "citizen" with little success.[144]

Given the way in which racialization in the novel functions as a process by which populations are situated outside history—an expulsion from social life into negative Third World space—the threat for those in the First World who are being expelled from the formal economy and the wage is that they will become no different from those racialized others, the *Takaru* in the global south. Racialization can be therefore understood to operate here most immediately in the

[141] Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, 65.

[142] Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, 22.

[143] Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, 115-6.

[144] Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, 21.

form of the expulsion of labour from the production process, but more fundamentally as a position outside any historical narrative *telos* of development associated with national citizenship in an advanced economy. The anxieties of unemployment and superfluity in the novel are in this light essentially indicative of a fear of *becoming black*, where blackness names the form of appearance of the dispossession of the commodity labour-power, either as slavery or unemployment. As one of Vonnegut's characters puts it, the machines are slaves, and "anybody that competes with slaves becomes a slave."[145] Both *Player Piano* and *Invisible Man* envisage the automation of the production process as an ascription of superfluity to a segment of the population, so that expulsion from the formal economy and the wage assumes the role of racialization under conditions of deindustrialization.

* * *

This chapter has examined narrative representations of racialized, gendered and classed forms of precarity as they developed in the early years of rising US hegemony. Both of these novels address shifting historical circumstances in the Golden Age, drawing out the consequences of these changes for politics. Ellison and Vonnegut anticipate a crisis in the reproduction of the class relation that will signal the exhaustion of industrial expansion and inaugurate the age of US decline. These narratives encode a series of contradictions tied to the movement of integration and expulsion that characterizes the US cycle of accumulation over the American century, which register at the level of narrative form as a tension between affirmative and abolitionist political horizons. In the following chapter, I turn to the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks, John Ashbery, Amiri Baraka and Diane di Prima to examine the experiences of racialized and gendered precarity in the 1960s and '70s, as the postwar phase of material expansion reaches its saturation

[145] Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, 280-1.

point and enters into protracted crisis. Charting the emergence of a "riot poetics" during the brief history of the long, hot summers, Chapter Two continues to explore the unfolding relationship between cycles of accumulation and cycles of struggle as it is taken up in avant-garde poetics at the end of the long boom.

CHAPTER TWO

Long Hot Summer: Riot Poetics at the End of the Long Boom

Calling out around the world,
Are you ready for a brand new beat?
Summer's here and the time is right,
For dancing in the street.
— Martha & The Vandellas, "Dancing in the Street"

These are transitional years and the dues
will be heavy.
— Diane di Prima, "Revolutionary Letter #10"

George Kent's biography of twentieth-century African American poet Gwendolyn Brooks, *A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks*, mentions in passing that Brooks's poem "Boys. Black." situates itself in the wake of the "long, hot summers" of the late 1960s, an expression that, as Kent notes, "during the riot years implied the destruction of aspects of an ignoring economy."[1] As this chapter demonstrates, the riot—and the seasonal leitmotif of the long, hot summer—is in fact central to Brooks's work and to the culture of the period more broadly. Appearing first in the August 1972 issue of *Ebony*, "Boys. Black." suggests that black freedom struggles in the 1970s still carry the flame lit during the riotous summers that engulfed cities across America during the latter half of the 1960s and smoldered, occasionally flaring up, at the dawn of the new decade:

Boys. Black. Black Boys.
Be brave to battle for your breath and bread.
Your heads hold clocks that strike the new time of day.
Your hearts are
legislating Summer Weather now.
Cancel Winter.[2]

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[1] George E. Kent, *A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 248.

[2] Gwendolyn Brooks, "Boys. Black. A Preachment," *Beckonings* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1975), 15.

The apostrophe here invokes not a dead or absent person nor an inanimate object—although the precise location of blackness in the subject-object relation remains of primary concern here—but a political-economic abstraction: a racialized collective subject who embodies a movement from the most abstract categories of political economy to the most concrete issues of social reproduction, and whose experience of what Giovanni Arrighi calls "the signal crisis of the US regime of accumulation of the late 1960s and early 1970s" offers a transitional anchor between the periods of boom and downturn.[3] The speaker addresses an insurgent, ascendant sociality held in common among young black men, observing their disposition toward riot in a heated struggle for the basic metabolic requirements for reproduction. Figured as a mode of political antagonism tied to racialization, riot emerges as a creative and life-affirming force in the poem.

This chapter examines the relationship between poetry and precarity in America during what Kent calls "the riot years" and their immediate aftermath, which emerged in the context of industrial exhaustion and the historical transition from boom to downturn. I begin with Brooks' poetry, which I contrast to the work of John Ashbery. I then further develop the relationship between race and riot that Brooks opens up through the work of Amiri Baraka during his "transition period," before moving on to considerations of riot and revolution as they appear in the poetry of Diane di Prima. In marked contrast to their typical association with destruction and mayhem, riots for Brooks have a positive valence, appearing as a leading tactic of a counter-legislative body embroiled in a pitched battle against the cold, dark winter of immiseration that both Brooks and Gil Scott-Heron saw looming on the horizon. While the latter's album *Winter in America*, released in 1974, represents a departure from his previously established persona as a radical poet—trading militancy for aestheticism like so many of his contemporaries—the record

[3] Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (New York: Verso, 2010), 315.

nonetheless offers a biting indictment of American civil society in its account of black precarity in the opening years of the long downturn: mass incarceration, assassinations and coordinated killings of black leaders, decaying urban centres, waning political power, and general immiseration.[4] Conceived amid the social, political and economic crises of the period—stagflation, the oil shock of 1973, the 1973 stock market crash, the coup in Chile, the final withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam, the Watergate scandal, and mass civil unrest—the title of the album and its seasonal language of "winter" signals in retrospect the onset of a protracted period of economic stagnation in the US that, as Robert Brenner demonstrates, begins "during the brief period between 1965 and 1973," when "the advanced capitalist world was suddenly projected from boom to crisis."[5]

This recurring trope of seasonal transition in US cultural production from the late 1960s to the early 1970s reflects a growing concern among artists and writers of the period with a sense of climatic shift in both the social order and the forms of struggle pitted against it. Of course, seasonal imagery is not exclusive to US cultural production from the period, stretching back in the Western tradition at least as far as Ovid, whose epic work the *Metamorphoses* suggestively recounts the introduction of the seasons by the gods to facilitate the emergence of organized agricultural labour in the wheat fields and the domestication of social reproduction in the form of the family home.[6] In this period of transition from long boom to long downturn, though, seasonal imagery gets attached explicitly to notions of impending economic exhaustion and American decline. The culture of the period is saturated with the climatic imagery of this shared experience

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[4] Gil Scott-Heron, *Winter in America*, prod. Gil Scott-Heron and Brian Jackson, Strata-East Records, 1974, vinyl record.

[5] Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005* (New York: Verso, 2006), 99.

[6] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. David Raeburn (New York: Penguin, 2004).

of seasonal change and the rise and fall of militancy that accompanied it. Read in this light, the appearance of the capitalized word "Weather" in "Black. Boys." invokes the notorious Weather Underground, a radical splinter of the Students for a Democratic Society who, in response to the police murders of Black Panther leaders Mark Clark and Fred Hampton in 1969 as part of the FBI's infamous Counter-Intelligence Program, issued a declaration of war against the US government. The group took its name from Bob Dylan's hit record, "Subterranean Homesick Blues," from the album *Bringing It All Back Home*, in which the counterculture icon reminds his listeners, "You don't need a weatherman / To know what which way the wind blows."[7]

When "Subterranean Homesick Blues" came out in 1965, the protest movements of the decade were just gaining momentum, but by the time the Weathermen called for "days of rage" to "bring the war home" from Vietnam and overthrow the US government in October 1969, hardly anybody turned up to the party. Shortly thereafter, the group disappeared underground, adopting fake identities and pursuing covert actions exclusively. This transitional period saw the birth of the post-welfare security state, which in a dark irony brought the war home on its own terms, adapting tactics used against guerillas in Vietnam to use in predominantly black urban environments across the US.[8] Facing an increasingly militarized police and a rising unemployment rate, the long, hot summers of the 1960s gave way to the autumnal downturn of the 1970s, and militancy entered a protracted period of torpor. Brooks's notion that rioters were

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[7] Bob Dylan, "Subterranean Homesick Blues," recorded January 14, 1965, prod. Tom Wilson, track 1 on *Bringing It All Back Home*, Columbia Recording Studios, 1965, vinyl record.

[8] Michel Foucault calls this tendency the "boomerang effect," whereby techniques of governance used by Western powers abroad—especially in colonial and imperial ventures—are later adapted for domestic application and deployment. See *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 103. Note too that, as Joshua Clover argues, the rising significance of the colonial relation of direct domination in the global North suggests the end of "absorptive capital," as the economies of the advanced capitalist countries become less able to absorb new labour inputs. See Jack Chelgren, "The Causality Runs Both Ways: A Conversation with Joshua Clover," *The Rumpus*, January 21, 2018, http://therumpus.net/2018/01/the-rumpus-interview-with-joshua-clover/. For a detailed study of the use of colonial technologies of power in domestic urban centres, see Stephen Graham, *Cities under Siege: The New Military Urbanism* (New York: Verso, 2011).

"legislating Summer Weather," then, arguably attests to a commitment on her part to optimism in the face of waning militancy, but also points to a series of contradictions inherent in the long, hot summers themselves: although they seemed to have run their course—by 1972, the long wave of militancy that surged in the 1960s was crashing, soon to begin its protracted recession—the long, hot summers seemed to be a harbinger of things to come. Amid the ostensible chaos and confusion of the riot, Brooks saw the emergence of a new mode of political antagonism with its own internal logics and historical specificities.

These contradictions reflect a shift in the period in the spheres in which struggles over social reproduction are fought, as labour is pushed from the hidden abode of production into the noisy sphere of circulation. Brooks's use of the word "bread" in this context might bring to mind the infamous bread riots of the eighteenth century, which preceded the ascendency of organized industrial labour and its favoured tactic, the strike. This distinction might also imply that the riot has its roots in the abolition of law, opposed in its apparent disorder to the organized tactic of the strike. And yet the riot here is characterized as a form of political engagement that is *legislative*, which is to say, a practice that *writes the law*. "Boys. Black." continues:

> Up boys. Boys black. Black boys.
> Invade now where you can or can't prevail.
> Take this:
> there's fertile ground beneath the pseudo-ice.
> Take this:
> sharpen your hatchets. Force into the green.
> Boys, in all your Turnings and your Churnings,
> remember Afrika.[9]

Brooks deploys an explicit language of armed conflict, a reflection perhaps of the exhaustion of peaceful protest tactics associated with the Civil Rights movement and Great Society liberalism—and the politics of representation and recognition more generally—and the turn to

[9] Brooks, *Boys. Black.*, 15.

violent direct action tactics on the part of the Black Power movement. This language of armed insurgency certainly echoes the ideological platform of Black Power, which insisted on its alignment with anticolonial struggles for independence throughout the so-called Third World, and indeed many American would-be revolutionaries of the 1960s saw their struggle as part of a global movement against American imperialism, including the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and the Weathermen.

By 1972, many Black Power leaders were dead or in jail, and so it is no wonder that riot is also cautioned against later in the poem, in a reference to the prison riots at Attica in 1971, which ended in the deaths of over thirty prisoners.[10] Still, the poem remains committed to the utopianism of unearthing the "fertile ground beneath the pseudo-ice," a phrase that readily invokes what the French Situationist René Viénet called "the beach beneath the paving stones," which he spray-painted around the streets of Paris during the mass civil unrest of May '68.[11] Whereas the avant-garde aesthetic practice of the Situationist International was rooted in an anti-authoritarian Marxism and an urban politics of spatial disruption and defamiliarization—a practice referred to in the French as *détournement* or *derivé*—Brooks finds her utopian horizons in the cultural politics of Black Nationalism. Brooks is a key writer and thinker of the Black Arts

[10] The Attica Prison riot at a correctional facility in Attica, New York, on September 9, 1971 was arguably the most infamous prison uprising of the Prisoners' Rights Movement. Prisoners rioted, took hostages and produced a list of grievances, demanding improvements to the lives of inmates. Negotiations failed, and after an intense and widely broadcast standoff, New York State Police troopers retook the prison on the order of Governor Nelson Rockefeller. On September 13, troopers dropped tear gas into the prison yard and fired blindly into the haze continuously for two minutes, bringing the four-day prison uprising to an abrupt end. In the process, at least 43 people were killed, including 33 inmates. In response, the Weathermen exploded a bomb near the office of prison commissioner Russell Oswald of the New York Department of Corrections, calling for an end to white supremacy. For a first-person account of the uprising from a journalist observer, see Tom Wicker, *A Time to Die: The Attica Prison Revolt* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2011). For a recent study of the incident and its aftermath, see Heather Ann Thompson, *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2017).

[11] The famous piece of graffiti from May '68 read, "sous les pavés, la plage," the literal translation of which is, "beneath the paving stones, the beach." For a discussion of Viénet and his role in the events of May '68, see McKenzie Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Street: On the Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International* (New York: Verso, 2011), 149-57.

Movement, a set of political and aesthetic practices according to which racial blackness serves as a foundation upon which to build a collective subject proper to the project of black liberation. But this affirmative horizon rooted in identification with "Afrika" also tarries with the negative, exemplified in "Boys. Black." by the contradictory significations of the long, hot summer as a mode of antagonism at once exhausted and emergent, legislative and anarchic.

The expression "long, hot summer" was originally an innocuous phrase meant literally, but acquired new meaning when it was used as the title of a 1958 film adapted from a series of William Faulkner stories, which included sun-soaked scenes of racial conflict in sultry settings, evoking Civil Rights struggle in the south.[12] Shortly thereafter, as Malcolm McLaughlin notes in his study of the 1967 Newark riots, the expression "emerged as an evocative way to refer explicitly to the southern Civil Rights movement, where the heat of the sun combined with the heat of social conflict"—in 1964, for example, at a press conference in St. Augustine, Florida, Martin Luther King Jr. called for "a long, hot summer of protest"—at the same time that "the term was also gaining currency as a way of describing conflicts in the cities across the United States."[13] Opposition to the Vietnam War, campus unrest, a series of devastating political assassinations and a defiant counterculture combined to create an incendiary atmosphere. Black Power politics were displacing the Civil Rights movement as the philosophy of nonviolent protest seemed to run its course, throwing into crisis the Civil Rights leadership and its platform of formal integration into American civil society. Several large American cities had already seen riots in decaying urban centres involving poor blacks who felt left behind by the Civil Rights movement, including Jersey City (1964), Harlem (1964) and Watts, Los Angeles (1965). When

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[12] Irving Ravetch and Harriet Frank Jr., *The Long, Hot Summer*, dir. Martin Ritt (Jerry Wald Productions, 1958), filmstrip, 115 minutes.

[13] Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

black Newark taxi driver John Smith was stopped for a traffic violation on July 12, 1967, and was taken to the 4th Police Precinct and beaten, rumor that he had died spread like wildfire throughout Newark's black neighborhoods. For five days and nights, the city burned. The nation was in turmoil, and fears that the long, hot summers would continue to rage were evident in newspapers, government reports and public opinion, but over the next few summers things would simmer down abruptly as the chill of unemployment set in.

In hindsight, then, Brooks may have been overly optimistic about the prospect of the long, hot summers raging into the 1970s, but this connection between a kind of dogged positivity and the idea of the long, hot summer is a theme that animates literary representations of riot throughout her work during this pivotal moment in American history. Brooks's chapbook *Riot*, published by Broadside Press in 1969, is described on the back cover as "a poem in three parts" that "arises from the disturbances in Chicago after the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968."[14] The first part of the poem, "Riot," stages a confrontation between John Cabot, a wealthy white man, and a group of racialized rioters:

> John Cabot, out of Wilma, once a Wycliffe,
> all whitebluerose below his golden hair,
> wrapped richly in right linen and right wool,
> almost forgot his Jaguar and Lake Bluff;
> almost forgot Grandtully (which is The
> Best Thing That Ever Happened To Scotch);
> almost forgot the sculpture at the Richard Gray
> and Distelheim; the kidney pie at Maxim's,
> the Grenadine de Boeuf at Maison Henri.
>
> Because the Negroes were coming down the street.[15]

The figure of John Cabot, "out of Wilma, once a Wycliffe," embodies an entire history of white colonial wealth and power, the codified genealogy of his name suggesting capital's geopolitical,

[14] Gwendolyn Brooks, *Riot* (Detroit: Broadside Press: 1969).

[15] Brooks, *Riot*, 9.

imperial movement from Europe to North America in the transition from British to American economic hegemony. Gestures to Giovanni Caboto, the Genoese navigator credited with the 1497 "discovery" of various parts of North America, and John Wycliffe, early martyr of the Protestant Reformation, make Brooks's Boston Brahmin a natural successor of European capital for the twentieth century.[16] The list of bourgeois indulgences he nearly forgets for fear of "the Negroes … coming down the street" offers an index of what the city affords those with access to a suddenly dwindling surplus, and what it withholds from those who are themselves becoming surplus across American cities in the period, as profit margins thin and unemployment levels rise. As Janet Abu-Lughod writes, "both [the Harlem and Watts riots of 1967] occurred in the context of an economic recession whose effect appeared first in black areas but subsequently spread to the wider U.S. economy."[17] In Chicago—the scene of encounter between the white ambassador of historical capital John Cabot and his racialized antagonists—the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, sparked riots that left two miles of West Madison Street in rubble. In the poem's account of these events, John Cabot "went down in the smoke and fire / and broken glass and blood," suggesting once again a defiant optimism on Brooks's part.[18] Indeed, as critics have noted, this poetic rendition in which rioters appear to triumph "is a revisionary, and perhaps we might even say aspirational, history," given that "eleven people died in the [Chicago] riots, all [of whom] were black."[19]

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[16] The Boston Brahmin are members of Boston's traditional elite. A wealthy and educated class of both bourgeois and aristocratic origin, they represent an integral part of the historic core of the East Coast establishment in the nineteenth century. Their "Boston Toast" is famous: "Here's to dear old Boston, the home of the bean and the cod, where the Lowells speak only to Cabots, and the Cabots speak only to God." Of note here is too is Pulitzer Prize winning postwar poet Robert Lowell, a Boston Brahmin who could trace his lineage back to the Mayflower.

[17] Janet Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 25.

[18] Brooks, *Riot*, 10.

[19] Jasper Bernes, Joshua Clover and Juliana Spahr, "Gwendolyn Brooks's 'Riot' and the Opt Out," *Jacket 2*, March 15, 2014, http://jacket2.org/commentary/gwendolyn-brookss-riot-and-opt-out.

How to account for this optimism? Consider for a moment the late John Ashbery, a canonical figure of early postwar poetry who has been called "a poet for all seasons,"[20] and whose work from the period tracks a seasonal transition from the long, hot summers of the late 1960s to the autumnal downturn of the 1970s. "As You Came From the Holy Land" is exemplary in this regard. Collected in *Self-Portraits in a Convex Mirror* (1975), Ashbery's homage to Sir Walter Raleigh's poetic rendering of epochal shifts in late Elizabethan England was originally published in the November 1973 issue of *Poetry*, on the very precipice of the long downturn. In a move typical of Ashbery, the poem wonders over "a note of panic in the late August air," prompting the speaker to consider the possibility of "turning away from the late afternoon glare / as though it too could be wished away," an act which promises a "magic solution" to "whatever has held you motionless / like this so long through the dark season."[21] For Ashbery, writing in the early 1970s, "it is finally as though that thing of monstrous interest / were happening in the sky / but the sun is setting and prevents you from seeing it." It is in the face of this abstracted (yet very real) threat of looming catastrophe, as "the seasons change and tremble," that the speaker reminds the reader, "remember you are free to wander away."[22]

In his comprehensive study of poetry and capitalism in the American century, *The Matter of Capital*, Christopher Nealon argues that there are "two poetic emphases" that "form the parameters of 'the matter of capital'" in twentieth-century American poetry, which derive from the modernist poetics of Ezra Pound and W.H. Auden, respectively: "the importance of poetry as a stabilizing editorial arrangement," in the first case, and the notion of "poetry as the medium for

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[20] Stephen Meyer, "Ashbery: A Poet for All Seasons," *Raritan* 15, no. 2 (1995): 144-61.

[21] John Ashbery, "As You Came From the Holy Land," *Self-Portraits in a Convex Mirror* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), 6.

[22] Ashbery, "As You Came From the Holy Land," 7.

registering obliterable life" in the second.[23] For Nealon, Ashbery's work is a case in point, mobilizing textual practice "in order to dodge the implications of punctual, public event, especially event that takes spectacular form."[24] As Nealon notes, while a great deal of Ashbery criticism insists his poems are "textual rather than referential," one can nevertheless discern in his work "a poetic minority … in which a quiet bid for the existential importance of textuality … makes it possible to enjoy [a] form of powerlessness" that is born of "a relationship among accumulation, textuality, and minority … quite particular to the seventies."[25] This triangulation of textuality, crisis and minor poetry forms what Nealon calls "John Ashbery's Optional Apocalypse," where "drifting elsewhere … allows the speaker not to confront whatever it is that looms 'as the seasons change and tremble'."[26] What Ashbery elsewhere calls the "Invisible form in the air," Nealon suggests, is capital entering the crisis of accumulation that signals the onset of American decline.[27] For Nealon, then, Ashbery's tendency to "wander away" from the "monstrous" event looming on the horizon "is less a failing of the inattentive than a strategy of the frightened."[28] What allows Ashbery to commit to this noncommittal poetics of acquiescence in the first place, it turns out, is a sense that poetry itself is inherently political: "All poetry is

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[23] Christopher Nealon, *The Matter of Capital: Poetry and Crisis in the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 31.

[24] Nealon, *The Matter of Capital*, 98.

[25] Nealon, *The Matter of Capital*, 75. This opposition of the textual to the referential and the poetic practice of delinking the signifier from its referent, emphasizing instead what will later be called the materiality of the signifier, will be pivotal for the Language Poets of the late 1970s and 1980s—including Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman, Barrett Watten, Lyn Hejinian, Bob Perelman, Rae Armantrout, Carla Harryman, Clark Coolidge, Hannah Weiner, and Susan Howe—for whom the free play of signs is disruptive of capitalist logics. See Ron Silliman, *The New Sentence* (New York: Roof Books, 1987), and Steve McCaffery, "Language Writing: from Productive to Libidinal Economy," in *North of Intention: Critical Writings of 1973-1986*, 3rd ed. (New York: Roof Books, 2000), 143-58.

[26] Nealon, *The Matter of Capital*, 87.

[27] John Ashbery, *The Double Dream of Spring* (New York: Ecco Press, 1976), 31.

[28] Nealon, *The Matter of Capital*, 87.

against war and in favour of life," Ashbery writes in a 1967 letter to the editor of *The Nation*, "or else it isn't poetry."[29]

Ashbery's inclination to stage his escape from the impending crisis of the 1970s at the level of poetic form, adopting a quiet aestheticism that takes solace in its sense of powerlessness, finds a curious correlate in Brooks's decision to opt out of the mainstream publishing model of the period, leaving Harper & Row—a major press with widespread publicity and distribution capacities—for Broadside Press, a black-run small press founded by African American poet Dudley Randall in Detroit in 1965.[30] In "Killing John Cabot and Publishing Black," James D. Sullivan describes this switch as "a profoundly anti-economic move," a testament to "Brooks's commitment to African American cultural nationalism."[31] This commitment is clear in *Riot*, which includes a frontispiece, a painting by visual artist Jeff Donaldson, one of the founders of AfriCOBRA (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists), a black artist collective formed in 1968 with a commitment to "the collective exploration, development, and perpetuation of an approach to image making which would reflect and project the moods, attitudes, and sensibilities of African Americans independent of the technical and aesthetic strictures of Euro-centric modalities."[32] The painting, titled "Allah Shango" after the African storm god, depicts two racialized figures with their hands pressed to glass—one of whom holds a statue that seems to threaten the glass sheeting through which the viewer apprehends the scene—while a riot appears to rage in the background, cultural and political referents that provide the paratextual

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[29] John Ashbery, letter to editor, *The Nation*, 29 May 1967, letters.

[30] For an in-depth study of Broadside Press and its founder, Dudley Randall, see Melba Joyce Boyd, *Wrestling with the Muse: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

[31] James D. Sullivan, "Killing John Cabot and Publishing Black: Gwendolyn Brooks's 'Riot'," *African American Review* 36, no. 4 (2002): 557.

[32] AfriCOBRA, "Mission Statement," http://africobra.com/Introduction.htm (site discontinued), quoted in Bernes, Clover and Spahr, "Gwendolyn Brooks's 'Riot' and the Opt Out."

infrastructure of the poem. As Sullivan notes, "Since Brooks chose to publish *Riot* with Broadside, readers had to approach the book through a specifically African American context. That context was tied to the artifact that bore the text."[33] This helped counter the tendency, prevalent at the time, to read Brooks "through a lens of universal white humanism."[34] In this way, *Riot* can be read as "a turning away from a white audience indifferent or even hostile to African American art in order to construct works addressed primarily to a specifically black audience."[35]

Although they are two very different poets with different political commitments, both Brooks and Ashbery participate in a form of "opting out," or "turning away," predicated on ideas about the political capacity of poetic production. In a sense, of course, these two forms of opting out themselves could not be more different: Brooks, in her Black cultural nationalism, turns her back on the whiteness of the mainstream poetry world, while Ashbery wanders away from the spectacle of crisis and 1970s precarity. Nevertheless, "Brooks clearly believed in the opt-out, which might be best thought of as an opting into community publishing; she repeatedly said in interviews that she did not leave Harper & Row because she had a critique, but because she wanted to support black publishing."[36] In fact, all forms of opting out are necessarily also forms of opting in, and for all their differences—and these will be decisive—Brooks and Ashbery both turn toward a collective subject capable of surviving the crisis, one way or another. If Brooks's move to Broadside is best understood as part of what John B. Thompson, in *Merchants of*

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[33] Sullivan, "Killing John Cabot," 558.

[34] Sullivan, "Killing John Cabot," 558. For a critical account of the tendency in poetry criticism to either reduce the work of poets of colour to an account of their identity through voice at the level of (social) content—as distinct from the properly literary—or to read the work in purely formal terms in isolation from the poet's subjectivity, see Dorothy Wang, *Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 36-7.

[35] Sullivan, "Killing John Cabot, 559.

[36] Bernes, Clover and Spahr, "Gwendolyn Brooks's 'Riot' and the Opt Out."

Culture, calls "an economy of favours," the switch still takes place under the coercive strictures of an actual economy slipping into free-fall.[37] This would seem to be not only Brooks's problem, but the issue for poets of the period in general: you cannot escape, you must go on. Wrestling with this contradiction plays out in a commitment to the aesthetic as a political force in the face of waning militancy, a turn to aestheticism that animates a broad array of poetic practices in the period. What would it mean to think these two examples of the "opt-out" together, as two poetic responses to the problem of capitalist crisis in the moment of transition from boom to downturn?

My argument here is that a number of experimental poets writing in the period turn to poetic address, and especially apostrophe, to conjure a collective subject with whom to face capitalist crisis. Brooks and Ashbery both suggest that the political capacity of poetry obtains its ability, through apostrophe or address, to invoke a collective subjectivity capable of surviving the crisis at hand. This turning away that is also a turning toward—where negation is sought through a counter-affirmation—takes the form of an optimistic attachment, in a process of poetic invocation that Lauren Berlant insists is always provisional. Drawing on Barbara Johnson's work on apostrophe and animation, Berlant argues that apostrophe "appears to be a reaching out to a you, a direct movement from place *x* to place *y*, but it is actually a turning back, an animating of a receiver on behalf of the desire to make something happen *now* that realizes something *in the speaker*, makes the speaker more or differently possible, because she has admitted, in a sense, the importance of speaking for, as, and to, two—but only under the condition, and illusion, that the two are really (in) one."[38] Apostrophe enacts the possibility of the subject's flourishing in relation to another, and this enactment is itself a mode of self-affirmation at the level of affect,

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[37] John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (New York: Plume, 2012), 156.

[38] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 27.

whether or not it feels triumphant. "Attachments do not all *feel* optimistic," Berlant notes, "but being drawn to return to the scene where the object hovers in its potentialities is the operation of optimism as an affective form. In optimism, the subject leans toward promises contained within the present moment of the encounter with her object."[39]

The collective subject invoked through apostrophe, then, is at once an abstraction and an object of attachment that holds a cluster of promises, and "whatever the *content* of the attachment is, the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world."[40] Seen in this light, apostrophe can be understood in both Ashbery's and Brooks' work, following Nealon's analysis, as a formal and rhetoric technique that operates as both "a stabilizing editorial arrangement," establishing a collective subjectivity capable of weathering the storm, and a "medium for registering obliterable life" in the precarity of that collective subjectivity.[41] Who is the "you" the speaker of Ashbery's poem addresses that is able to turn and walk away from the crisis? As Jasper Bernes shows, it is the post-Fordist subject of the techno-managerial class that survives in fragmented form, a subjective point of view dispersed across networks of commodity circulation.[42] For Brooks, surviving the crisis means something very different, and her work addresses those forced to secure the means of reproduction outside the labour process as the economy shifts from boom to downturn.

Most Marxian accounts of this moment of transition tell a story of capital's triumph—a narrative of the Left's defeat and the strength of multinational capital—and certainly the

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[39] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 24.

[40] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 24.

[41] Nealon, *The Matter of Capital*, 31.

[42] Bernes ties the poetic emergence of this subjective point of view in Ashbery'to the process of deindustrialization, and in particular to "the changed character of the capital-labor relationship" already evident "in the 1960s." See Jasper Bernes, *The Work of Art in the Age of Deindustrialization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 76.

capitalist class has since won a series of decisive victories over organized labour, while the market has spread throughout the social field and around the globe in its insatiable thirst for profit. Indeed, many signs point to capital's expansion after the late 1960s and early 1970s. The spread of markets has entailed the monetization of what were once extra-economic activities, such as communication and care-work, and facilitated the disappearance of previously semi-autonomous public spaces and the systematic transfer of wealth from the commons to private ownership.[43] Since the 1980s, the global workforce has expanded from 1.9 billion to 3.1 billion, while Oxfam recently reported that the world's 85 richest people have the same wealth as 3.5 billion of the world's poorest people.[44] These developments would seem to suggest a period of vast capitalist ascendency, and yet growth has actually stagnated during this period. Brenner notes, "Between 1973 and the present, economic performance in the US, western Europe, and Japan has, by every standard macroeconomic indicator, deteriorated, business cycle by business cycle, decade by decade."[45] As I explore further in Part II of this study, "it was the fall of profitability in the international manufacturing sector, beginning between 1965 and 1973, not only in the US but across the world economy, that was primarily responsible for the long downturn—the extended period from the early 1970s through the early 1990s marked by slow growth of output, investment and productivity, high unemployment and deeper and longer

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[43] See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 292-3; and David Harvey, "Accumulation by Dispossession," in *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 137-182.

[44] See John Bellamy Foster and Robert W. McChesney, "The Endless Crisis," *Monthly Review* 64, no. 1 (2012), http://monthlyreview.org/2012/05/01/the-endless-crisis/; and Graeme Weirden, "Oxfam: 85 Richest People as Wealthy as Poorest Half of the World," *The Guardian*, January 20, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/jan/20/oxfam-85-richest-people-half-of-the-world.

[45] Robert Brenner, "What Is Good for Goldman Sachs Is Good for America: The Origins of the Current Crisis," Prologue of the Spanish edition of *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (*La economía de la turbulencia global,* trans. Juan Mari Madariaga [Madrid: Akal, 2009]). Available online in English-language typescript, 6. http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/issr/cstch/papers/BrennerCrisisTodayOctober2009.pdf.

cyclical recessions."[46] The waning of militancy as the abyss of the 1970s opens up, then, is less a question of the relative success of workerism than it is an issue of torpor, a kind of depressed political metabolism tied to seasonal transition and economic stagnation. At this precise moment, as the long wave of workerism breaks and tumbles headlong in frothy arcs along its downwards trajectory, an older form of struggle resurfaces in its wake: the riot.

Cycles of struggle are theorized here in relation to the logical and historical trajectory of capital accumulation as it interlocks with class composition. Marx calls this dynamic the "double moulinet" (*zwickmühle*): the systematic reproduction of the capital-labour relation at the level of the social totality.[47] As I have been arguing throughout this study thus far, a focus on the history of the class relation opens onto a model of periodicity that threads cycles of accumulation with cycles of struggle. Where Chapter One ties the decline of the American realist novel to the automation of industrial production and the subsequent exhaustion of twentieth-century political possibilities, this chapter studies the relationships between poetry, riot and abolition at the end of the long boom. In this argument, Joshua Clover's theory of riot as "the confrontational struggle

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[46] Robert Brenner, "The Boom and the Bubble," *New Left Review* 6 (2000): 8. Despite an uptick in growth in the late nineties, however, the long downturn continues into the twenty-first century: "In 1997, as real exports grew by 14 per cent, the economy flourished as it had not done for several decades, and it began to appear that the US might finally lead the world economy out of the doldrums. The expansion of the US domestic market which was making possible export-led growth internationally was no longer being driven, as it had been for decades, primarily by US government deficits, but, to an important degree, by rising exports and capital investment, founded upon increasing competitiveness and rising profit-rates. Yet just at the moment when faster growth began to take hold in the US economy, from the end of 1995, its foundations started to be transformed by two closely interrelated developments. On the one hand, a sudden rise in the dollar began to undermine US manufacturing exports, by driving up the relative cost of American goods and indirectly precipitating the end of the East Asian boom. On the other hand, an exploding stock-market bubble, financing a feverish growth of indebtedness, began to shift the driving force of expansion towards domestic consumption, and in so doing to speed up substantially the growth of the US economy." As Brenner demonstrates, these developments result not in the end of the long downturn, but in a series of financial bubbles that had devastating effects on the global economy as a whole. This will be of particular importance to Chapter Four of this study. See "The Boom and the Bubble," 14.

[47] This rendering derives from a French translation of *Capital*. Marx uses the term *Zwickmühle* in the original German, taken from the thousand-year-old game of Mill, sometimes called Nine Men's Norris. For some reason, the term is entirely absent from the English translation—appearing instead as "alternating rhythm"—and is more accurately translated as the "double mill," which refers to a grave dilemma, being caught in a trap or an iron grip.

for social reproduction outside the sphere of production" remains paramount.[48] Clover seeks to grasp the "internal and structural significance" of riot, according to which what he calls "riot prime" emerges as the form of antagonism appropriate to the "ongoing and systemic capitalist crisis" that has unfolded throughout the capitalist world-system since the end of the long boom.[49]

Clover situates this crisis—which he understands in value-theoretical terms as an "increasing domination of dead over living labour"—in relation to what he calls the "arc of accumulation," arguing that "both Brenner and Arrighi succeed in excavating the strong relation between the *logical* account of self-undermining accumulation and the *historical* account of capitalist cycles."[50] Synthesizing these accounts, he writes: "From roughly 1830 to 1973 there was a core of productive capital in the west with its ratcheting system of expansion. It is according to this that we earlier called the period from the eighteenth century to the present a metacycle, a great arc of accumulation in the capitalist world-system following the course or *circulation-production-circulation prime*."[51] Tracing a history of struggle against the backdrop of this "arc of accumulation," Clover identifies three hegemonic forms of antagonism: riot, or "the setting of prices for market goods," which prevails in the pre-industrial market economies of early capitalist development; strike, or "the setting of prices for labor power," which replaces the riot as the dominant form of struggle during the decades of industrial expansion; and "riot prime," in which the riot, having returned transformed, now operates "within a logic of racialization and takes the state rather than the economy as its direct antagonist."[52]

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[48] Joshua Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot: The New Era of Uprisings* (New York: Verso, 2016), 115.

[49] Clover, *Riot*, 1.

[50] Clover, *Riot*, 132-5.

[51] Clover, *Riot*, 137.

[52] Clover, *Riot*, 10-15.

Clover maps this "tripartite sequence" onto Marx's formula, M-C-M' (money-capital-money prime), and thence to the schema, adapted from Arrighi, of "circulation-production-circulation prime."[53] For Marx, as we have seen, M-C-M' represents "the general formula for capital," whereby monetary value congeals in the commodity-form only on the condition that it be realized at a profit.[54] This is the process of capitalist accumulation understood generally as a circuit through which the total sum of capital increases with each profitable reinvestment. As Arrighi argues, however, "Marx's general formula of capital (MCM') may be reinterpreted as depicting, not just the logic of individual capitalist investments, but also a recurrent pattern of world capitalism. The central aspect of this pattern is the alternation of epochs of material expansion (MC phases of capital accumulation) with phases of financial expansion (CM' phases)."[55] Citing Arrighi, Clover writes:

> The first transition, *riot-strike*, corresponds both historically and logically to the Industrial Revolution and its extension and intensification of the wage relation at the beginning of Britain's long nineteenth century. The second transition, *strike-riot prime*, corresponds in turn to the period of "hegemony unraveling" at the end of the United States' long twentieth century. A rise and a fall. A certain shapeliness amid the mess and noise of history delivering us now to the autumn of empire known variously by the terms *late capitalism*, *financialization*, *post-Fordism*, and so forth—that dilating litany racing to keep pace with our protean disaster.[56]

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[53] Clover, *Riot*, 17-20.

[54] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin: London, 1990), 247-57.

[55] Giovanni Arrighi, "Hegemony Unraveling II," *New Left Review* 33 (2005): 86.

[56] Clover, *Riot*, 17.

During phases of financial expansion, "no real recovery of accumulation is possible, but only more and less desperate strategies of deferral."[57] Under these circumstances, circulation increasingly displaces production as the primary sphere in which both capital and labour seek their reproduction. Clover uses the term "circulation struggle" to name those struggles that occur in the sphere of circulation, which include riots but also blockades and occupations, all of which are defined as struggles for the means of social reproduction outside the productive sphere. And in the era of riot-prime, circulation struggles take on a distinctly racialized form. In the course of his own reading of Brooks's *Riot*, Clover argues that "the riot is an instance of black life in its exclusions and at the same time in its character as surplus, cordoned into the noisy sphere of circulation, forced there to defend itself against the social and bodily death on offer. A surplus rebellion."[58] If "bread" signifies one primary aspect of the riot—price setting—in Brooks' poem "Boys. Black." discussed above, then "breath" registers another: the threatening presence of the police at a moment in which riot returns to find that "the economy is far, the state near."[59]

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This chapter thus offers a theory of "riot poetics," tying their emergence during the brief history of the long, hot summer to the changing structure of US political economy at the end of the long

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[57] Clover, *Riot*, 18.

[58] Clover, *Riot*, 122.

[59] Clover, *Riot*, 126. One need only think of the 2014 police killing of Eric Garner whose final words, "I can't breathe," became a rallying cry of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, or of Frantz Fanon's remark that, "It is not because the Indo-Chinese has discovered a culture of his own that he is in revolt. It is because 'quite simply' it was, in more than one way, becoming impossible for him to breathe." This claim too became a slogan during the Ferguson and Baltimore riots of 2014 and 2015 although re-articulated in more general terms: "When we revolt, it's not for a particular culture. We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe." Nathaniel Mackey references the killing of Eric Garner in his analysis of precarity and the poetics of breath that I discuss below, but note for the moment that Garner was killed selling cigarettes illicitly as part of a racialized informal economy of black markets. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 226. For a recent study of breath and blackness, including discussions of both Garner's death at the hands of police and Fanon's remarks concerning Indo-Chinese revolt, see Ashton Crawley, *Black Pentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

boom. A theory of riot poetics concerns itself with *the poetry of circulation struggles*, a formulation that threads Clover's concept of circulation struggles with what Bernes calls "the poetry of circulation."[60] Identifying a departure in American poetry from a modernist "ethos of craft" that affirmed the dignity of human labour against the brutal technocracy of industrial capitalism, Bernes reads Ashbery's early work as a poetic engagement with the point of view of the postwar white-collar worker: a move from artisan to administrator, and from singular subject to networked actor.[61] This viewpoint will turn out to be a shattered one, but even in its dispersal across the field of managerial systems it remains tied to a positive conception of worker identity. That is, the vantage point of the fragmented point of view in early Ashbery remains identifiable as that of the white-collar worker even as it is diffused throughout the administrative apparatus of commodity circulation. Ashbery projects the subject along the historical arc of the white-collar viewpoint, even as his affinity with the fate of the post-Fordist worker requires a change in grammatical point-of-view to reflect the precarious post-Fordist worker's contradictory association with work as a category of identification. Wandering away in his later work can thus be read as an attempt to restore the human subject disintegrated by postwar developments in the labour process through the adoption of a lightheartedness in and about work that mirrors the folding in on each other of leisure and labour under post-Fordism.

For Bernes, Ashbery is a poet of circulation in the age of mass-produced objects, writing of and from the point of view of the administration of commodity circulation. Brooks, by contrast, writes *poetry of the circulation struggle*, documenting the experiences of those made surplus by the exhaustion of industrial production in northern US cities. Both Ashbery and Brooks follow the shift from production to circulation in the period, but are interested in different

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[60] Bernes, *The Work of Art in the Age of Deindustrialization*, 67.

[61] Bernes, *The Work of Art*, 67-68.

subjective experiences of that historical transition. Ashbery follows the white-collar worker into the world of clerical work, attending to the fractured subjectivities that emerge from diffused forms of post-Fordist managerial labour. Brooks, on the other hand, turns her attention to the surplus proletariat, particularly as it emerges in the period in its racialized form, following the black worker into the world of unemployment. That is, Brooks opts out of mainstream publishing to participate in struggles over the reproduction of black social life. This is not to flatten the class difference between Brooks and unemployed black populations in decaying urban centres, but to note that, in leaving Harper & Row for Broadside, she effectively sides with black separatist movements and rejects cultural inclusion and assimilation. "My aim," she says, "is to write poems that will somehow successfully 'call' […] all black people: black people in taverns, black people in alleys, black people in gutters, schools, offices, factories, prisons, the consulate."[62] But Brooks will no more escape the problem of a positive conception of identity than Ashbery, tied as she is in her cultural nationalism to the affirmation of black identity. In what follows, I examine the work of two other poets from the period—Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Diane di Prima—to explore how the riot poetics that emerge during the long, hot summers increasingly turn to apostrophe to conjure a collective subject from the ruins of capitalist crisis, and how the desire to abolish capitalist social relations through the affirmation of abstract identity categories forms a contradiction that continues to cloud political horizons well into the twenty-first century.

Take What You Want

Amiri Baraka, born Everett LeRoi Jones, was an African American poet, novelist, playwright, essayist, music critic, political activist and organizer. An inflammatory and controversial figure,

[62] Here, Brooks cites Amiri Baraka's poem "SOS," which I discuss below. See Gwendolyn Brooks, *Report from Part One* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1972), 183.

his politics shifted dramatically over the course of his lifetime, usefully dividing his oeuvre into relatively coherent periods: the Beat period between 1957 and 1962, during which time he was a member of the predominantly white avant-garde scene in Greenwich Village, New York associated with writers like Allan Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac; a break-away period from 1963 to 1965, when he began to develop a distinctly black political consciousness and a commitment to black liberation struggles; the Black Nationalist period between 1965 and 1974, when he was a leading figure in the Black Arts Movement; and a Third-World Marxist period from 1974 until his death in 2014, which saw Baraka abandon the Black cultural nationalism that he had helped make famous for a Marxist-Leninist philosophy rooted in anti-imperial struggles in the global south.[63] Between 1964 and 1975—sometimes referred to as middle-period Baraka, which spans his journey from Beat poet through Black Nationalism to Third-World Marxist, and the period of import for this chapter—a decisive moment of structural transition, when the political economy of the US underwent profound historical transformation—Baraka published several important books of poetry, among them *The Dead Lecturer* (1964), *Black Magic* (1970), and *Hard Facts* (1975). Each of these books captures the political position of the poet at the time of its publication: his move away from the Beats, the turn to Black Nationalism, and his subsequent shift to Third World Marxism. My aim is not to survey Baraka's middle period, but to mark pivotal moments in the trajectory of his poetic work during this period, charting its movement through a series of political positions that each attempt to come to terms with the crisis at hand.

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[63] One of the first literary studies of Baraka's work, Theodore R. Hudson's *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka*, published in 1973, argues that Baraka's "artistic and personal development has not followed an orderly, coordinated or casual progression." However, William J. Harris's seminal and expansive edited collection of Baraka's work, which was produced in collaboration with Baraka, is organized according to this framework. See Theodore R. Hudson, *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka: The Literary Works* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1973), xi; and William J. Harris, ed., *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991).

Toward the end of his Beat period, Baraka's work began to depart from a poetics of discovery associated with the white majority avant-garde in favour of political intensity, rejecting not only the elitist avant-gardism of an Anglicized formalism—a refusal he shared with many of the Beat poets, who drew heavily on popular and folkloric musical forms—but also a notion of blackness as a pre-modern social form. As James Edward Smethurst notes, "Baraka was able to take the Beat notion of African Americans as a class of permanent non-conformists (or involuntary saints)—who are nonetheless quintessentially American—and locate himself inside it without the sort of primitivist mysticism that often attended Beat expressions of this idea."[64] In *The Dead Lecturer*, Baraka, then LeRoi Jones, draws on black music—folk, popular and avant-garde—and techniques of American modernism to express a sense of enclosure within an organic system that aches to expel him. "Rhythm & Blues" uses the formal structures of jazz and blues to forge a distinctly African American voice, while "A Poem For Willie Best" sees the strategies of an oppositional subjectivity at work in Best's Hollywood minstrel performances of African American characters as "Lazy / Frightened / Thieving / Very potent sexually / Scars / Generally inferior / (but natural / rhythms," staging the scene of antagonism within and against the confines of a racialized culture industry.[65] At the same time, his poetry at this moment remains openly indebted to an existing community of American avant-garde poets like Edward Dorn, to whom the book is dedicated. Rather than marking a clean break with American avant-gardism that might allow for a transcendent black poetics of the outsider, the book blends black music with modernist techniques to capture an experience of constraint and restriction.

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[64] James Smethurst, "'Pat Your Foot and Turn the Corner': Amiri Baraka, the Black Arts Movement, and the Poetics of a Popular Avant-Garde," *African American Review* 37, no. 2-3 (2003): 266.

[65] Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), "A Poem For Willie Best," *The Dead Lecturer* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 18.

The poems formalize this relation between the speaker and his surround through a free verse poetics of breath drawn in part from the guiding tenets of the Black Mountain school,[66] routed through the black jazz tradition to trouble the distance between subject and respiratory process along racial lines. In "An Agony. As Now." Baraka writes, "I am inside someone / who hates me. I look / out from his eyes. Smell / what fouled tunes come in / to his breath."[67] This might suggest the double consciousness of black experience that W.E.B. Du Bois described, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others,"[68] but Baraka spatializes what would otherwise be a psychological sensation of doubling. Following Robert Creeley's famous assertion that "form is nothing more than the extension of content,"[69] the line-breaks reproduce the rhythms of the respiratory system, while their semantic content foregrounds bodily sites of exchange between the speaker and the surround that coalesce in the expressive but measured breathing of musical "tunes." In his discussion of the relation between breath and precarity, Nathaniel Mackey threads a genealogical poetics of breath from Creeley and Charles Olson to the "beat" poetics of Ginsberg and Baraka, tying the practice to the improvisational jazz forms of Ben Webster and Charlie Parker.[70] Mackey connects "breath and asthmatics," or "impediments to breath"—which he argues index an embodied experience of black precarity exemplified in lynching and the chokehold—to the "the stutter, the limp, and the stagger," the

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[66] The Black Mountain poets, named after the experimental Black Mountain College in Asheville, North Carolina, where they studied in the 1950s under the tutelage of Charles Olson, included Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan, as well as their students Ed Dorn, Joel Oppenheimer, John Wieners, and John Williams. Their poetic practice builds on and develops the ideas expressed in Olson's famous manifesto, "Projective Verse," which espouses a "field poetics" of open form dictated by the body and the breath. For a gloss on the group and a sampling of their work, see Donald Allen, ed., *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960* (New York: Grove Press, 1960).

[67] Baraka, "An Agony. As Now." *The Dead Lecturer*, 15.

[68] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York: Bantum Classics, 1989).

[69] Creeley's famous statement is quoted in Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," in *Collected Prose*, ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 240.

[70] Nathaniel Mackey, "Breath and Precarity" (Leslie Scalapino Lecture in Innovative Poetics, University of California – Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, November 9, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QlrPmLEYmsE.

"vocal and ambulatory impediments" of black music and experimental poetics.[71] Baraka's poem manipulates the poetics of breath to capture a visceral, embodied experience of confinement and isolation, an alienation of the senses that situates the speaker at odds with the enveloping social organism that might be the American avant-garde or American civil society, or both.

The speaker of the poem might seem to embody the psychoanalytic concept of the abject, cast off from that of which he remains a part, except that abjection here is not primarily a matter of consciousness, at least not in the psychoanalytic sense.[72] For Baraka writing in the opening years of the 1960s, abjection is tied up with the racial divisions of postwar American civil society, but rather than locate blackness in a romanticized state of Nature before and beyond the alienated spaces of modernity—a tendency of Beat writers eager to find historical redemption for human civilization in a romanticized notion of African primitivism—the speaker positions racialized exclusion in a material history of enclosure: "This is the enclosure (flesh / where innocence is a weapon. An / abstraction. Touch."[73] Flesh marks the site of enclosure here, a border that opens onto an abstraction that remains visceral and embodied. The fleshy materiality of the abstraction "blackness" crystalizes the cry of the abject subject languishing at the heart of civil society: "It burns the thing / inside it. And that thing / screams."[74] The "guttural cry" of the slave that Cornel West calls "the 'ur-text' of black culture"[75] issues from inside the social organism: an act of violence reproduces a racialized subjectivity internal to the body politic, a

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[71] See also Nathaniel Mackey, "Sound and Sentiment, Sound and Symbol," *Callaloo* 30 (1987): 29-54.

[72] Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

[73] Baraka, "An Agony. As Now." 15. For a discussion of racial romanticism in the work of Beat writer Jack Kerouac, see Jon Panis, "Kerouac's *The Subterraneans*: A Study of "Romantic Primitivism'," *MELUS* 19, no. 3 (1994): 107-23.

[74] Baraka, "An Agony. As Now." 16.

[75] Cornel West, "Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization," in *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Civitas, 1999), 102.

performative act which is itself reproducible. Baraka challenges the Beat conception of race that posits blackness as an identity category preceding mediation, connecting the abstract process of racialization to an embodied material history of enclosure and its consequences. In "A Short Speech to My Friends," Baraka writes, "The poor have become our creators. The black," affirming both the new avant-garde mixing of high and low art and his burgeoning cultural nationalism, but he remains committed at this point to "a political art" based on "tenderness," even as the "perversity of separation" negates any "common utopia."[76]

With the rise of the civil rights movement, Baraka broke definitively with the predominantly white avant-garde scene in New York and adopted a more militant Black Nationalist tone in his politics and poetics. In 1965, following the assassination of Malcolm X, Baraka left Greenwich Village where he had established himself as a leading voice of the Beat Generation and moved uptown to open the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BART/S) in Harlem. Though BART/S lasted only a short while, its founding was in many ways the formal inauguration of the Black Arts Movement, establishing a space and home base from which to develop the cultural nationalist aesthetic projects that had begun in smaller groups like the Umbra Workshop.[77] In *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, which Baraka penned during his incarceration in 1982, Baraka writes of the Black Arts Movement:

> In many ways it was something like the period of the Harlem Renaissance. Black intellectuals drawn to a common spot out of the larger commonality of their national experience. A rise in black national consciousness among the people themselves is what

[76] Baraka, "Short Speech to My Friends," *The Dead Lecturer*, 29.

[77] Umbra was a post-civil rights literary group of black writers founded in 1962 who produced a magazine of the same name. Based in Manhattan, the group aimed to merge black politics with aesthetic orientation, a move that would later cause tension between members who thought of themselves primarily as activists with those who saw themselves more as artists. For a discussion of Baraka and the Umbra group, see Daniel Kane, "Umbra and Lower East Side Poetics," in *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 79–90.

> set both periods in motion, and whenever there is a high level of black national consciousness, a militant affirmation of the African American national identity, the whole of American society takes off.[78]

Emerging alongside and in conversation with African revolutions abroad and rising black militancy at home, the Black Arts Movements developed a cultural politics of aesthetic experimentation rooted in a black national consciousness and the affirmation of a pan-African national identity. Smethurst opens his comprehensive account of the Black Arts Movement by situating its history in the context of "the ethnic and racial nationalisms that in their various manifestations flourished in the United States from about 1965 to 1975."[79] But note that Smethurst effectively maps the lifespan of racial and ethnic nationalisms in the US exactly onto the period of transition from boom to downturn.

Black Nationalism in the US responds to both the conditions of black industrial work and the onset of deindustrialization, and while groups like the Black Panther Party called for full employment, expressing skepticism about the political efficacy of the riot, distance from the labour market plays a key role in the proliferation of riot during the long, hot summers. As Clover notes, in the late 1960s in northern industrial cities like Detroit,

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[78] Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka* (1984), in *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, 369.

[79] James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 1. For the purposes of this study, I follow Smethurst in defining cultural nationalism "in the context of the 1960s United States relatively broadly as an insider ideological stance (or a grouping of related stances) that casts a specific 'minority' group as a nation with a particular, if often disputed, national culture. Generally speaking, the cultural nationalist stance involves a concept of liberation and self-determination, whether in a separate republic, some sort of federated state, or some smaller community unit (say, Harlem, East Los Angeles, or the Central Ward of Newark). It also often entails some notion of the development or recovery of a true 'national' culture that is linked to an already existing folk or popular culture. In the case of African Americans, cultural nationalism also usually posited that the bedrock of black national culture was an African essence that needed to be rejoined, revitalized, or reconstructed, both in the diaspora and in an Africa deformed by colonialism." See Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 17.

> we see two trends: a still-dominant manufacturing economy internalizing black labor, but beginning its decline and unable to absorb in full the demographic influx. This implies an increase in both employed and surplus black populations, subject to differential dispossessions. But these tendencies are moving in opposite directions. In the period 1965-1973 the trend lines cross like wires sparking and Detroit sees *the intensification of conditions for both riot and strike*, centered within the black community. This is the situation as the sixties accelerate, and the basis for the political sequence that unfolds, even if it cannot endure.[80]

If the Black Arts movement emerged in part from "the ideological climate of the Cold War, decolonization, and the re-emergent civil rights movement, particularly the black movement that began in 1960," as Smethurst argues, and in relation to "the development of distinct, though interrelated schools of New American Poetry" like the Beats and the New York School, it also takes shape in the context of a growing economic crisis. "Black Arts and Black Power conceptions of history," for example, and "Black Power and Black Arts ideologies, poetics, and activists," find common ground in the riot, with its looting and violent opposition to the police.[81] In "Black Art," a poem published in 1965 that serves as a landmark manifesto for the Black Arts Movement, Baraka writes, "We want 'poems that kill.' / Assassin poems, Poems that shoot / guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys / and take their weapons leaving them dead / with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland."[82] Written the year Watts saw widespread rioting amid endemic police brutality, "Black Art" suggests poetry is a weapon against racist power structures in a moment of economic crisis in which the state is the primary antagonist. This relationship

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[80] Clover, *Riot*, 187-8.

[81] Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 7-12.

[82] Amiri Baraka, "Black Art," *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, 219.

between economic crisis, racialization and state violence comes to a head in the long, hot summer of 1967 in Newark.

In 1966, with BART/S falling apart as funding from Great Society liberalism dried up and internal tensions grew, Baraka left New York for his hometown of Newark, New Jersey, where the insurrectional tenor of his poetics would intensify. Umbra Workshop veteran Lorenzo Thomas, who stumbled into one of Baraka's readings one Christmas eve and was astounded by the brazen language of Baraka's "new crazy poems," notes that "when Baraka returned from Harlem in 1966 and set up the Spirit House on Stirling Street in the very heart of the ghetto/saint home" and began "talking about the political machine" in Newark, "his rhetoric escalated and carefully particularized his social and political concerns."[83] What Lorenzo heard was "Black People!", a prose poem Baraka wrote after his arrest during the 1967 Newark Rebellion that was later published in *Black Magic*, his most definitively Black Nationalist poetry collection:

> All the stores will open up if you will say the magic words. The magic words are: Up against the wall mother fucker this is a stick up! Or: smash the window at night (these are magic actions) smash the windows daytime, anytime, together, let's smash the window drag the shit from in there. No money down. No time to pay. Just take what you want. The magic dance in the street.[84]

Jefferson Airplane, Californian pioneers of the counterculture movement and psychedelic rock, made headlines when they sang the line "Up against the wall mother fuckers" in their performance of the title track from the album *We Can Be Together* on the Dick Cavett Show in

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[83] Lorenzo Thomas, *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), 149.

[84] Amiri Baraka, "Black People!" *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*, 224. The poem would later be read aloud in court as evidence against Baraka during his trial for charges he was given when he was arrested during the Newark Rebellion.

1969.[85] But the real single of import here is Martha & the Vandellas' "Dancing in the Street" from 1964, in which the Motown vocalist Martha Reeves sings, "Calling out around the world / Are you ready for a brand new beat? / Summer's here and the time is right / for dancing in the street."[86] The moment was ripe, the song seems to suggest, for the long, hot summers to usher in a radically different rhythm, perhaps even an entirely new form of social life. The song calls to its audience, the apostrophe inviting listeners to participate in the dance parties erupting in the streets. Although it was ostensibly innocent enough—Reeves called it "a party song" when asked about the lyrics by a reporter while on tour in England—the record quickly became associated with riots in inner cities, and was something of a civil rights anthem.[87] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee chairman H. Rap Brown—a polarizing figure best known for repeatedly refusing to concede a monopoly on violence to the state—played the song when organizing civil rights demonstrations. In his autobiography, Baraka calls the song the "national anthem" of black America; with its list of American cities—Chicago, New Orleans, New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and the Motor City—the song, he says, "spoke to us of Harlem and the other places, then Watts and later Newark and Detroit."[88] An anthem for the long, hot summer, then.

"Black People!" is a poem about the riot as circulation struggle, what Clover describes as "surplus population confronted by the old problem of consumption without direct access to the

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[85] Jefferson Airplane takes the phrase from the anarchist group UAW/MF (Up Against the Wall / Mother Fuckers), who got it from Baraka. Jefferson Airplane, "We Can Be Together," recorded April, 1969, prod. Al Schmitt, B-Side of *Volunteers*, RCA Victor, vinyl record.

[86] Martha & The Vandellas, "Dancing in the Street," recorded June 19, 1964, writ. Marvin Gaye, William "Mickey" Stevenson, and Ivy Jo Hunter, prod. William "Mickey" Stevenson, *Dancing in the Street*, Gordy, vinyl record.

[87] For scholarly studies of the cultural and political significance of the Motown classic, "Dancing in the Street," see Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), and Mark Kurlansky, *Ready for a Brand New Beat: How "Dancing in the Street" Became the Anthem for a Changing America* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2013).

[88] Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka*, 376.

wage."[89] Newark was a manufacturing city hit hard during the Great Depression and was slow to recover. Its population peaked in 1948, after which it began a steady decline. Housing in black urban areas was notoriously rundown, as redlining by the Federal Housing Administration drove urban decay and white flight radically changed the racial demographics of the city. By 1967, the traditional manufacturing base of the Northeast US was almost entirely eroded. In a sort of bait-and-switch, industrial work in the north disappeared just as thousands of African Americans arrived from the Great Migration to be industrial workers. One of the "cities staggered on the coastline" that Scott-Heron sings about on the record, "Winter in America," Newark and its black communities "never had a chance to grow."[90] At the time of the Newark Rebellion unemployment rates for young black men were approaching 40 percent.[91] As I argued in the opening chapter of this study, deindustrialization—and the expulsion of labour from the site of production—is simultaneously a process of abjection at the level of class composition, a casting-off that has distinctly racializing effects on the sociological appearance of unemployment. This conception of a racialized population superfluous to production, forced to struggle for social reproduction in the sphere of circulation, finds its logical expression in the riots of the long, hot summers. In "Black People!" the speaker says, "smash the window drag the shit from in there. No money down. No time to pay. Just take what you want," suggesting that, as Clover argues, looting is "a version of price-setting in the market place, albeit at price zero."[92] In this way, the poem suggests the riot is a mode of political antagonism appropriate to deindustrialization: the

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[89] Clover, *Riot*, 28.

[90] The title track was not included on the original LP, but was recorded after its release. Midnight Band, "Winter in America," recorded June-July 1974, writ. Gil Scott-Heron, prod. Gil Scott-Heron and Brian Jackson, track 6 on *The First Minute of a New Day*, Arista, vinyl record.

[91] Peter B. Levy, "Long, Hot Summer Riots, 1965-1967," in *The Civil Rights Movement in America: From Black Nationalism to the Women's Political Council* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2015), 187.

[92] Clover, *Riot*, 29.

phrase "no time to pay" marks an absence of—as well as a desire for the negation of—socially necessary labour time as the source of value.[93]

The connection between racialized precarity and Baraka's poetry during the long, hot summers ties Mackey's genealogy of the poetics of breath and West's notion of the primal scream of the slave to changes in the composition of American industry in the transition from boom to downturn. Mackey harkens back to Creeley, whose early postwar poetry adopts artificial breath patterns as a sign of "duress" during the Cold War, and to Olson's highly influential essay "Projective Verse," with its radical claims for a poetics of physicality measured by the breath.[94] He also sutures the poetics of breath to experimental black music, arguing that the rhythms of jazz reflect violent interruptions of breath such as lynching. In this light, breath is not a "natural" measure, but an organized method of invoking precarious states of being. Citing the 2014 killing of Eric Garner, who was choked to death by New York Police Department officer Daniel Pantaleo, Mackey argues that the poetical use of artificial breathing patterns in black culture signifies a corporeal experience of precarity that registers the state-sanctioned violence to which black life is routinely subjected in American civil society. This relationship between breath and anti-black violence conjures the spectre of the slave's anguished cry in Black Studies, which figures in the cultural narrative of African American *bildung* since at least Frederick Douglass, whose autobiography opens with an account of the beating of his Aunt Hester.[95] As Fred Moten suggests, the production of blackness would seem to be always

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[93] We might think here of Moishe Postone's provocative claim that capital is a "temporal form of wealth" in which abstract time of value (as socially necessary labour time) dominates lived historical time. See Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 76.

[94] Mackey also ties the poetics of the break to William Carlos Williams's "variable foot," and Robert Creeley's "practiced stumbling." See "Breath and Precarity."

[95] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (New York: New American Library, 1968).

necessarily the reproduction of what Saidiya Hartmann describes as "the primal scene" of "the slave's ravaged body" as origin story of the black subject.[96] At least, this is his take away from Hartman, who "must both repress and return" to Douglass and "the natal occasion" his Aunt Hester's scream provides his autobiography, which Douglass "passes on" to Black Studies and "Hartman's critical suppression extends."[97] If blackness is tied ineluctably to the reproduction of the scene of the slave's subjection, Moten asks, "is there a way to disrupt the totalizing force of the primality Douglass represents?"[98]

For Moten, the history of the black radical tradition represents an ongoing exploration of the possibilities inherent in the object's capacity to resist. He argues that black culture emerges and develops "in the break," a fugitive practice that he identifies in "Baraka's lingering in the broken rhythms of the field where blackness and black radicalism are given in and as black (musical) performance, in and as the improvisation of ensemble."[99] According to Moten, Baraka's aesthetic improvisation takes the form of a "sociopoetics of riot":

> There's a connection between poetry and violence that Amiri Baraka, among others, began to explore by way of these terms and which now needs to be re-explored in the full awareness that Baraka's movement extended, rather than disavowed, that antinomian opening of the field that can be traced back through Charles Olson and Sun Ra, Emily Dickinson and Harriet Jacobs, Anne Hutchinson and Tituba, and beyond. The poetics of the open field, especially when performed in the narrow cell, was always tied to the sociopoetics of riot, of generative differentiation as a kind of self-care, of expropriative

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[96] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century American* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3, qtd. in Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 3.

[97] Moten, *In the Break*, 2-5.

[98] Moten, *In the Break*, 5.

[99] Moten, *In the Break*, 86.

> disruption as a kind of self-defense, of seeing things as a performed social theory of mind.[100]

It is worth recalling Baraka's emphasis, in his discussion of jazz and blues, on the determining force of context: "Each phase of the Negro's music issued directly from the dictates of his social and psychological environment."[101] For Baraka, this is key to Coltrane's late-period avant-garde altissimo solos, which reviewers described as a sort of "screaming."[102] For Baraka, "the catalysts and necessity of Coltrane's music must be understood as they exist even before they are expressed as music. The music is the result of the attitude, the stance."[103] Crucially, Baraka effectively shifts critical focus from the primacy of the scream to its conditions of reproduction. If Baraka's riot poetics stage a violent intervention in the flows of the ensemble in order to disrupt the scene of black subjection in the open field—an "expropriative disruption as a kind of self-defense" expressed in the act of looting—this appears in "Black People!" as the collective revolt of a racialized surplus population interrupting the flow of commodities in the market.

Baraka's riot poetics reflect the historical conditions in which riot proliferates during the long, hot summers, conjuring a collective subject from the racialized populations of the dispossessed through the tactical deployment of apostrophe. In "SOS," another poem collected in *Black Magic*, Baraka writes:

> Calling all black people
> Calling all black people, man woman child
> Wherever you are, calling you, urgent, come in

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[100] Fred Moten, "necessity, immensity, crisis (many edges/seeing things)," *Floor*, October 30, 2011, http://floorjournal.com/2011/10/30/necessity-immensity-and-crisis-many-edgesseeing-things/.

[101] Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Morrow, 1963), 65.

[102] Geoff Dyer, "Catastrophic Coltrane," *The New York Review of Books*, October 4, 2014, http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2014/10/04/catastrophic-coltrane/.

[103] Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* (New York: Akashic Books, 2010), 25. Ben Hickman argues "attitude" is "Baraka's central term for black music in the period." See Ben Hickman, *Crisis and the US Avant-Garde: Poetry and Real Politics* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2015), 118.

> Black People, come in, wherever you are, urgent, calling you,
> calling all black people
> calling all black people, come in, black people, come on in.[104]

During his Black Nationalist period, Baraka viewed black art as a tool for the subversion of white institutional power: a cultural affirmation of blackness against an experience of abjection. After the Newark Rebellion, Baraka (still Leroi Jones) visited Maulana Karenga in Los Angeles and adopted his pan-African philosophy of Kawaida, taking the name Imamu Amear Baraka, or "spiritual leader" of "divine blessing." The five years that followed saw the height of Baraka's participation in the Black Nationalist project. In 1970, Baraka initiated the "first modern" pan-African congress in Atlanta, and publicly supported Kenneth A. Gibson in the Newark mayoral election, a black candidate in a majority-black city that had never had a black mayor. But when Gibson became the first African American mayor of Newark and it was back to business as usual, Baraka faced a philosophical crisis. He dropped the spiritual title "Imamu," breaking with Black Nationalism to pursue a political philosophy of Third-World Marxism.

Baraka's interest in Marx predates his public conversion to Marxism—a socialist sensibility appears repeatedly in his work after his trip to Cuba in 1960—but the hard shift to Third-World Marxism in 1974 reflects more than a disappointing experience with mainstream politics.[105] As Ben Hickman notes in his study of late-period Baraka, "the confluence of a global economic crisis directly implicating imperialism in the falling living standards of working people, combined with the willingness of imperialism's 'black agents' in Africa to place the burden of this crisis on the poor, produced a reading of imperialism and racism that increasingly

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[104] Amiri Baraka, "SOS," *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*, 218.

[105] See Maurice A. Lee, *The Aesthetics of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka: The Rebel Poet* (Biblioteca Javier Coy d'estudis nord-americans: Universitat de València, 2004), 11-22.

turned to class as its major interpretive tool."[106] Baraka's first major work of his Marxist period, *Hard Facts*, marks this radical departure from the politics of black cultural nationalism with a shift from innovative formalism to content-driven poems inspired by the short essay form of Chinese writer Lu Hsun. Poems like "Das Kapital" and "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat" stake out a Marxian politics in plain terms. In the wake of the long, hot summers, Baraka calls for a "Red Autumn," a poem from *Hard Facts* in which he writes, "winter is yet ahead, we are readying to go to a women's conference and find / ways / to bring Marxism-leninism-mao tse-tung thought to black women."[107] Its casual paternalism not withstanding, the poem announces itself as a search for an aesthetic practice adequate to a black Marxist poetry. In this moment of seasonal transition, Baraka departs from the musical improvisations of his Black Nationalist period, trading the experience of rhythm for the dissemination of knowledge. Hickman writes, "as a *cultural* nationalist, [Baraka] felt an organic tie between new (or Black) artistic forms and political (Black) liberation," and his Marxist period marks "a move away from the idea that culture can be politics *in its very form*."[108] This emphasis on content over form represents an attempt to develop a specifically Marxian poetics, but also registers a contradiction animating a range of radical politics in the period of transition from boom to downturn.

Although Baraka trades Black Nationalism for Third-World Marxism at the level of political content, he remains committed to a politics of affirmation throughout this transition at the level of form, even as his focus shifts from a poetics of formal experimentation to a content-driven poetics of direct address based on the essay form. Baraka's earlier work sought a formal practice appropriate to the affirmation of blackness, which comprised its content, drawing

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[106] Hickman, *Crisis and the US Avant-Garde*, 119.

[107] Amiri Baraka, "Red Autumn," *Hard Facts: (Excerpts)* (Newark: Revolutionary Communist League, 1975), 23.

[108] Hickman, *Crisis and the US Avant-Garde*, 124.

heavily on black music. For Baraka writing during his Black Nationalist period, "black music is essentially a collectivizing form that moves outward from expression to history," but this "summative theory of black music" also constitutes his "theory of art" more generally, which posits "a complex emancipation from the self through expression, a liberatory art that finds political agency in the exhaustion of the desiring subject."[109] The task of this political and aesthetic practice follows Baraka's comments on New Black Music: "Find the self, then kill it."[110]

This contradiction of self-abolition through self-affirmation is precisely what is at issue in the use of apostrophe in the period. Crucially, Hickman argues, Baraka's poetics do not amount, as Kimberly Benson argues, to "a process of constant self-negation" through the subversive use of language.[111] This would suggest "endless self defeat," but Baraka retains a commitment to the *real* revolutionary transformation of society throughout his life, in which poetic practice plays a role best described as "projective representation, a species of art that can call for action at the same time it describes."[112] The collective subject Baraka constitutes in communication between speaker and audience—what Baraka calls "the larger consciousness of a *one self*"—is thus tasked in a very real sense with self-abolition through the revolutionary transformation of society.[113] Baraka's poetry after his shift to Marxism has been accused of didacticism, but as Hickman argues, "*Hard Facts* has to be positioned as an experimental work in the strict sense: it is consciously the beginning of a project to find a poetic language for the mass communication of

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[109] Hickman, *Crisis and the US Avant-Garde*, 116-7.

[110] Baraka, *Black Music*, 201.

[111] Kimberly Benston, *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2000): 202, qouted in Hickman, *Crisis and the US Avant-Garde*, 116.

[112] Hickman, *Crisis and the US Avant-Garde*, 116-117.

[113] Baraka, *Black Music*, 205.

Marxism."[114] In his late period, then, Baraka commits to a Marxist poetic form that reaches for a collective subject for whom the defining characteristic is no longer race but class.

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This contradiction between affirmation and negation defines the radical political projects of the period, and is exemplified perhaps most pointedly by the Situationist International and their critique of work, which rejected the affirmation of labour central to the traditional workers' movement but sought the abolition of class society through the establishment of workers' councils. A critique of work appears in Baraka's poetry in the Black Nationalist period, and especially in the call in "Black People!" for unmediated access to everything the world has to offer without having to work for it, as well as in the work of anarcho-feminist Beat poet Diane di Prima, Baraka's friend and co-editor of *The Floating Bear* from 1961 to 1969. Like Baraka, di Prima insists upon unmediated access to everything for everyone, rejecting the idea that work should be the basis of social wealth and calling for a total transformation of social life and its reproduction. And like Baraka, her poetry conjures a collective subject of insurrection through the use of apostrophe. Di Prima thus wrestles, too, with what Marina Vishmidt, following Ray Brassier, calls "the paradox of self-abolition," which is to say the problem of construction of a subject that carries within itself its own self-destruction.[115] I want to conclude this chapter with a discussion of di Prima's 1968 collection, *Revolutionary Letters*, and the critique of work—particularly in relation to the political philosophy of the Situationist International—in order to grasp a common tension structurally grounded in the shared contradictions of the moment.

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[114] Hickman, *Crisis and the US Avant-Garde*, 123.

[115] See Marina Vishmidt, "The Paradox of Self-Abolition: A Mapping Exercise" (lecture, The Showroom, London, UK, December 12, 2015), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKykupDhX4k; and Ray Brassier, "Wandering Abstraction," *Mute*, February 13, 2014, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/wandering-abstraction. In Chapter Three, I further explore Vishmidt's approach to the paradox of self-abolition in my discussion of Lizzie Borden's 1983 indie-film *Born in Flames* (New York: First Run Features).

Take What You Need

Originally composed during the turbulent years of 1968-1971 and extended over the decades following its initial publication, *Revolutionary Letters* is at once a history of the long, hot summers and a survival manual for insurrectionaries facing the onset of autumnal downturn. The speaker remarks, "These are transitional years and the dues / will be heavy," underlying the seismic shift that was underway and the toll it would surely take.[116] The psychic world of *Revolutionary Letters* is in total state of emergency, a situation in which "help will arrive, until the day no help arrives / and then you're on your own." Under such circumstances, "The forms proliferate." This will be true for both poetry and struggle, and their intersection in the emergence and development of what I have been calling "riot poetics" tracks this convergence. Di Prima's poems stress the practicalities of social reproduction during periods of scarcity and open conflict with the state, advising readers to "store water; make a point of filling your bathtub / at the first news of trouble: they turned off the water / in the 4th ward for a whole day during the Newark riots."[117] Like Baraka, di Prima's work in the period forgoes abstract expressionism in favour of direct address, in letter fifteen reminding rioters to "take what you need, 'it's free / because it's yours'." Precarious life populates these pages—in prisons and riots, hiding out or under siege—but the poems militate against compromise: "when you seize a town, a campus, get hold of the power / stations, the water, the transportation, / forget to negotiate, forget how / to negotiate, don't wait for De Gaulle or Kirk / to abdicate, they won't."[118] The document has a clandestine tone, suggestive of secret communication systems between underground resistance fighters, warning readers "to KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT / not to 'trust' / even your truelove,

[116] Diane di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2007), 20.

[117] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 3.

[118] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 27.

that is / lay no more knowledge on him than he needs / to do his part."[119] As American hegemony unravels, Di Prima develops a riot poetics that tactically deploys the apostrophe to conjure a collective, revolutionary subject from among the ruins of the postwar boom.

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Read as a historical document of the long, hot summers, *Revolutionary Letters* records the rise of a system of separation at the end of the industrial period in America, tying the spread of riots to the gentrification of urban centres and the decline of social services. Noting changes in the urban landscapes of San Francisco, New York and Boston, letter sixty directs its reader to:

> Look to the cities, see how 'urban renewal'
> tears out the slums from the heart of town
> forces expendable poor to the edges, to some
> remote & indefensible piece of ground:
> Hunter's Point, Lower East Side, Columbia Point
> out of sight, out of mind, & when bread riots come
> (conjured by cutting welfare, raising prices)
> the man won't hesitate to raze those ghettos
> & few will see, & fewer will object.[120]

After the 1949 Housing Act, urban renewal projects remade formerly industrial cities into havens for high finance, crowding low-income residents into vast housing complexes divided along racial lines. The Regional Plan Association—composed of Morgan bankers, Rockefeller Foundation directors, and real estate developers—was dreaming up the deindustrialization of Manhattan decades earlier with the First Regional Plan of 1928, which envisioned a rezoned downtown that explicitly excluded industry. But it was not until the time of the Downtown Lower Manhattan Association (DLMA)—created in 1958 by financier David Rockefeller—that conditions allowed for the implementation of their vision: "In the 15 years spanning 1958-1973, nearly 47 million square feet of new office space was created in Lower Manhattan. The

[119] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 26.

[120] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 77.

centerpieces of the DLMA building boom were the World Trade Center complex, the Chase Manhattan Bank headquarters (1961), the Home Insurance building (1965) and the Jacob Javits federal office building (1968)."[121] With the decline in industrial profitability, the institutions of high finance began to exert their influence over state policy. Unemployment levels grew, and cities became post-apocalyptic wastelands: "your cities in ruins, smouldering, pillaged by children / your cars broken down, at a standstill, choking the roads / your citizens standing beside them, bewildered, or choosing / a packload of objects (what they carry away)."[122] In the cultural imaginary of the long, hot summers, the collective subject of the insurrection finds its recruits among these populations of the dispossessed.

For insurrectionaries, *Revolutionary Letters* offers tactics for surviving the autumnal downturn of the American century, too, describing in critical detail "what to expect" now that "the tide is rising."[123] Letter three addresses vital matters like food and shelter: "store food—dry stuff like rice and beans stores best / goes farthest, SALT VERY IMPORTANT," or, "hoard matches, we aren't good / at rubbing sticks together any more."[124] In letter five, the speaker encourages her readers to stockpile medication: "at some point / you may be called upon / to keep going for several days without sleep," so "keep some ups around," or "you may have to crash, under tension," in which case "keep some downs / on hand."[125] Letter eight offers protest strategy: "Everytime you pick the spot for a be-in / a demonstration, a march, a rally, you are choosing the ground / for a potential battle," so "Pick your terrain with that in mind." Bring "a

[121] Jessica Hurley and Laura Finch, "From the Bomb to the Crash: Geographies of Disaster in the American Century," accessed on January 13, 2018, http://fromthebombtothecrash.squarespace.com/content-1.

[122] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 53.

[123] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 5.

[124] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 9-10.

[125] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 12.

plastic bag / with a damp cloth in it, for tear gas," and "wear no jewelry / wear clothes you can move in easily, wear no glasses / contact lenses / earrings for pierced ears are especially hazardous." The discussion of tactics here opens onto a question of violence: "try to be clear / in front, what you will do if it comes / to trouble." This advice comes with a reminder that "NO ONE WAY WORKS, it will take all of us / shoving at the thing from all sides / to bring it down."[126] But violence remains a decisive factor in the question of audience composition, when, for example, the speaker in letter six advises her reader to "avoid the folk / who find Bonnie and Clyde too violent / who see the blood but not the energy form."[127] Indeed, the collective subject of self-abolition invoked in the *Revolutionary Letters* is repeatedly renegotiated along political lines in which the question of violence remains of key concern.

As an instructional or historical document, *Revolutionary Letters* assumes a certain amount of knowledge and familiarity with radical politics, but the poems constantly complicate any sense of collectivity that might easily emerge. In letter fifty-three, subtitled SAN FRANSCISCO NOTE, the speaker finds collectivity in the midst of riot:

> I think I'll stay on this
> earthquake fault near this
> still-active volcano in this
> armed fortress facing a
> dying ocean &
> covered w/dirt
> while the
> streets burn up & the
> rocks fly & pepper gas
> lays us out
> cause
> that's where my friends are[128]

[126] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 17.

[127] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 14.

[128] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 68.

The poems trace a movement from the singular subject who opens the letters with the realization that "the stakes are myself," to a collective subject, a "we" that "return[s] with the tides." There is a sense in letter four that collectivity emerges naturally, that, "Left to themselves people / grow their hair," they "sleep easily" and "share blankets, dope & children."[129] While letter two speaks of "an organism, one flesh," however, letter three distinguishes between its reader and the "average American."[130] The poems reject normative national identity in favour of the outsider figure associated with the counter-culture movement: "at a gas station / man uptight at the / sight of us." The collective subject invoked in the letters might also include prisoners "in all the cages of America," and militants "who can tell you / how to make Molotov cocktails, flamethrowers, / bombs whatever / you might be needing," actively encouraging the reader to "find them and learn." But the tone remains cautious, even suspicious, returning time and again to the question of audience composition. Letter fourteen asks, "are you prepared / to hide someone in your home indefinitely"? Any relationship between speaker and audience here is potentially antagonistic, introducing an additional degree of provisionality into the apostrophe. Nevertheless, the goal remains the same: "every revolutionary must at last will his own destruction / rooted as he is in the past he sets out to destroy." And once again it is aesthetic practice that best approaches the possibility of self-abolition: "the vortex of artistic creation is the vortex of self destruction."[131]

As a poetics of the circulation struggle, *Revolutionary Letters* takes the state as its primary antagonist, but advocates a more totalizing critique than "the overthrow of government," as in letter nine, when the speaker says, "don't kid yourself : government / is not where it's at : it's only / a good place to start." The poem offers a more radical program: "1. kill head of Dow

[129] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 7, 11.

[130] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 8, 10.

[131] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 23.

Chemical / 2. Destroy plant / 3. MAKE IT UNPROFITABLE FOR THEM." The speaker elaborates: "i.e. destroy the concept of money / as we know it, get rid of interest, / savings, inheritance."[132] Compared to a document like the Black Panther's "Ten Point Program," which includes a demand for full employment, the *Revolutionary Letters* treats the desire for work as a sign of antagonism and naivety, as in letter nineteen:

> If what you want is jobs
> for everyone, you are still the enemy,
> you have not thought thru, clearly
> what that means[133]

The question of how to identify the "enemy," of who or what that enemy is, is of course central to the critique itself. The poem is dedicated to the Poor People's Campaign, which was created by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1967, and sought full employment and low-income housing for impoverished citizens. By contrast, the poems reject labour and civil society altogether, along with the luxuries of a social surplus generated by years American growth now passing into memory. From "housing, / industry / (GE on the Navaho / reservation) / a car for everyone, garage, refrigerator, / TV, more plumbing, scientific / freeways," to "schools / where all our kids are pushed into one shape / are taught / it's better to be 'American' than Back / or Indian, or Jap, or PR, where Dick / and Jane become and are the dream," the mutual implication of each referent suggests moments of an integrated totality. An entire form of life here becomes the object of critique, at the very moment the narrative of its universality unravels: "if you still want a piece / a small piece of suburbia, green lawn / laid down by the square foot / color TV," or "degrees from universities which are nothing / more than slum landlords, festering sinks / of lies," di Prima writes, "THEN YOU ARE STILL / THE ENEMY, you are selling / yourself

[132] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 18.

[133] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 31.

short, remember / you can have what you ask for ask for / everything." Di Prima's suggestion that work is a form of domination resonates with the critical spirit of Guy Debord's famous phrase, "NE TRAVAILLEZ JAMAIS," or "NEVER WORK," which he spray-painted on a wall on the Rue de Seine in Paris 1953. Like di Prima, who advocates total transformation, Debord and the Situationist International sought what the Belgian anarchist philosopher and Situationist Raoul Vaneigem calls "the revolution of everyday life."[134]

Against any separation of revolutionary activity, the Situationist International insisted on the total transformation of society, but remained constrained by the limits of what Théorie Communiste call "programmatism," defining the revolution as the self-affirmation of one pole of the capital-labour relation.[135] Drawing on Théorie Communiste's critique of the Situationist International, the Endnotes collective highlights this fundamental tension inherent in the philosophical practice of Situationism:

> It was thus on the basis of an existing workers' power at the points of production that they saw the abolition of work as becoming possible, both from a technical and organizational standpoint. In transposing the techniques of the cyberneticians and the gestures of the bohemian anti-artist into the trusted, calloused hands of the organized working class, the situationists were able to imagine the abolition of work as the direct result of its liberation; that is, to imagine the overcoming of alienation as a result of an immediate technical-creative restructuring of the workplace by the workers themselves.[136]

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[134] Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Left Bank Books and Rebel Press, 1983).

[135] Readers will recall the concept of programmatism from my discussion of the work of Théorie Communiste in Chapter 1. See Theorié Communiste, "Much Ado about Nothing," *Endnotes* 1 (2008): 155-66.

[136] Endnotes, "Bring Out Your Dead," *Endnotes* 1 (2008): 8.

For the Situationists, who drew heavily on the bohemian avant-garde, the possibility of the self-abolition of the proletariat depends upon both the rising power of the working class and technological developments in capitalist production. As Endnotes argues, the Situationists collapse the conflict between the liberation of labour and its abolition "into an immediate contradictory unity, transposing the opposition between means and ends into one between *form* and *content*."[137] This tension appears as a contradiction internal to their practice between their call to end work and their investment in workers' councils as the means through which to realize proletarian self-abolition. "On the one hand the *content* of the revolution was to involve a radical questioning of work itself (and not merely its organization), with the goal of overcoming the separation between work and leisure," Endnotes writes, "yet on the other hand the *form* of this revolution was to be workers taking over their workplaces and running them democratically."[138] The Situationist International thus represents the contradictory logic of a transitional moment, promoting the self-abolition of the proletariat by means of workers' councils that will become obsolete with the capitalist restructuring of the 1970s.

What is characteristic of avant-garde responses to the transition from boom to downturn and 1970s precarity is the search for a political and aesthetic practice adequate to the growing crisis at hand, marked by the attempt—through apostrophe and address—to conjure a collective subject capable of weathering the gathering storm. For Baraka and di Prima, the intention is self-abolition through the total transformation of society, but their projects remain affirmative at the level of form because they derive their content from a positive sense of identity categories. In the case of the Situationists, their position is based on a sense of political possibility afforded "by the technological prosperity of modern capitalism" and especially "the 'leisure society' potentials of

[137] Endnotes, "Bring Out Your Dead," 7.

[138] Endnotes, "Bring Out Your Dead," 7.

automation," as well as "the battalions of the workers' movement who were capable of both compelling (in their day to day struggles) and appropriating (in their revolutionary councils) these technical advances."[139] A positive conception of worker identity provides the content for the Situationist approach to self-abolition, which takes its contradictory form in the affirmation of the proletariat via workers councils. For the poets considered in this chapter, the revolutionary subject of self-abolition moves between racialization and class composition, but always within a positive conception of collectivity affirmed through apostrophe. In many ways, di Prima pushes this contradiction the furthest, although a lingering sense of affirmation battles for position in lines like "without police / may it continue / without prisons / may it continue."[140] This tension between affirmation and negation forms the crux of radical politics in the period.

* * *

This chapter has argued that, during the long, hot summers, as industrial exhaustion sets in, the emergence and development of riot poetics tracks the struggle to find a politics appropriate to the transition from boom to downturn. The separatist horizons of Baraka's Black Nationalism and di Prima's anarchism at times risk confusing the refusal of normative civil society with a revolution in everyday life. The desire for a return to Africa or to a simplified form of life similar to the peasantry of the pre-industrial period—what Benjamin Noys characterizes in his reading of di Prima's *Revolutionary Letters* as a call for "a return to a moment or form of life before abstraction"[141] that gives di Prima's work a anarcho-primitivist or anti-civilization tenor—may be less of a politics after all, and more an acknowledgement of the becoming surplus of the

[139] Endnotes, "Bring Out Your Dead," 8.

[140] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 87.

[141] Benjamin Noys, "The Cosmogony of Revolution: Diane di Prima's *Revolutionary Letters* and Anti-Neurosis" (paper presentation, Neurosis, Poetry, and the Present, Goldsmiths, London, UK, March 18, 2017), https://cpct.uk/2017/05/12/benjamin-noys-chichester-the-cosmogony-of-revolution-diane-di-primas-revolutionary-letters-and-anti-neurosis-neurosis-poetry-and-the-present-18-march-2017/.

proletariat in this transitional moment, a development closely intertwined with the process of racialization and the reproduction of the abstraction *blackness*. At any rate, the "crossed wires"[142] of the late 1960s and early 1970s suggests both a gathering and a dispersal that registers a series of contradictions animating the riot poetics of Baraka and di Prima. The *Revolutionary Letters*, for example, expound a revolutionary immediacy in which the mediating forces of money, labour, and the state are swept away in a moment of insurrectionary violence, at the same time that the speaker of "Letter #10" insists that "Change is quick but revolution / will take a while," suggesting the revolution will unfold as process and transition.[143] The ultimate expression of this contradiction emerges as an attempt to ground a politics of abolition in the affirmation of a collective subject, a contradiction that will prove decisive to the cultural politics of the long downturn that I explore further in Part II of this study.

[142] Clover, *Riot*, 166.

[143] di Prima, *Revolutionary Letters*, 20.

PART II: BUST

CHAPTER THREE

Signs of Autumn: Arrighian Realism and the Cinematics of Downturn

> Was this burst of financial activity an aberration as some historians, taking a moral tone, have suggested? Was it not rather a normal development? Already in the latter part of the sixteenth century, another period when capital was superabundant, the Genoese had followed the same itinerary, as the *noble vecchi*, the official lenders to the king of Spain, gradually withdrew from commercial activity. It looks very much as if Amsterdam, repeating this process, dropped the bird in hand to go chasing shadows, abandoning the money-spinning entrepôt trade for a life of speculation and rentierdom, and leaving all the best cards to London – even financing her rival's rise. But then, did Amsterdam really have any choice? Was there even the remotest chance of stopping the rise of the North? At all events, every capitalist development of this order seems, by reaching the stage of financial expansion, to have in some sense announced its maturity: it was a sign of autumn.
>
> — Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century,* Vol. III

> Just as the heavenly bodies always repeat a certain movement, once they have been flung into it, so also does social production, once it has been flung into this movement of alternate expansion and contraction. Effects become causes in their turn, and the various vicissitudes of the whole process, which always reproduces its own conditions, take on the form of periodicity. When this periodicity has once become consolidated, even political economy sees that the production of a relative surplus population—i.e. a population surplus in relation to capital's average requirements for valorization—is a necessary condition for modern industry.
>
> — Karl Marx, *Capital,* Vol. I

The 1973 Recession marked the decisive moment at which an already sputtering global economy abruptly lurched into a process of large-scale restructuring. This shift signaled the beginning of the end for American hegemony and its organization of the capitalist world-system, ushering in a protracted period of economic stagnation and contraction in the West. In the wake of the 1973 oil shock, and the collapse of the Bretton Woods Agreement in 1973 following the Nixon Shock of 1971, the 1973 stock market crash made evident at an economic level what the Fall of Saigon in 1975 would subsequently demonstrate at the level of geopolitics: the postwar economic order was unraveling and the American century was in a profound state of crisis. After World War II,

the leading capitalist economies enjoyed what Giovanni Arrighi describes as "a worldwide virtuous circle of high profits, high investments and increasing productivity."[1] But, as Robert Brenner argues, between the years of 1965 and 1973, as output rates in Germany and Japan caught up with their US counterparts, what had been previously "a symbiosis, if a highly conflictual and unstable one, of leader and followers, of early and later developers, and of hegemon and hegemonized" became a zero-sum game of cutthroat competition.[2] Global profit rates plummeted. The response of governments and industry leaders in the advanced capitalist countries to the steep fall in profitability across major sectors of the economy only exacerbated the crisis, plunging the global economy into extended decline.

Part I of this dissertation examined relationships between precarity and American literature in the context of postwar industrialism: Chapter One focused on the American novel at the outset of the period Brenner calls "the long boom," which he dates between 1950 and 1965, while Chapter Two studied avant-garde poetics in the US during what Brenner describes as "the fall in profitability and the turn from boom to crisis" that took place between 1965 and 1973. Part II now turns to cinematic and televisual representations of precarity from the post-1973 period that Brenner calls "the long downturn," an era defined by a sustained crisis of profitability in the capitalist world-system that stretches into the present.[3]

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[1] Giovanni Arrighi, "The Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence," *New Left Review* 20 (2003): 11.

[2] Robert Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble: The US in the World Economy* (New York: Verso, 2002), 15.

[3] Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005* (New York: 2006), 8-9.

This chapter advances a new interpretive framework that I call the cinematics of downturn, a proposition I tie to Fernand Braudel's claim that financial expansion signals the arrival of autumn for a capitalist hegemon.[4] As Marija Cetinic elaborates,

> Autumn here indexes not a respite from the anticipated relentlessness of winter, but rather a decay or a waning. These "signs of autumn," rather than the free play of signs, articulate something about a major form of contemporary experience and its recent history: not an experience of slippage, disjunction, or difference, but of suffusion and density—of saturation and stasis—that unfold as decline. Autumn marks what feels like a terminal sense of crisis and contradiction that permeates contemporary life in the age of late capitalism.[5]

In what follows, I recount in some detail two leading theories of this pivotal shift in 1973—Brenner's account of the long downturn and Arrighi's model of hegemonic cycles—and the subsequent period of economic stagnation and hegemonic unraveling, as well as the brief moment of restored profitability in the 1990s that now seems little more than a blip in the general pattern of decline.[6] I outline the debate between Brenner and Arrighi regarding the post-1973 period, turning to the Marxian critique of value to distinguish the present downturn from previous periods of hegemonic transition. The remainder of the chapter then considers two examples of post-1973 realist cinema, Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* (1983) and Harmony

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[4] See Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*, vol. 3, *The Perspective of the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

[5] Marija Cetinic, "House and Field: The Aesthetics of Saturation," *Mediations* 28, no. 1 (2014): 35.

[6] According to one economist, "What it means is that with the benefit of hindsight, the late '90s never happened." Steve Liesman, "Nasdaq Companies' Losses Erase Five Years of Earnings," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 16, 2001, https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB997916585441212918.

Korine's *Gummo* (1997).[7] Marking cinematic developments in form and genre during the first decades of the long downturn, I situate these two films against the backdrop of an uptake in avant-garde realist techniques among filmmakers in the 1980s and 1990s, following Jed Esty's Arrighian argument that "realism wars can be mapped onto tectonic shifts in the history of global Anglophone hegemonies in the modern world system."[8]

* * *

Against "supply-side" explanations, which tie falling profit rates after the postwar boom to wage inflexibility understood exogenously as "'vertical' (market and socio-political) power relations between capitalists and workers," Brenner stresses the centrality of the "economic contradictions" that "arise from the 'horizontal' competition among firms that constitutes the capitalist system's economic mainspring" in bringing about the extended crisis of the long downturn.[9] In Brenner's account, capitalists are subject to competitive constraints that compel them to innovate, accumulate and move from line to line in search of the highest returns, but over time these same constraints tend to trap firms in stagnant lines, placing downward pressure on extant profit rates. His description of the transition from boom to downturn details a "historical pattern of uneven development and international competition," whereby the process by which German and Japanese manufacturing outputs caught up with productivity rates in the US first sustained and then undermined the postwar boom.[10] The transformation had dwelt within the conditions of the expansion itself: as Germany and Japan played catch-up with the US,

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[7] *Born in Flames*, dir. by Lizzie Borden (New York: First Run Features, 1983); *Gummo*, dir. by Harmony Korine (Burbank, CA: First Line Features, 1997).

[8] Jed Esty, "Realism Wars," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 49, no. 2 (2016): 335.

[9] Brenner, *Economics of Global Turbulence*, 37.

[10] Brenner, *Economics of Global Turbulence*, 25. It should be noted that, as Arrighi writes, "Brenner's use of the expression 'uneven development' echoes Trotsky's and Lenin's but differs radically from the more common contemporary deployment designating the tendency of capitalist development to polarize and diversify geographical space." See Arrighi, "Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence," 8, fn. 9.

higher-cost incumbent American firms found that their large-scale investments in fixed capital—which had previously afforded them a competitive advantage in the global economy—now prevented them from abandoning their lines or scaling back on production without suffering catastrophic losses.[11] This crisis of capital density is what Brenner calls "over-capacity and over-production" and what Cetinic describes as "a saturated field of productive processes."[12]

A crisis of capital density requires what Brenner terms a "shake out," but in the years following the 1973-1975 Recession, a "wide-ranging system of mutual support, ultimately guaranteed by the government, that protected core industrial and financial corporations from going out of business," allowed higher-cost incumbent firms to avoid "purging superfluous, high-cost means of production by the standard capitalist methods of bankruptcy, downsizing, and layoffs."[13] Commodity production continued apace, tightening the profitability squeeze. Brenner describes this state of affairs as a situation in which there is simultaneously "too much entry" and "too little exit."[14] Because an incumbent firm's fixed capital

> can be realized only in their established lines of production and would be lost were they to switch lines … they will have every reason to defend their markets and counterattack by speeding up the process of innovation through investment in additional fixed capital. The adoption of such a strategy on the part of the firms originally caught with the high costs will tend to provoke the original cost-reducing innovators to accelerate technical

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[11] Brenner writes, "Under these conditions, the line can be said to be characterized by over-capacity or over-production because—or in the sense that—there is insufficient demand to allow the higher-cost firms to maintain their former rates of profit; they have been obliged to cease using some of their means of production and can make use of the rest only by lowering their price and thus their profitability. There is over-capacity and over-production, *with respect to the existing profit rate*." See Brenner, *Economics of Global Turbulence*, 28.

[12] Brenner, *Economics of Global Turbulence*, 9; Cetinic, "House and Field," 35.

[13] Brenner, *Boom and the Bubble*, 113.

[14] Brenner, *Boom and the Bubble*, 26.

> change themselves, further worsening the already existing over-capacity and over-production.[15]

Faced with a rapidly devaluating dollar, the US government executed a series of policy moves—the "Volcker shock" and the Reagan-Thatcher monetarist "revolution" of 1979-1981, the Plaza Accord of 1985, and the so-called "reverse Plaza Accord" of 1995—that would inflate the financial boom and bubble of the 1990s and 2000s, deferring the "shake out" until the crash of 2008. The persistence of stagnation thus follows from the manner in which businesses and governments responded to falling profitability between the years of 1965 and 1973, and then in the decades following the 1973-1975 Recession, worsening the dynamics that underwrite over-capacity and over-production and bringing about an extended squeeze on profitability.

If Brenner details the economic and political mechanisms by which the postwar US industrial economy swung dramatically from boom to crisis and got stuck there, dragging the whole thing down with it, Arrighi situates the long downturn in world-historical perspective, tying declining profit rates and the collapse of Bretton Woods to the mounting costs of the Vietnam War, and shifting focus from the crisis of manufacture in the advanced capitalist countries to the financialization of the capitalist world-system. Arrighi argues that "the crisis of profitability that marked the transition from the long boom to the long downturn, as well as the great stagflation of the 1970s, were themselves deeply affected by the parallel crisis of American hegemony which ensued from the escalation of the Vietnam war and the eventual US defeat."[16] The escalation of the war in Vietnam and the rising costs of the conflict both politically and economically were decisive in both the breakdown of the gold standard and the subsequent financialization of the global economy. Arrighi notes that financialization occurs

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[15] Brenner, *Economics of Global Turbulence*, 35.

[16] Arrighi, "Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence," 41.

> whenever returns to capital invested in trade and production fall below a certain threshold and inter-capitalist competition becomes a zero- or negative-sum game. Under these conditions—precisely those which, according to Brenner, have characterized the long downturn—the risks and uncertainties involved in reinvesting incoming cash flows into trade and production are high, and it makes good business sense to use them to increase the liquidity of assets as a defensive or offensive weapon in the escalating competitive struggle.[17]

In the post-1973 period, to be sure, staggering profits have been generated in the US financial sector, while profit rates in manufacture have suffered a dramatic decline.[18] Arrighi thus highlights how deindustrialization and financialization are two sides of the same coin.

Crucially for Arrighi, this declension in industrial growth and the simultaneous explosion of finance that together characterize the post-1973 US economy are part of a recurrent pattern spanning the *longue durée* of capital accumulation, marking the collapse of the Italian, Dutch and British financial empires in previous "long centuries," giving rise to a fleeting period of restored profitability for the waning hegemon. As Arrighi argues,

> this upturn can be traced to a response to system-wide intensifications of competition that has characterized world capitalism from its earliest, pre-industrial beginnings right up to the present. This response consists of a system-wide tendency, centred on the leading capitalist economy of the epoch, towards the "financialization" of processes of capital accumulation. Integral to the transformation of inter-capitalist competition from a

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[17] Arrighi, "Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence,", 50.

[18] Arrighi writes, "Confronted with heightened international competition (especially in trade-intensive sectors like manufacturing), higher-cost incumbent firms responded to falling returns by diverting a growing proportion of their incoming cash flows from investment in fixed capital and commodities to liquidity and accumulation through financial channels." See Arrighi, "Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence," 49. For an account of the growing share of GDP that finance comes to occupy in the late twentieth century, see Greta R. Krippner, "The Financialization of the American Economy," *Socio-Economic Review* 3 (2005): 173-208.

> positive- into a negative-sum game, this tendency has also acted as a key mechanism for restoring profitability, at least temporarily, in the declining but still hegemonic centres of world capitalism. From this standpoint we can detect resemblances, not just between the great depression of 1873-96 and the long downturn of 1973-93, but also between the Edwardian *belle époque* and the US economic revival and great euphoria of the 1990s.[19]

As I explain in the Introduction, Arrighi turns to Fernand Braudel's theory of the "long century" to model what he calls "systemic cycles of accumulation." He identifies four cycles, each tied geopolitically to a global hegemon, and each divided into three phases held in sway, in turn, by the logics of mercantile, industrial, and financial capital. Each cycle's movement through these three phases follows a seasonal logic of transition: from the blossoming of spring, through the flowering of summer and into the decay of autumn, with a brief and final moment of financial flourishing before the sun goes down for good on a global hegemon.

Pinpointing 1973 as the signal crisis of the US cycle of accumulation, Arrighi recasts Brenner's account of the boom and bubble of the 1990s—during which time the US economy enjoyed a sudden surge in growth—in world-historical perspective, arguing that the financialization of the capitalist world-system in the post-1973 period repeats "the tendency for uneven development, in Brenner's sense, to generate a long boom, followed by a long period of intensifying competition, reduced profitability and comparative stagnation; itself followed by an upturn of profitability, based on a financial expansion centred on the epoch's leading economy."[20] In Arrighi's model, this financial bubble cannot rescue an ailing hegemon, which at the end of each cycle must inevitably give way to its successor. For Arrighi, as for Braudel,

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[19] Arrighi, "Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence," 26.

[20] Arrighi, "Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence," 27.

financialization is "a sign of autumn."[21] What distinguishes the present moment of American decline, I contend, is that there appears to be no new cycle of accumulation on the horizon, no ascending hegemon that might inaugurate a renewed expansion of the capitalist economy on a global scale. A series of candidates have vied for the position—first Japan, then China, and then the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) in a sort of multi-nodal hegemony—only to fail under the weight of global overcapacity and a high organic composition of capital.[22]

In their focus on inter-capitalist competition, the analyses offered respectively by Brenner and Arrighi—as illuminating as they are in tracing the contours of the post-World War II period—operate at the level of *price*, and therefore cannot fully account for the historical specificity of the current conjuncture, which is marked fundamentally by a crisis of *value*.[23] "Competition executes the inner laws of capital," Marx writes, "but it does not invent them. It realizes them."[24] Here, Marx suggests we can discern in the motion of inter-capitalist competition a trace of the operations of capital's secular tendencies. But the underlying process

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[21] Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, 246.

[22] Arrighi himself has argued that capital accumulation may very well eventually "reach a stage at which the crisis of overaccumulation cannot bring into existence an agency powerful enough to reconstitute the system on larger and more comprehensive foundations," and that "there are indeed signs that we may have entered such a stage." See Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (New York: Verso, 2010), 341. For a critique of the notion that industrial development in the BRICS is ushering in a new era of material growth that might pave the way for a renewed workerism and a revitalized party-form, see Joshua Clover and Aaron Benanav, "Can Dialectics Break BRICS?" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113, no. 4 (2014): 743-759.

[23] For a critique of Brenner and Arrighi on these very grounds, see Moishe Postone, "Theorizing the Contemporary World: Robert Brenner, Giovanni Arrighi, David Harvey," in *Political Economy and Global Capitalism: The 21st Century, Present and Future*, eds. Rob Albritton, Bob Jessop, and Richard Westra (London: Anthem Press, 2010), 7-24.

[24] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1977), 752. See also Volume I of *Capital*, where Marx writes, "While it is not our intention here to consider the way in which the immanent laws of capitalist production manifest themselves in the external movements of individual capitals, assert themselves as the coercive laws of competition, and therefore enter into the consciousness of the individual capitalist as the motives which drive him forward, this much is clear: a scientific analysis of competition is possible only if we can grasp the inner nature of capital, just as the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies are intelligible only to someone who is acquainted with their real motions, which are not perceptible to the senses." Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), 433.

driving this motion—what Marx calls valorization—remains in the final instance obscured. Marx's critique of value offers three distinct moments of insight into the trajectory of capital accumulation. First, the capitalist form of value, as an actually existing abstraction, "form-determines" the labour process and its reproduction at the level of the social whole.[25] Next, in its drive to self-expansion, capital reorganizes the labour process to increase productivity via technological ratcheting. Finally, through the rationalization of the labour process, capital erodes the very source of value, expelling increasing numbers of workers from the production process and thereby slipping inexorably into crisis. When capital reaches this level of density, the affirmation of labour—the traditional Marxist project of its liberation and socialization—becomes impossible. Labour cannot represent an opposition to capital or be the agent of its overcoming in an era of deindustrialization, not simply because it is always already an alienated form of human activity, but because it no longer occupies a structural position within the class relation from which to assert itself as an antagonist. Under such conditions, the proletariat confronts what Théorie Communiste calls "class belonging as external constraint."[26]

This is the autumnal logic of seasonal torpor for a labour movement in terminal decline. Brenner and Arrighi disagree about the extent to which labour militancy brought about the long downturn, but how do they view the consequences of the downturn for anti-capitalist struggle? Arrighi argues that a global wave of labour action between 1968-73 and a subsequent pay

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[25] The concept of "form-determination" is taken from Marx's writings on the capitalist value-form, and its capacity to exert a determining force over the form or shape that the labour process and its products take. For a more detailed explanation of the concept in Marx's work, see the Introduction to this dissertation.

[26] Théorie Communiste, "Communization in the Present Tense," *Communization and Its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles*, ed. Benjamin Noys (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2011), 53. That is not to say that the surplus proletariat has now become the revolutionary subject of our era. As the Surplus Club writes, "The proliferation of riots within the present moment as an addendum to the development of the surplus proletariat does not necessitate a romantic projection that distinguishes an identitarian agent closer to communism than those more fortunate." Nevertheless, the horizon of anti-capitalist struggle in the present necessarily confronts the fact of a proletarian class in the throes of decomposition. See Surplus Club, "Trapped at a Party Where No One Likes You," *SIC*, Spring, 2015, http://sicjournal.org/trapped-at-a-party-where-no-one-likes-you/.

explosion play a significant role in bringing on the long downturn: "It was, indeed, the great stagnation-cum-inflation of the 1970s—'stagflation' as it was called at the time—and its effects on inter-capitalist competition and labour-capital relations, that effectively wore down workers' power in the core, opening the way for its collapse under the impact of the Reagan-Thatcher counterrevolution."[27] Brenner, for his part, explicitly rejects the idea that labour militancy played a key part in triggering the long downturn, arguing that capital can always look elsewhere for cheap labour. Yet he does note that, "by the middle of the 1990s, US corporations had significantly improved their condition compared to a decade previously largely by means of extended and brutal processes of rationalization and redistribution," arguing that "manufacturers had, over a decade and a half, engaged in wave after wave of shakeout, scrapping masses of outdated and redundant plant and equipment and ejecting tens of thousands of employees, achieving in the process substantial improvements in productiveness," and that "they had hugely amplified their profits at the expense of workers by means of a decade-long freeze on the growth of real wages."[28] Brenner and Arrighi thus agree that the long downturn has had a devastating impact on the lives of working people, undermining their ability to effectively organize to better their working conditions or contest the power of capital.

In Arrighi's view, this implies a fundamental similarity between the downturn at the close of the American century and the downturn that marked the decline of British hegemony at the end of the nineteenth century, a repetition confirmed for Arrighi by the financial flourishes that mark both periods. Noting that the capitalist class also launched an assault on the working classes at the end of the nineteenth century under conditions of volatility, Brenner too equates the

[27] Arrighi, "Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence," 38.

[28] Brenner, *Boom and the Bubble*, 89-92.

present moment of economic and hegemonic decline with the Gilded Age.[29] What distinguishes the two positions is the emphasis each theorist places on either politics or economics in their accounts of post-1973 downturn. Arrighi stresses the role of neoliberalism in his take on the decline of labour militancy, while Brenner's account of the long downturn highlights the economic basis of political defeat, even if he also argues elsewhere that "working people have been ravaged by capitalism in its neoliberal form."[30] For Brenner, there is a political dimension to the long downturn, and monetary policy plays an important part in giving lower-productivity firms the ability to hang on, but his detailed analysis of the advanced capitalist countries in the post-1973 period clearly spells out the death of the historical workers' movement in economic terms. But both thinkers ultimately liken the current downturn to the era of British decline.

During the period that marked the transition from British to US hegemony, however, the industrial proletariat was expanding in size and increasing in concentration—a process of mass integration and expansion that would accelerate in the twentieth century—whereas in the post-1973 period the proletariat has been defined by expulsion and fragmentation. As Aaron Benanav argues, "Since 1973, rising precarity has been associated not only with the decline of the welfare state, but also with a slowdown in capital accumulation, a rise in unemployment, and a decline in the availability of industrial jobs, all of which mark off the present from the Gilded Age past."[31] This distinction not only helps explain why Arrighi's model has been unable to account for the absence of a new cycle of accumulation, but also allows for a better account of political

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[29] See Robert Brenner, "What Is Good for Goldman Sachs Is Good for America: The Origins of the Current Crisis," Prologue of the Spanish edition of *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (*La economía de la turbulencia global,* trans. Juan Mari Madariaga [Madrid: Akal, 2009]). Available online in English-language typescript, 23. http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/issr/cstch/papers/BrennerCrisisTodayOctober2009.pdf.; Arrighi, "The Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence," 26.

[30] Robert Brenner, "Introducing Catalyst," *Catalyst: A Journal of Theory and Strategy* 1.1 (2017), https://catalyst-journal.com/vol1/no1/editorial-robert-brenner.

[31] Aaron Benanav, "Precarity Rising," *Viewpoint*, June 15, 2015, https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/06/15/precarity-rising/

possibility in the post-1973 period, in which the shift from production to circulation that Arrighi narrates accompanies a secular decline in capital accumulation and thus a secular decline in the demand for labour. The reproduction of capital and the reproduction of labour consequently diverge and decouple after 1973, hence the proletariat "becomes an externality to the process of its own reproduction, a class of workers who are 'free' not only of means of reproduction, but also of work itself."[32] Rising precarity in the post-1973 period therefore reflects declining opportunities for social reproduction through capital accumulation.

How does this economic history speak to what Colleen Lye (following Esty) has called "Arrighian realism,"[33] and to what I describe in this chapter as the cinematics of downturn? In the following sections, I examine Borden's *Born in Flames* and Korine's *Gummo* as part of a turn to realism that accompanies periods of hegemony in crisis. Like the "revanchist realism" that Leigh Claire La Berge argues emerged in the 1980s alongside and against "the canonization of postmodernism as an aesthetic mode," which sought to "resuscitate the dominant aesthetic mode that had been used to capture and critique finance capital's early twentieth-century cultural and economy hegemony, from the gilded age to the Great Depression,"[34] this thoroughly postmodern realism refuses the fantasy of reproductive futurity that financial realism espouses. But if finance, as La Berge argues, should be understood as "an orientation and contestation over futurity,"[35] the films in this chapter participate in this contest only to the extent that they reject

[32] Aaron Benanav and John Clegg, "Misery and Debt: On the Logic and History of Surplus Populations and Surplus Capital," in *Contemporary Marxist Theory: A Reader*, ed. Andrew Pendakis, Jeff Diamanti, Nicholas Brown, Josh Robinson, and Imre Szeman (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 593.

[33] Colleen Lye, "Afterword: Realism's Futures," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 49, no. 2 (2016): 351.

[34] Leigh Claire La Berge, *Scandals and Abstractions: Financial Fiction of the Long 1980s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5-10.

[35] La Berge, *Scandals and Abstractions*, 12.

the conventions of narrative temporality. Whereas the temporality of finance promises a future of pure speculation, postmodern cinematic realism is one in which the future has been cancelled.

Born in Flames ties the impasse of affirmative political projects to a slowdown in capital accumulation, while *Gummo* depicts the crisis of reproductive futurity playing out in the former industrial regions of the Midwest. Rather than attempt to represent the contents of concrete reality—as with much of the social realism of the Gilded Age—these films trace the abstractions governing reality at the level of cinematic form. *Born in Flames* constructs a spatialized narrative of feminist resistance that confronts the exhaustion of a progressively developing modernity as political and historical impasse. *Gummo* offers an image of the rustbelt as the refuse of a post-growth society and a world devoid of the real that value constitutes in a capitalist economy. Thus, my account of precarity and post-1973 cinema tracks idiosyncrasies in avant-garde approaches to cinematic realism and opens a window onto the problems that emerge from various conflicting attempts to periodize the long downturn. But it also provides the scaffolding for a theory of the precarious present and the political possibilities and limitations embedded therein.

No Time like the Present

To date, very little has been written about Lizzie Borden's pseudo-documentary and debut film from 1983, *Born in Flames*. The film takes its name from the psychedelic rock band Red Krayola's lo-fi punk single of the same name, released in 1981, which plays during the opening credits and at regular intervals throughout the film. What little criticism of *Born in Flames* that does exist tends to foreground the film's formal structure in analyzing its political significance as an example of avant-garde feminist cinema. Teresa de Lauretis, for example, argues that the

film's "barely coherent narrative, its quick-paced shots and sound montage, the counterpoint of image and word, the diversity of voices and language, and the self-conscious science-fictional frame of the story" together advance a feminist politics of difference.[36] Christina Lane describes the film as a "disjunctive collage of women's individual and collective work," suggesting *Born in Flames* uses feminist avant-garde realist strategies that subvert masculinist cinematic codes associated with Hollywood realism, "creating fantasy spaces in which women's relationships to each other can be examined."[37] The film "escapes easy summation," Brent Ryan Bellamy writes, "eschewing easy categorizations on both a narrative and formal level" in order to advance "a vision of a complex feminist movement (and of the feminists within it), located in very real socio-political milieus."[38] All three critics look to the film's formal structure in order to grasp its feminist politics, but it is the notion that the film eschews straightforward narrative that I want to engage in order to situate this formal tendency historically. In particular, I want to suggest that it is precisely in the move from temporal progression to spatialization that the film registers its own historicity at the level of narrative form, and in doing so casts light on the historical processes and structural shifts underwriting the proliferation of precarity in the late postwar era.

Set a decade after a peaceful socialist revolution in the US, *Born in Flames* is in fact a film about its real-world present, offering a biting critique of New York City in the 1980s, an infamous period in the city's history marked by crime, violence, unemployment, and financial corruption. The film foregrounds the effects of deindustrialization in the wake of the economic

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[36] Teresa de Lauretis, "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women's Cinema," *New German Critique* 34 (1985): 165.

[37] Christina Lane, *Feminist Hollywood: From Born in Flames to Point Break* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 129, 125.

[38] Brent Ryan Bellamy, "We Still Need the Women's Army: Form and Politics in Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames*," *cleo* 1, no. 3 (2013), http://cleojournal.com/2013/11/28/we-still-need-the-womens-army-form-and-politics-in-lizzie-bordens-born-in-flames/.

restructuring of the 1970s, which saw finance, insurance and real estate—the FIRE sector—displace manufacturing as the primary engine of economy profitability in the city. Borden registers this historical moment in terms of space and place, beginning with an aerial shot of the World Trade Center towers that opens the film. "Lizzie Borden's radical feminist quasi-documentary *Born in Flames*," Bellamy argues, "constructs its story through a deeply space-oriented plot."[39] Several agitating political groups populate this cinematic space: the competing underground punk-rock radio stations, Phoenix Radio, hosted by Honey (played by the actress of that name), and Radio Ragazza, hosted by Isabel (Adele Bertei); the white female editors of one of the print media organs of the party, the *Socialist Youth Review*; striking secretaries and unemployed women; and the Women's Army, a notorious direct-action group labeled as terrorists by the state, who cycle through the city and ride the subway protecting women from rapists and harassers.

The film has no single protagonist, instead jumping between plotlines that focus on one or another of these groups, interspersed with surveillance footage, reportage, and scenes from state security meetings in which we learn that the Women's Army is the target of a counter-intelligence program. Adelaide Norris (Jean Satterfield), the leader of the Women's Army, is the primary focus of their investigation. One agent describes her as a "butch, homosexual, black woman," highlighting those categories of identity that remain outside the benevolent embrace of the fictional socialist state. Laid off from her construction job, Adelaide studies under an elder, Zella Wylie (Flo Kennedy), whose vision of the movement is global and pro-violence. Under her guidance, Adelaide travels to the Western Sahara to meet a revolutionary women's group and

[39] Bellamy, "We Still Need the Women's Army."

buy weapons. Upon returning to New York, she is arrested and dies shortly afterwards while in police custody. Her death is officially recorded as a suicide, but many suspect foul play.

Just as the film appears to establish a protagonist and central story arc, narrative focus re-disperses throughout the social whole, while the inclusion of shots from fictionalized DIY "home movies" alongside what appears to be surveillance footage throws the origin of the shots into doubt. The film refuses to centre any single character's journey or privilege any one political group. Lane describes this as "a kaleidoscope of women's perspectives."[40] Instead, the film depicts multiple women's groups with different perspectives, and with conflicting ideas about what can and should be done about the rampant sexism, misogyny, patriarchal violence, high female unemployment and government oppression that characterize the socialist state. All the while, the narrative jumps between scenes and plotlines: men catcall women in the streets; male news broadcasters report cynically on the Women's Army and their struggle against precarity; white women at the *Socialist Youth Review* bemoan the "separatist" assertions of the Women's Army in favour of the ostensibly universalist cause of socialism. There are images of New York's black mayor, Zubrinsky, and the US socialist President, Metzger, alongside shots of women organizing, hosting radio shows, putting a condom on a penis, wrapping raw chicken at a processing plant, and wheat-pasting posters warning other women of rapists living in their neighborhoods. After Adelaide's death, both radio stations burn down under suspicious circumstances, and Honey and Isabel take their show on the road, broadcasting "Phoenix Ragazza Radio" from stolen moving vans. They join the Women's Army and break into a news station to interrupt a broadcast of the US President proposing to implement a wages-for-

[40] Lane, *Feminist Hollywood*, 128.

housework program. In the final scene, as a reporter recounts the incident, the antenna on top of the World Trade Center explodes, bringing the film full circle to end where it began.

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There is much to be said here, not least about the reference to the Wages for Housework movement. Before exploring the relationships between feminist cinema and precarity in the 1980s, however, I first want to consider the historical significance of what has been called the "spatial turn," which according to Fredric Jameson forms the touchstone of that notoriously slippery period in aesthetic production known as postmodernism. Writing in mid-1980s, Jameson argues that "we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism."[41] Consider, for example, the postmodern embrace of pastiche, which Jameson famously theorizes as a "symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way."[42] For Jameson, then, postmodernism is "a culture increasingly dominated by space and spatial logic."[43] Jameson thus argues that postmodernism favours a spatial sensibility at the expense of historical awareness, distinguishing it from its predecessor in terms of "the waning of the great high modernist thematics of time and temporality, the elegiac mysteries of *durée* and memory."[44] It is this spatial sensibility that forms what he calls the cultural logic of late capitalism, a term he borrows from the Belgian economist

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[41] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 16.

[42] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 21.

[43] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 25.

[44] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 64.

Ernest Mandel.[45] Following Jameson's use of Mandel's periodizing gesture to characterize cultural production in the late postwar period, it is useful to clarify here that the postmodern dominance of space and spatiality is best understood in the context of capital's tendency to move periodically from phases of industrial production to financial circulation over the *longue durée*.

The associations at stake here between production and temporality, on the one hand, and circulation and spatiality on the other, each correspond respectively to the industrial and financial phases of a given cycle of accumulation in Arrighi's world-systems model. Following Arrighi, Joshua Clover reads the transition from production to circulation in the late postwar period in terms of a shift in orientation from time to space. Drawing on Marx's theory of value, Clover argues that "the sphere of production, or value, is a regime oriented by time, while the sphere of circulation or price is a regime oriented by space."[46] This reading of the temporality of production and the spatiality of exchange rests on a distinction between value and price. "Value is congealed Socially Necessary Labor Time rather than labor or labor power itself," he argues, "while circulation is a spatial exchange, as money and commodity swap places."[47] The exchange of money for commodities is, according to Clover, the moment at which value becomes price. As Clover writes, "The transformation of value to price—that is, the process of exploitation, of surplus value extraction and realization as profit—can be understood as the compelled exchange of incommensurates, of the exchange of time for space."[48]

Putting aside the infamously thorny "transformation problem," which names the difficulty of accounting for the manner in which value becomes price, we can see here how

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[45] See Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1978).

[46] Joshua Clover, "The Time of Crisis," *And/Or Evacuate*, October 4, 2011, http://occupyeverything.org/2011/the-time-of-crisis/.

[47] Clover, "The Time of Crisis."

[48] Clover, "The Time of Crisis."

spatialization is concurrent with the financialization of the economy, insofar as the latter names the shift—both historical and structural—from production to circulation at the end of the US cycle of accumulation. What I want to suggest is that all of the symptoms associated with precarity—financial insecurity, employment scarcity, an inability to plan for the future, a lack of political possibility, and subjection to state violence—obtain precisely in this movement from a production-centered economy to one dominated by circulation. That is, circulation contextualizes not only the proliferation of precarious service-sector jobs and the decline in real wages that result from the rise to dominance of the FIRE sector, but also the hollowing out of social subjectivities previously made possible by economic growth. It thus becomes increasingly impossible to assert oneself through a politics of affirmation in the face of a state increasingly dedicated to the violent policing of surplus populations.

It is here amid economic superfluity and state violence that Borden's *Born in Flames*, with its thoroughly spatialized narrative, becomes crucial for grasping the historicity of the precarious present and the foreclosure of political possibility that it represents. The various women in the film, to one degree or another, bear all the hallmarks of economic precarity: industrial jobs are increasingly hard to find, feminized work in the service sector remains underpaid, and the future feels profoundly uncertain. With the shift in the latter half of the twentieth century from industry to finance—or, more accurately, from production to circulation—a growing percentage of the population found itself superfluous to capital's requirements for valorization, locked out of both the wage and any state-funded reproductive

commons. The spatialized totality of the film formally encodes this foreclosure, partitioning the story-world through abstraction and enclosing its inhabitants in reduced life-worlds.[49]

By the 1980s, New York's fiscal crisis—which had sounded the death knell for the postwar golden age of industrialism and the social democratic project, and heralded the emergence of finance as the leading edge of capitalist dynamism—finally appeared to be coming to a close: the city's municipal budget had been balanced and borrowing-access to capital markets was opening up again. But proletarians had no place in the financial economy and the expanding service sector afforded little opportunity for economic stability or political power. As *Born in Flames* makes clear, these experiences of precarity were more common and severe for racialized and queer women, and the primary political point of the film is, as Honey says, "not to fight against the flesh and blood, but against the system that names itself falsely."[50] The film suggests that these abstract identity categories are caught up in a "system" of capitalist social relations that must be abolished. The women in the film recognize that they must begin by affirming their structural position in society *as women* as a basis for political action. But the socialist state in the film, which is predicated on the affirmation of labour, also seeks to snuff out rising militancy among women by implementing a "wages for housework" scheme. This move effectively evacuates the Wages for Housework movement of its radical politics in favour of a reformist position based on the reproduction of gender, throwing into question the possibility of women's emancipation through a politics of affirmation.

In *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History*, Denise Riley notes that, "both concentration on and refusal of the identity of 'women' are essential to

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[49] For an extended exploration of the relationship between the partitioning work of formal abstraction and reduced life-worlds, see Jane Elliott, *The Microeconomic Mode: Political Subjectivity in Contemporary Popular Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

[50] Borden, *Born in Flames*, 0:03:24.

feminism. This its history makes plain."[51] Riley thus underlines the contested status of gender identity in the history of feminist politics, insofar as feminism, in the course of various struggles, has sought at times to affirm or negate the category of woman. The forms of precarity traditional to the experiences of women—exclusion from the formal economy and the wage, vulnerability to domestic and sexualized violence, and lack of access to political representation, to name the most obvious—appear in their ubiquity to indicate a common feminine experience that might form the basis for a feminist politics. On the other hand, this suggests an essential female identity, which risks naturalizing the historically contingent reproduction of gender and gendered precarity. As Marxist feminism has long been at pains to show, forms of precarity specific to the experiences of women result from the ways in which the organization of social reproduction operates as an ascriptive process of gendering, often in order to secure the reproduction of the class relation.[52] Women's unwaged reproductive and domestic labours provided the engine for the reproduction

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[51] Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1.

[52] Marxist feminism has an expansive and vital history of engagement with the material consequences of gender inequality and oppression for the female body, particularly around the centrality of domestic and reproductive labour as they figure in the reproduction of capitalist social relations, and insofar as those relations are predicated on a gendered division of labour that disproportionately exploits women. In the 1970s, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James began to argue that, despite being unwaged, women's reproductive and domestic labour is central to the process of capital accumulation, in that it is necessary both for social reproduction and for the production of surplus value. In "Women and the Subversion of the Community," Dalla Costa argues that, "on a world level, it is precisely what is particular to domestic work, not only measured as number of hours and nature of work, but as quality of life and quality of relationships which it generates, that determines a woman's place wherever she is and to whichever class she belongs," a place capital dictates to women insofar as they are "transformed into a function for reproducing labor power." James states in "Sex, Race and Working Class Power" that "our feminism bases itself on a hitherto invisible stratum of the hierarchy of labour powers—the housewife—to which there corresponds no wage at all." Drawing on Dalla Costa's work, Maria Mies notes that "the housewife and her labour are not outside the process of surplus value production, but constitute the very foundation upon which this process can get started. The housewife and her labour are, in other words, the basis of the process of capital accumulation." More recently, Silvia Federici writes, "the body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory has been for male waged workers: the primary ground of their exploitation and resistance, as the female body has been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labor." See Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community," in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1973), 19, 29; Selma James, "Sex, Race and Working Class Power," in *Sex, Race and Class* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975), 14; Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1986), 31; Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 16.

of the industrial labour force—and of capitalist social relations more generally in the form of the family—not only through the coercive violence of law and custom but also via the systematic reproduction of gender as such.[53] In a contribution to a dossier on social reproduction, FTC Manning asks, "What if 'woman' was nothing but the formal category of people who are on one side of specific set of social relations, similar to the way in which the proletariat is nothing but the formal category of people who are on one side of a specific set of social relations?"[54]

It is through the mediation of the wage-relation that gender continually re-emerges historically under capitalism, and so feminist struggles against gendered forms of precarity—struggles that seek emancipation from the domestic sphere, equal access to the wage and to political office, and legal protection from patriarchal violence, for example—repeatedly encounter a contradiction. As Marina Vishmidt asks, "how not to identify with the structural role allotted to you by power while leveraging that role to question and upset the whole premises of the system?"[55] This is to take seriously, as Miranda Joseph does, "the systemic production of the category or class or subject position of 'women' as social currency; while particular women may be exchanged in particular exchanges due to their unique interpersonal relations, their exchangeability is constituted by and constitutive of their subjection as *women*. Women are not ripped from their context but rather exchanged in context."[56] Drawing on Riley and Joseph—as

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[53] In "Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint," Federici insists "that capitalism is built on an immense amount of unpaid labor, that it [is] not built exclusively or primarily on contractual relations; that the wage relation hides the unpaid, slave-like nature of so much of the work upon which capital accumulation is premised." See Silvia Federici, "Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint" (lecture, Bluestockings Radical Bookstore, New York, NY, October 28, 2006), https://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/precarious-labor-a-feminist-viewpoint/.

[54] FTC Manning, "Closing the Conceptual Gap: A Response to Cinzia Arruzza's 'Remarks on Gender'," *Viewpoint Magazine*, May 24, 2015, https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/05/04/closing-the-conceptual-gap-a-response-to-cinzia-arruzzas-remarks-on-gender/.

[55] Marina Vishmidt, "Self-Negating Labour: A Spasmodic Chronology of Domestic Unwork," in *The Grand Domestic Revolution Handbook*, eds. Binna Choi and Maiko Tanaka (Amsterdam: Valiz/Casco, 2014), 57-58.

[56] Miranda Joseph, "Theorizing Debt for Social Change: The Communism of Capital?" *ephemera* 13, no. 3 (2013): 669.

well as the philosopher Ray Brassier's argument concerning the contradictory status of proletarian identity in communization theory—Vishmidt names this contradiction "the paradox of self-abolition."[57]

While second-wave feminists weighed the psychoanalytic formulations of femininity against the post-structuralist critique of essentialism, for example, a similar debate has characterized the history of materialist feminism, stressing instead the reproduction of gender through the machinations of political economy. The exclusionary logic of the Fordist family wage contributed to a nascent second-wave feminist politics later associated with the Women's Liberation Movement; yet in the decades following WWII many reproductive activities were integrated into the wage and factory production and women entered the workforce in vast numbers. This shift from exclusion to integration remained fraught, however: the gendered division of labour persisted with women's entry into the formal economy and the wage at the same time as institutional support for women's domestic labour waned.[58] These changing circumstances generated contradictory relationships to the category of woman, as its affirmation grounded not only a liberal feminist politics of inclusion but also more radical projects such as lesbian separatism. Furthermore, the persistence of the gendered division of labour raised a series of questions about gender abolition that took on an increasing intensity with the economic restructuring of the latter half of the twentieth century, when the US government began cutting its funding for reproductive activities such as care work.

The historical trajectory of the second-wave feminist movement Wages for Housework illustrates this transition in the experience of gender identity as it unfolds in the late postwar

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[57] Marina Vishmidt, "The Paradox of Self-Abolition: A Mapping Exercise" (lecture, The Showroom, London, UK, December 12, 2015), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKykupDhX4k.

[58] See Susan Thistle, *From Marriage to Market: The Transformation of Women's Lives and Work* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).

period. The International Wages for Housework Campaign was founded in Padua, Italy, in 1972 by the militant feminist group Lotta Femminista, a splinter of the Italian far-left *Potere Operaio* ("Workers' Power"), in conjunction with likeminded groups such as Rivolta Femminile in Italy, Midnight Notes in the US, and the Power of Women Collective in the UK.[59] Insisting that the domestic sphere was a primary space of capitalist exploitation and thus a crucial site of anti-capitalist resistance, the Wages for Housework movement demanded that domestic work—and by extension reproductive activities in general—be understood *as work*, challenging both the capitalist division between paid and unpaid workers and the notion that domestic labour is an unproductive and thus less valuable form of work. Contentious claims about value-production aside, the Wages for Housework movement faced harsh criticism for its focus on white women in industrial countries, particularly by Angela Davis, and so there is a certain logic to its appearance as a tool of governance invested in a critique of white feminism.[60]

More to the point, however, the campaign never intended for domestic workers simply to be paid by the state or by capital. As Silvia Federici clarifies in "Wages Against Housework," originally published in 1975, "To say that we want wages for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it, because the demand for a wage makes our work visible, which is the most indispensable condition to begin to struggle against it, both in its immediate aspect as housework and its more insidious character as femininity."[61] This shift in articulation from "for" to "against" in the essay title indexes the troubled status of gender identity in the movement, which Federici

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[59] For an overview of archive materials on the Wages for Housework movement that Mariarosa Dalla Costa donated to the Civic Library in Padua, see "Introduction to the Archive of Feminist Struggle for Wages for Housework," *Viewpoint Magazine*, October 31, 2005, https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/introduction-to-the-archive-of-the-feminist-struggle-for-wages-for-housework-donated-by-mariarosa-dalla-costa/.

[60] See Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), 234-5.

[61] Silvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework," in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 19.

acknowledges in her call for a refusal not merely of housework but of femininity as such. Although Federici's work remains equivocal on the question of gender abolition, it has recently inspired a renewed interest in the status of women's reproductive labour under capital, perhaps most notably in Maya Gonzalez and Jeanne Neton's essay, "The Logic of Gender." Drawing on debates within German value-form theory, the authors argue—against Federici's affirmation of women's collective reproductive work—that the drift of reproductive activities into and then out of the wage "creates the possibility of gender appearing as *an external constraint*...that is, as something outside oneself that it is possible to abolish."[62] There is thus a historicity to the shift from the affirmation of gender identity to a desire for its abolition, as abstract identity categories come to be experienced as external constraints due to transformations in capital accumulation and in relation to a dwindling social surplus.

Born in Flames offers a critical cinematic take on the fraught relationship between feminism and gender identity in its depiction of the Women's Army, a radical feminist collective. The Women's Army is an organization that initially dedicates itself to issues such as cuts to childcare and the closure of community daycare centres, but takes on an increasingly militant role as a vigilante group protecting women from street harassment and abuse. Invested in a radical approach to feminism from the start of the film, the group forgoes hierarchical structures and established institutions in favour of horizontalism and direct action, collectivizing the work of social reproduction in their daily lives and thus working toward abolishing capitalist forms of mediation in the course of struggle. Drawing on the Maya Gonzalez's work on gender abolition, Bellamy argues that, "as the members of the Women's Army care, feed, clothe, house, and educate one another, they begin to generate a powerful counter to the gendered division of

[62] Maya Gonzalez and Jeanne Neton, "The Logic of Gender: On the Separation of Spheres and the Process of Abjection," in *Contemporary Marxist Theory: A Reader*, eds. Andrew Pendakis, Jeff Diamanti, Nicholas Brown, Josh Robinson, and Imre Szeman (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 179.

social reproduction by embodying anti- or post-capitalist social relations in the present."[63] As these tactics gradually appear to reach their limit in the face of violent state repression, the Women's Army commits to a practice of armed insurrectionary struggle.

The attempt to overcome this impasse through violence signals an encounter with the limits of affirmation, as the collectivization of women's reproductive work is appropriated by the state and ends up reproducing the category of gender at a moment when the formal economy can no longer absorb women's work, such that they become surplus to capital and thus targets of state violence.[64] In this light, the financially ailing socialist government's proposal to pay women wages for housework appears not only as a gesture of appeasement, but also as an attempt to reassert the gendered division of labour. *Born in Flames* thus participates in an avant-garde feminist cinema that rejects the liberal politics of representation and positive theories of femininity in favour of an anti-capitalist politics of abolition rooted in a critique of the gendered work of social reproduction. Identity appears in the film as a series of abstract categories imposed from outside, that is, as a series of structural positions within a social totality that for a time allow for certain possibilities and so can be affirmed politically, but after the rupture of 1973 and in the subsequent downturn come to be experienced increasingly as limits.

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[63] Bellamy, "We Still Need the Women's Army."

[64] One way to trace an inadvertent attachment to capitalist mediations in critical discourse is through the concept of the commons, which Angela Mitropoulos notes "emerged from the property law concept of res communes (meaning: 'it is in common,' or is common property)" and "involves assumptions about what it means to share properties and what it means to posit a notion of commonality or preponderance as the basis for resolving questions about the just distribution of goods and resources." In the politics of reproduction advanced by thinkers such as Federici and Peter Linebaugh, "commoning" is offered as a means of (among other things) collectivizing reproductive labour amid increasing indebtedness, but arguably risks reproducing a series of categories attached to the capitalist organization of risk and the *oikos*—not least the category of gender itself—as I discuss in Chapter Four. See Angela Mitropoulos, "The Commons," in *Gender: Nature*, ed. Iris van der Tuin (London: Macmillan, 2016), 165-81; Silvia Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons in an Era of Primitive Accumulation," in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 138-48; and Peter Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014).

The problem of capital density helps explain this exhaustion of affirmative political projects in the late postwar era. A crisis of capital density is not, as one might expect, a matter of immobility in a spatial sense but rather constitutes a blockage in historical time. Brenner, after all, is an historian, and his narration of the transition from long boom to long downturn, as Clover notes, "offers a *temporal* account, based around the slow and indirect theft of surplus value in the wage-labor process."[65] Capital density, as I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, blocks the progressive *telos* to which twentieth century political projects and subject positions attached themselves. For Jameson, the spatialization of capital through globalization and financialization produces this crisis of historicity.[66] For Clover, by contrast, the spatial turn in fact emerges as a response to an impasse in historical motion that results from the reduction of socially necessary labour time in the production process and the financialization of the economy. If "the apparent M-M' situation of financialization and rise in organic composition of capital … is thus characterized by *the subtraction of time*," Clover argues, then it might be said that "an organizing trope of Autumnal literature is *the conversion of the temporal to the spatial*."[67]

Space is what comes to dominate the cultural sensorium when production—the arena of value, oriented by socially necessary labour time—is displaced by circulation, which is oriented by space, or exchange in the sphere of the market. After all, globalization, as David Harvey argues, is a "spatial fix."[68] When capital can no longer go forwards, it spreads outwards and bores deeper in search of profits. Affirmative political projects require and assume a narrative

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[65] Joshua Clover, "Autumn of the System: Poetry and Finance Capital," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 41, no. 1 (2001): 38.

[66] In "'End of Art' or 'End of History'?" Jameson argues that, "with the cybernetic and informational revolutions and their consequences for marketing and finance, the entire world is suddenly sewn up into a total system from which no one can secede." See Fredric Jameson, "'End of Art' or 'End of History'?" in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern*, *1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998), 91.

[67] Clover, "Autumn of the System," 42-43.

[68] David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (New York: Verso, 2006), 427.

temporality—a temporal progression that allows for the possibility of advancement over time—in which the structural position affirmed moves from conditions of precarity to a better, more secure form of life. Such developmentalist narratives are no longer an option within capitalist society when capital accumulation itself grinds to a halt. Spatialization thus signals the exhaustion of affirmative political possibilities: the eclipse of socially necessary labour time undermines the progressive *telos* of narrative temporality that underwrites the politics of affirmation. In other words, space is the arena in which this crisis of historicity is lived.

In order to further develop this argument tying late-twentieth-century cinema to precarity and the long downturn, I want to return to Lane's remarks that *Born in Flames* uses feminist avant-garde realist strategies such as the documentary mode and cinema verité to mount its intervention.[69] Blending elements of the documentary, surveillance footage and the "home movie" that was newly popular in the 1980s, *Born in Flames* unfolds less as a narrative and more as a series of montages that map a complex social totality. What is the relationship of this avant-garde realist *mapping* to postmodernism, the dominant cultural style of the period? As noted above, Jameson's periodizing model follows Mandel's, a three-period scheme for the history of capital that moves from "market capitalism," through the imperialist phase of "monopoly capitalism," and on to the finance-driven consumer economies of "late capitalism."[70] In Jameson's "cultural periodization," which he contends "is both inspired and confirmed by Mandel's tripartite scheme," these three phases of capitalist development map onto "the stages of realism, modernism, and postmodernism."[71] Jameson's postmodernism, however, arguably

[69] Lane, *Feminist Hollywood*, 20.

[70] Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, 312-16.

[71] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 36.

operates as a novel mode of realism itself, one that takes the representation of a radically uneven globalized capital as its primary problematic.

As Carolyn Lesjak argues, Jameson's model of "cognitive mapping" epitomizes this "postmodern realism." She writes, "Where classical nineteenth-century realism saw (imperialist) history as a developmental narrative unfolding in time and premised on a notion of historical continuity, this form of postmodern realism develops instead from a fully global history of uneven development and the layerings of social time produced by it."[72] Lesjak offers a theory of aesthetic practice that, absent a narrative of historical continuity, collapses the distance between realism and postmodernism, calling into question the distinction Jameson himself makes. As Colleen Lye argues, "it is increasingly unclear whether postmodernism intensified itself to the point where it made a qualitative leap into realism or whether what we formerly called postmodernism was really realism all along."[73] What does this mean for the avant-garde realism of late-twentieth-century cinema, in which realist genres are mobilized in such a way as to draw attention to their status as artifice? To clarify the stakes of this cinematic realism, the final section of this chapter considers the 1997 film *Gummo* in relation to Brenner's account of economic stagnation and Arrighi's theory of hegemonic unraveling. My reading follows Esty's suggestion that "our current realist turn may be the most recent iteration of this pattern" in which realism returns in times of great geopolitical transformation, as it did at the end of the British cycle of accumulation, now "arising at another moment of transition, in the twilight years of the long twentieth century."[74]

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[72] Carolyn Lesjak, "History, Narrative and Realism: Jameson's Search for a Method," in *On Jameson: From Postmodernism to Globalization*, ed. Caren Irr and Ian Buchanan (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 35.

[73] Lye, "Afterword," 343.

[74] Esty, "Realism Wars," 334.

No Place like Home

Although *Gummo* hardly resembles *Born in Flames* in content, Korine's debut film shares several significant formal and generic characteristics with Borden's cinematic debut. As with *Born in Flames*, *Gummo* lacks a conventional linear narrative and singular protagonist, and is better described as a sequence of montages, interlacing plotlines, and character groupings. Jack Forey writes, "Though it has two seemingly central characters, Solomon (Jacob Reynolds) and Tummler (Nick Sutton), the film is a series of disjunctive vignettes set in the town of Xenia, Ohio, which was devastated by a series of tornadoes several years before the time the film is set in. The town has never been able to recover."[75] Similarly, J.J. Murphy argues that *Gummo* embraces an "unusual narrative syntax" in order to "weave together its disparate scenes and events," achieving its narrative cohesion "by employing a more experimental collage technique in which scenes are linked together, not by cause and effect, but by the elusive logic of free association."[76] Jay McRoy and Guy Crucianelli speak of "Korine's postmodern collage of daily events in a small Ohio town."[77] And like *Born in Flames*, *Gummo* adopts a pseudo-documentary style, "blurring the line between documentary reality and scripted fiction," as Murphy writes.[78] Forey describes this technique as a "grainy semi-documentary approach."[79]

Despite this self-evident critical interest in the film, however, *Gummo* met with harsh criticism when it was first released. Murphy describes it as "the most controversial American

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[75] Jack Forey, "All Ate Up With Maggots: Transcendent Decay in Korine's *Gummo*," *Film Matters* 7, no. 1 (2016): 44.

[76] J.J. Murphy, "Harmony Korine's *Gummo*: The Compliment of Getting Stuck with a Fork," *Film Studies* 5, no. 1 (2004): 92.

[77] Jay McRoy and Guy Crucianelli, "'I Panic the World': Benevolent Exploitation in Tod Browning's *Freaks* and Harmony Korine's *Gummo*," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 42.2 (2009): 257-8.

[78] Murphy, "Harmony Korine's *Gummo*," 92.

[79] Forey, "All Ate Up With Maggots," 44.

independent film of the 1990s."[80] Even a cursory glance at the reviews indicates why this might be the case. J. Hoberman describes the film as "genuinely disgusting" and dismissed Korine as "the glue sniffer's Jean-Luc Godard."[81] David Walsh calls it a "libel against mankind."[82] In perhaps the most scathing review of the film, Janet Maslin writes, "October is early, but not too early to acknowledge Harmony Korine's *Gummo* as the worst film of the year."[83] Yet not all reviews were negative, particularly those from filmmakers associated with American avant-garde cinema such as Werner Herzog, Bernado Bertolucci and Gus van Sant who, as Pansy Duncan notes, "sought to position the film outside this mainstream cinematic order by annexing it for the realist avant-garde."[84] Van Sant, for example, describes the film as "a portrait of small-town Middle American life that is both bracingly realistic and hauntingly dreamlike," and argues that the film defies categorization, citing the influences of "Herzog, Cassavetes, Arbus, Fellini, Godard, Maysles, [and] Jarman" on Korine's work.[85] This gesture strikes me as an especially suggestive one, and as an example of the avant-garde realist tradition released at the close of the American century, *Gummo* offers an opportunity to further develop Esty's idea of Arrighian realism and to flesh out a theory of the cinematics of downturn.

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[80] Murphy, "Harmony Korine's *Gummo*," 92.

[81] Quoted in Murphy, "Harmony Korine's *Gummo*," 92. See Janet Maslin, "*Gummo*," *New York Times*, October 17, 1997, E12. See also J. Hoberman, "Parting Shots: The 37th New York Film Festival," *Village Voice*, September 22–28, 1999, 124.

[82] David Walsh, "Thoughts about the 1997 Toronto Film Festival: Film, Social Reality and Authenticity," *World Socialist Web Site*, September, 1997, http://www.wsws.org/arts/1997/sep1997/tff-2.shtml.

[83] Janet Maslin, "Cats, Grandma and Other Disposables," *New York Times*, October, 17, 1997, http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9907E6DA123FF934A25753C1A961958260.

[84] Pansy Duncan, "Bored and Boringer: Avant-garde and Trash in Harmony Korine's *Gummo*," *Textual Practice* 29, no. 4 (2015): 718.

[85] Gus van Sant, "Forward," *Official Website for Gummo*, 1997, http://www.harmony-korine.com/paper/int/hk/forward.html.

Before examining the film within the context of the avant-garde realist tradition in the US and the notion of Arrighian realism, I first want to set the scene, as it were, with reference to the performance of the US economy in the 1990s and the film's locale of Xenia, Ohio. The final decade of the American century opened amid a recession that had begun in the late 1980s following the Black Monday of 1987 when the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell by 22.6%, a collapse larger than the stock market crash of 1929 that had announced the beginning of the Great Depression. Brenner writes,

> Between 1985 and 1995, the dollar fell by about 40 per cent against the Deutschmark and 60 per cent versus the yen. In the same period, real wages in US manufacturing increased at an average annual rate of 0.5 per cent, compared to 3 per cent in Germany and 2.9 per cent in Japan. Meanwhile, the long-term shake-out of high-cost/low-profit means of production in the US economy was given a further major kick by the recession of 1990–91 and the subsequent extended "jobless recovery."[86]

This period would see discount outlets replace department stores as part of a general shift in consumption patterns—Walmart superseded the traditional stalwart Sears to become the country's largest retailer—reflecting the declining purchasing of a population at an increasing degree of remove from the postwar American fantasy of the good life. This moment also bore witness to the savings and loan crisis, during which more than a thousand of the savings and loan associations in the US failed and folded. From 1966 to 1979, savings and loans associations had struggled to generate income in an economic environment characterized by slow growth, high interest rates and inflation—conditions that came to be known as "stagflation"—until Volcker's monetarist turn in 1979.

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[86] Brenner, "The Boom and the Bubble," *New Left Review* 6 (2000): 7.

Despite the early 1990s recession and the savings and loan crisis, the late 1990s would finally see a boom in economic growth unrivaled in the post-1973 period.[87] According to Brenner, "The roots of manufacturing revival in the US go back to the recession of 1979–82, when the record-high real interest rates which accompanied Volcker's turn to monetarism set off an extended process of industrial rationalization. Massive means of production and labour were eliminated in an explosion of bankruptcies not witnessed since the shedding of suddenly unprofitable plant and equipment during the Great Depression of the 1930s."[88] This widespread liquidation of constant and variable capital allowed the US economy to rebound in part, but the first real "turning point—a watershed for the world economy as a whole—came with the Plaza Accord of September 1985, when the G5 powers agreed to take joint action to reduce the exchange rate of the dollar, to rescue a US manufacturing sector threatened with decimation."[89] The second "turning point" was "the agreement forged by the US, Japan and the other G7 powers that would come to be called the 'Reverse Plaza Accord'," which represented "a total about-face in the policies both of the US and its main allies and rivals, in much the same way as had the original Plaza Accord of 1985." The "Reverse Plaza Accord," he writes, "secured…the prospect of a huge inflow of funds that could be expected to help cover its rising current-account deficit and push up equity prices, as well as a flood of cheap imports which could be counted on to exert strong downward pressure on prices, relieving the Fed of much of the job of containing inflation."[90] Between these two decisive policy shifts, global capital appeared to return to

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[87] Writing at the turn of the new millennium, Brenner notes that "US economic performance during the past half-decade has been superior to that of any comparable period since the early 1970s. On the other hand, the same period has witnessed the swelling of the greatest financial bubble in American history." See Brenner, "Boom and the Bubble," 5.

[88] Brenner, "Boom and the Bubble," 6.

[89] Brenner, "Boom and the Bubble," 7.

[90] Brenner, "Boom and the Bubble," 14-16.

postwar growth levels, so that "by 1995, the pre-tax profitability of US manufacturing had risen by 65 per cent above its level of 1986 and was, for the first time in a quarter of a century, above that of 1973—although still a good third below its high tide in 1965."[91]

While pundits and policy makers celebrated the successes of the New Economy and the promises of technology, the rust belt continued its steady decline. The small Midwestern town of Xenia, Ohio is a case in point. Like the rest of Ohio, Xenia boomed during the early postwar years. Its population doubled between 1950 and 1970, after which it began to drop precipitously. Considered an exemplary rustbelt state, Ohio was once known for steel production and heavy industry, which have greatly decreased over the latter half of the twentieth century in part due to a steep rise in imports from other manufacturing countries such as the products found in Walmart that followed the globalization of manufacture. As Duncan notes, "a degraded, impoverished setting is a realist avant-garde mainstay."[92] While her argument that *Gummo* bucks avant-garde cinema's investment in shock in favour of boredom is important to my discussion of waste below, it will suffice for the moment to note that, although *Gummo* was shot in Korine's hometown of Nashville, Tennessee, the film's setting shows all the signs of rustbelt degradation: economic decline, population loss and urban decay. There is a kind of "slow death" here, a phrase Lauren Berlant, following David Harvey, uses to describe "the physical wearing out of a population in a way that points to its deterioration as a defining condition of its experience and historical existence."[93] Slow death traverses the border between living and dying such that it becomes difficult to distinguish the two, an experience that "is simultaneously at an extreme and in a zone of ordinariness, where life building and the attrition of human life are

[91] Brenner, "Boom and the Bubble," 7-8.

[92] Duncan, "Bored and Boringer," 721.

[93] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 95.

indistinguishable."[94] The film captures the pervasive slow death of the rustbelt in the image of an insect-infested stray cat that the neighborhood kids have killed in an apparent act of mercy because it was "ate up with maggots."[95] Or with the missing adults, dead of cancer of victims of the tornado, who figure in the film primary as absences. Or again with the catatonic woman who Tummler euthanizes because, as he says, "she's always been dead."[96]

The reason the boom of the 1990s meant little for the rust belt becomes clearer if it is understood as a financial boom that marks the decline of US hegemony. As Gretta R. Krippner has argued, financial growth does very little for employment, even as profits rise and finance occupies a larger portion of GDP share.[97] Arrighi makes a version of this argument in his critique of Brenner, tying declining standards of living for working people in deindustrialized regions to the explosion of finance in the autumn of American empire. Quoting Brenner, Arrighi writes, "the 'de-industrialization' of the United States and other core regions certainly had 'negative connotations' for the workers most directly affected by it; but it had no such dire meaning for the US economy as a whole, and especially its wealthier strata. Rather, it was a necessary condition of the great revival of US wealth, power and prestige of the 1990s."[98] The 1990s financial boom

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[94] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 96.

[95] Korine, *Gummo*, 0:17:35.

[96] Korine, *Gummo*, 1:07:41.

[97] Krippner writes, "A careful examination of the financialization of the American economy requires a different 'lens' than that typically used by scholars examining broad shifts in the economy. While most characterizations of long-term shifts in the underlying structure of the economy rely for evidence on changes in employment or in the mix of goods and services produced, these are not appropriate places to look for the rise of finance. The financial sector is not employment-intensive and its 'products' do not show up in transparent ways in national economic statistics." Krippner's point here is of course methodological: she insists scholars must look elsewhere for data regarding financialization. However, her argument that employment rates do not reflect growth in the financial sector implies a fundamental disconnect between finance and employment, wherein growth in the former does not lead to increases in the latter. See Krippner, "Financialization of the American Economy," 175.

[98] Arrighi, "Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence," 56.

follows from the decline of traditional manufacturing sectors.[99] The takeaway for an analysis of *Gummo* is that the 1990s boom and the generalized precarity that the film depicts are coterminous phenomena. Moving from the world of *Born in Flames*, with its urban political movements, to the rural torpor of *Gummo*, is a shift from the perspectives of women of colour to that of white children. Yet both films are in fact about the ongoing decline of American economic power at the end of the long twentieth century.

The critical lens of "Arrighian realism," a phrase that Lye coins in her reading of Esty's essay "Realism Wars," ties these films together to make them legible as examples of the cinematics of downturn. Noting the intensity of debates about realism at the end of the 1880s in Britain and again in the context of the US Cold War era, Esty suggests that realism wars tend to wax and wane with the cycles of hegemonic rise and fall. He asks, "If the slow fade of British hegemony conditioned the realism wars of the 1880s–90s and the slow rise of American hegemony conditioned the realism wars of the 1950s–60s, is it possible to comprehend, in real time, our own emergent realism wars as indexical of larger tectonic shifts at the far end of the American Century?"[100] His venture is that "the battle over realism's status and value seems to heat up under conditions of tectonic geopolitical transition; at the end of the British phase of centrality in the world-system and at the start of the American phase, we find literary cultures struggling to mesh the mimetic and antimimetic capabilities of their novel forms."[101]

Can the same be said of avant-garde cinema in the present period of economic stagnation and hegemonic unraveling? The films under study in this chapter are testament to the validity of

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[99] To reiterate, "When escalating competition reduces the availability of relatively empty, profitable niches in the commodity markets, the leading capitalist organizations have one last refuge, to which they can retreat and shift competitive pressures onto others. This final refuge is the money market." See Arrighi, "Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence," 51.

[100] Esty, "Realism Wars," 317.

[101] Esty, "Realism Wars," 328.

Esty's tentative proposal – but with an important caveat. The postmodern realism of late-twentieth-century avant-garde films such as *Born in Flames* and *Gummo* confronts a world in which there is, for the first time since capital began its global ascent in the Age of the Genoese, no new cycle of material growth on the horizon. Thus, rather than attempt to represent the concrete reality of hegemonic transition, as Esty notes occurred with late-nineteenth-century realism at the end of the British cycle of accumulation, the postmodern realism of late-twentieth-century avant-garde cinema makes its artificiality a point of emphasis. My contention here is that the evacuation of the real from this avant-garde cinematic realism registers the absent real of value, which no longer grounds the capital-labour relation in an age of deindustrialization. That is, value is the vanishing abstraction of the profit cycles of late-twentieth-century finance capital, gone along with the missing parents of the film who once worked in the factories of Ohio.

The German school of *wertkritik* (value criticism) insists that this is the logically inevitable outcome of an economic system predicated on the accumulation of value. Claus Peter Ortlieb, for example, argues that accumulation inevitably "comes up against absolute material limits, the observance of which must lead to the burning-out of the capitalist logic of valorization, and the disregard for which to the destruction of its material foundations and the possibility of human life as such."[102] *Gummo* paints a picture of a world in which the exhaustion of valorization has passed the point of no return and human life has become refuse, or, in Marxian terms, surplus. Forey argues that "*Gummo* is a pile of interesting garbage," in part because "it is unpleasantly heterogeneous, juxtaposing multiple unsavory vignettes together into one dissonant spew of imagery, neglecting and abusing typical cinematic conventions." Perhaps more importantly,

[102] Claus Peter Ortlieb, "A Contradiction between Matter and Form: On the Significance of the Production of Relative Surplus Value in the Dynamic of Terminal Crisis," in *Marxism and the Critique of Value*, ed. Neil Larsen, Mathias Nilges, Josh Robinson, and Nicholas Brown (Chicago and Alberta: MCM' Publishing, 2014): 116.

> It also resembles garbage because its subjects occupy a space of waste, and in this way it is also postmodern; garbage is a combination of disparate items with little in common other than the fact that they have been disregarded. In a postmodern era, disparate cultural artifacts clash constantly to create new meanings. The space of Xenia exists in a post-prosperity America, where the advancements of the twentieth century have come to a halt by the end of the century. Cultural norms established after World War II begin to lose meaning. Time, nature and reality have been fractured, recombined and melted down in Xenia, Ohio.[103]

The various characters that populate Korine's Xenia are typical examples of "white trash," and in this sense the film affirms Nicolas Bourriaud's argument that, in order to be adequate to the contemporary moment, any realist practice in the present must attend to the logics governing the distinctions between productive and unproductive, product and waste, and the included and excluded.[104] "Waste," Bourriaud writes, "refers to *what is cast off when something is made*. The proletariat—the social class that capital has at its full disposal—is no longer found only in factories. It runs through the whole of the social body and comprises a people of the *abandoned*."[105] Exterior shots depict shirtless children and broken-down cars in overgrown yards, while interior shots feature rooms in roach-infested houses piled high with refuse or basements cluttered with junk. Neighborhood kids play in junkyards and trash heaps. A young teenager smokes cigarettes on an overpass littered with rubbish before pissing over through the fence onto the cars passing below. Living on the fringes of a decaying social order, the children appear wan, speak poor English with a drawl, never go to school, and have no respect for legal or

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[103] Forey, "All Ate Up With Maggots," 44-45.

[104] Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Exform*, trans. Erik Butler (New York: Verso, 2016).

[105] Bourriaud, *The Exform*, viii.

moral authorities. Why should they? They are the leftovers of an industrial proletariat now lacking a material basis with which to secure its own social reproduction.

The wastrel figures of Korine's film, in this sense, mock the convention that children embody reproductive futurity and carry in their very presence the promise of a new day. If, as queer theorist Lee Edelman has argued, children are the representatives of "reproductive futurism,"[106] or the ongoing reproduction of the existing social order, these kids have no future. In such a world, there is little to do but kill time, a point *Gummo* makes plain through the pervasive sense of boredom in which it dwells. Duncan writes, "An emotion we might provisionally characterize as the painful, recursive feeling of feeling nothing at all, boredom seems to leak through the pores of … Xenia, Ohio, to saturate every aspect of the film."[107] When nothing ever happens, they find ways to pass the time. Tummler and Solomon shoot BB-guns at stop signs, huff glue or talk absent-mindedly of faraway places that they will never visit. Another character attempts suicide, fails, and cannot be bothered to try again. For Duncan, this focus on the "emotional trash" of boredom "on the squalid margins of economic life" distinguishes the film from the avant-garde tendency to traffic in shock, although there is no shortage of upsetting or even repellent scenes in the film.[108]

Referencing theoretical accounts of the avant-garde from critics as diverse as Peter Bürger, Clement Greenberg, Renato Poggioli, Fredric Jameson, Marjorie Perloff and Hal Foster, Duncan notes that, for these critics, shock functions as "the mode's animating affect, the emotional 'stimulus' through which its vaunted social and political aspirations are actualized."[109]

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[106] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

[107] Duncan, "Bored and Boringer," 718.

[108] Duncan, "Bored and Boringer," 728.

[109] Duncan, "Bored and Boringer," 719.

However, *Gummo*, "scenes of poverty seem divested of both urgency and extremity." In other words, *Gummo*'s avant-gardism offers no political program, and while its fragmentary depiction of poverty and dispossession might otherwise stir antagonistic feelings in its viewers, "these strategies seem to fall, as if inevitably, under the lack-lustre sign of boredom."[110] Rather than attempt to shock its viewers into action, *Gummo* registers "emotion's inadequacy" to "a political situation in which the relation between emotion and action" has been "suspended or obstructed."[111] The film forgoes the political intensity of *Born in Flames* for the slow burn of a trash-fire: where *Born in Flames* urges political action only to come up against the limits of affirmation, *Gummo* revels in the refuse that remains once the temporality of political and economic progress winks out.

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This chapter has examined the relationships between precarity and avant-garde cinema in the US at the end of the twentieth century through the dyadic lens of a postmodern realism that emerges at the intersection of hegemonic unraveling and economic stagnation. Drawing on Esty's work on Arrighian realism and Brenner's account of secular stagnation, I have advanced a theory of the cinematics of downturn as a realism of the absent real—the capitalist value-form—in an era of American decline. As examples of a cinematic realism without the real, the films I study in this chapter register a crisis of value at the level of cinematic form. Confronting the impasse of capital density, *Born in Flames* exhibits a preoccupation with space and place that results from the exhaustion of narrative temporality and the eclipse of affirmation political possibilities when circulation displaces production as the driving force of capitalist profitability. In a similar focus

[110] Duncan, "Bored and Boringer," 721.

[111] Duncan, "Bored and Boringer," 735.

on space and place, *Gummo* ties structural unemployment to generalized torpor in the former bastions of industrialism after the long boom.

Spatialized narratives, surplus populations, seasonal torpor: these are the characteristics of cinematic realism in an age of value in crisis. *Born in Flames* and *Gummo* thus pessimistically mark the autumnal phase of the US cycle of accumulation, a phase that—uniquely in the *longue durée* of capitalism—lacks the promise of a new cycle on the horizon. In the final chapter of this dissertation, "Endless Winter," I turn to twenty-first-century visual culture from outside the US in order to explore how American decline plays out beyond its national borders. Reading Ashley McKenzie's avant-garde film, *Werewolf*, alongside the BBC police procedural, *The Fall*, Chapter Four argues that contemporary forms of precarity in the West are tied to a crisis of reproductive futurity that follows from the onset of terminal decline in the capitalist world-system.

CHAPTER FOUR

Endless Winter: Stagnation, Separation, Nonreproduction

> The recent rupture of the present by an economic crisis that cut through the confidence of even the most assured neoliberals—perhaps most dramatically the somber economist Alan Greenspan who was moved to exclaim "I found a flaw in the model of how the world works"—illuminated that these past decades rode the edge of that most mercurial of feelings, euphoria.
>
> — Jeff Derksen, *After Euphoria*

> If the reign of finance in the cycle of capital accumulation is always a "sign of Autumn," we seem finally to have arrived at the onset of Winter. Or so one must suspect from the collapse of the global economy that began its run-up around 2006 and manifested itself in full over the course of 2007-2008. Whether this crisis is terminal remains a matter of open debate. Certainly if this is indeed the end of a cycle of accumulation, in some way like the end of the British Empire (or that of the United Provinces or the Italian city-states), each such conclusion is always different in its particulars. It would be presumptuous to propose what the shape or meaning of this finale might be, much less the nature of the transition to some next cycle or the nature of the next cycle itself.
>
> — Joshua Clover, "Autumn of the System"

Writing in the mid-1990s, as a wave of strikes in the service sector swept across the Parisian metropolis, Antonio Negri declared that the long winter of revolutionary torpor was, at long last, beginning to thaw. Looking back on that moment almost two decades later, Negri writes in the preface to the American edition of *The Winter Is Over*, "at the closing of the 20th century, it was no illusion to talk about a 'winter that was over,' about a historical phase in the hegemony of capitalism and in the repression of revolutionary movements that had finally come to an end."[1] The claim that "l'inverno è finito," to quote the original Italian title Negri's editor Giuseppe Caccia gave the collection of essays, comes in response to Félix Guattari's characterization of the 1980s as "the winter years," a phrase that, as Jason E. Smith notes, refers not only to "a

[1] Antonio Negri, "Preface to the American Edition of *The Winter Is Over*," in *The Winter Is Over: Writings on Transformation Denied, 1989-1995*, ed. Giuseppe Caccia, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2013), 30-31.

defeat and retreat of the antagonistic forces that consolidated themselves in the previous decade," but also "the existential fallout of this withdrawal, the libidinal collapse into a kind of historical, and not simply psychic, depression, an hibernal rut."[2] For Negri, the post-1945 period in Italy witnessed not one, nor two, but three distinct winters: the winter of reactionary reconstruction under NATO after World War II, which came to an end with the mass demonstrations of 1968 and Italy's "hot autumn"; the winter that stretched from the failure of that revolutionary moment to "The Movement of 1977," when a spontaneous political uprising in Italy saw the rise of Autonomia Operaia; and the winter that followed the collapse of the Italian Autonomia movement, a period of brutal state repression in Italy when Negri would be forced into exile in France (his flight to safety financed by his friend Guattari).[3] It was the bitter frost of this latter cold snap that Negri saw melting in 1995, as striking public service sector workers—especially those working in services central to social reproduction, such as transportation, communication and health care—represented for Negri the emergence of a new cycle of struggles tied to a "new mode of production" in which the sphere of circulation assumed strategic significance in a globalized post-industrial economy.[4] Thus was announced the long-awaited arrival of spring.

This optimism tied to the emergence of the so-called New Economy—a sense of possibility rooted in technological developments and the globalization of supply chains—was by no means unique to the left, finding its true champions among the mainstream economists of the day. Indeed, a pervasive euphoria over the economic prospects of the 1990s excited bourgeois

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[2] Antonio Negri, *L'inverno è finite: saggi sulla trasformazione negate, 1989-1995*, ed. Giuseppe Caccia (Rome: Castelvecchi, 1996); Félix Guattari, *Les Années d'hiver, 1980-1985* (Paris: Bernard Barrault, 1986); Jason E. Smith, Introduction to *The Winter Is Over*, 8.

[3] For a discussion of Guattari's involvement in Italy's "Hot Autumn" and its influence on his thinking, see François Dosse, "The 'Molecular Revolution': Italy, Germany, France," in *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, trans. Deborah Glassman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 284-305.

[4] Negri, "A New Public," *The Winter Is Over*, 37.

imaginaries across the advanced capitalist countries at the end of the twentieth century, well beyond then Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan. Take the late Nobel-Prize economist Rüdiger Dornbusch, who confidently proclaimed in 1998 that

> The U.S. economy likely will not see a recession for years to come. We don't want one, we don't need one, and, as we have the tools to keep the current expansion going, we won't have one. This expansion will run forever.[5]

Dornbusch died in 2002. Even though he saw the dot-com bubble burst in 2001, he never got to see just how mistaken he truly was. But the rampant enthusiasm of what Alan S. Binder and Janet L. Yellen—both of whom served under Bill Clinton and on the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System—called "The Fabulous Decade" was not simply an economic matter.[6] As Jeff Derksen argues, "market euphoria, with its global promise of prosperity, moved from an economic imperative to a policy justification to a 'social practice' and lived cultural proposition."[7] The Clinton Boom, with all its end-of-history triumphalism and technological euphoria, produced a particularly cruel form of optimism that came to saturate the broader social field. Derksen focuses on the relationship between culture and euphoria over the long neoliberal moment, but note too how the culture of optimism rebounds across the political spectrum in the wake of the Clinton Boom of the 1990s. Where Greenspan and the neoliberal right saw the end of history and the triumph of global capital, Negri and the post-Autonomist left saw in the knowledge worker of the New Economy the emergence of a new revolutionary subject capable

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[5] Rüdiger Dornbusch, "Growth Forever," in *Keys to Prosperity: Free Markets, Sound Money, and a Bit of Luck* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 65.

[6] Alan S. Binder and Janet L. Yellen, *The Fabulous Decade: Macroeconomic Lessons from the 1990s* (New York: The Century Foundation, 2001).

[7] Jeff Derksen, "Introduction: All Yesterday's Euphorias," *After Euphoria* (JRP | Ringier: Zurich, 2013), 7.

of appropriating the diffuse infrastructure of social reproduction. Then the 2008 financial crisis fell like a thick blanket of heavy snow and ushered in a winter with no end in sight.

Studies of the relationship between precarity and culture tend to focus on the shift to a post-Fordist mode of production, the financialization of everyday life, or the closure of the world market through neoliberal globalization.[8] What might it mean to assume instead a recent phase of capitalist development marked by the end of expansion and growth? Such a notion would appear to have been vanquished once again in the unbridled optimism that opened the new millennium, were it not for the colossal failure of the New Economy subsequently made painfully apparent in 2008. As Robert Brenner remarked in the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis, "the bottom line, all rhetoric to the contrary, is that the most recent business cycle, which began in March 2001 and ended in December 2007, has been *the weakest in the last half century* in the US, western Europe, and Japan, and this despite the titanic government-sponsored stimulus."[9] Following Brenner, this chapter proposes that the present moment in the US is defined by pervasive economic decline, or what is known in macroeconomic theory as secular stagnation.[10]

A decade after the Great Recession, mainstream economists such as Lawrence Summers and Robert Gordon have turned to the concept of secular stagnation to describe the dismal state

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[8] See, for example, Alice Bardan, "The New European Cinema of Precarity: A Transnational Perspective," in *Work in Cinema*, ed. Ewa Mazierska (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 69-90; Simon During, "Precariousness, Literature and the Humanities Today," *Australian Humanities Review* 58 (2015): 51-56; Michael Goddard and Benjamin Halligan, "Cinema, the Post-Fordist Worker, and Immaterial Labor: From post-Hollywood to the European Art Film," *Framework* 53, no. 1 (2012): 172-189; and Gabriel Giorgi, "Improper Selves: Cultures of Precarity," *Social Text* 31, no. 2 (2013): 69-81.

[9] Robert Brenner, "What Is Good for Goldman Sachs Is Good for America: The Origins of the Current Crisis," Prologue of the Spanish edition of *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (*La economía de la turbulencia global,* trans. Juan Mari Madariaga [Madrid: Akal, 2009]). Available online in English-language typescript, 6. http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/issr/cstch/papers/BrennerCrisisTodayOctober2009.pdf.

[10] For recent and upcoming work on relationship between culture and secular stagnation, see Melinda Cooper, "Secular Stagnation: Fear of a Non-Reproductive Future," *Postmodern Culture* 27, no.1 (2016), https://muse.jhu.edu/article/668356; and Annie McClanahan, "Secular Stagnation and the Discourse of Reproductive Limit," In *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Economics*, eds. Michelle Chihara and Matt Seybold (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

of the recovery.[11] Economists use the term secular stagnation to refer to the persistence of negligible growth rates beyond normal business cycles. The Harvard professor and government advisor Alvin Hansen—a student of John Maynard Keynes who broke with the teachings of his mentor—originally proposed the macroeconomic theory of secular (or long-term) stagnation during the Great Depression to account for persistent negligible economic growth.[12] In Hansen's view, the world economy was at risk of slipping into a permanent state of low growth and high unemployment in which any attempt at recovery would prove futile. Largely forgotten during the postwar boom, mainstream economists have recently revived this "macroeconomic heresy" to explain the unusually weak performance of the American economy since the 2008 financial crisis.[13] As I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, however, in order to adequately grasp the contours of the crisis-ridden present, we have to reach a little further back than 2008, to the crisis of 1965-1973 and its aftermath. If precarity has always been a feature of capital accumulation, the distinction I wish to draw here is between an expansive form of capitalism able to integrate vast populations into its systemic cycles of accumulation, and one that—since the period of transition from boom to downturn—has been unable to absorb and reproduce

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[11] See Lawrence Summers, "The Age of Secular Stagnation: What It Is and What to Do About It," *Foreign Affairs*, February 15, 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-02-15/age-secular-stagnation; Robert J. Gordon, *The Rise and Fall of American Growth: The U.S. Standard of Living since the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016). Yellen, now Chairman of the Federal Reserve, has also indicated an increasing sympathy for the secular stagnation hypothesis. See Matthew C. Klein, "The Fed's Gradual Embrace of 'Secular Stagnation'," *The Financial Times*, March 18, 2016, https://ftalphaville.ft.com/2016/03/18/2156742/the-feds-gradual-embrace-of-secular-stagnation/?mhq5j=e6.

[12] Alvin H. Hansen, "Economic Progress and Declining Population Growth," *The American Economic Review* 29, no. 1 (1939): 1-15.

[13] Roger E. Backhouse and Mauro Boianovsky, "Secular Stagnation: The History of a Macroeconomic Heresy," *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 23, no. 6 (2016): 946-970. For further discussion of secular stagnation in current mainstream economic discourse, see Satyajit Das, *The Age of Stagnation: Why Perpetual Growth Is Unattainable and the Global Economy Is in Peril* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2016) and Mohamed A. El-Erian, *The Only Game in Town: Central Banks, Instability, and Avoiding the Next Collapse* (New York: Random House, 2016).

increasing numbers of people due to dwindling rates of accumulation and growth, even as proletarianization of the global peasantry continues apace.

Negri rightly cites the decline of traditional workerism and the importance of the service sector to deindustrialized capital, but his association of proletarian antagonism in the post-Fordist period with the emergence of a positive collective subject connected through dematerialized networks of information and communication reproduces the error of the workers' movement. As Endnotes argues, the development of productive forces did not concentrate workers into a compact mass but separated them from each other:

> The mistake of the theorists of the labour movement was as follows. They often described capitalist social relations in terms of a foundational fracturing: the separation of peasants from the land generated a propertyless proletariat. However, the class relation is not only established through a foundational fracturing; it also confirms that fracturing in every moment. Capitalism realises the fracturing of social existence as the "unity-in-separation" of market society, an interdependence of everyone on everyone else, which nevertheless reduces individuals to isolated atoms, facing off against one another in market competition.[14]

In the frozen landscape of a stagnant global economy, as labour markets slacken, proletarians are united only in separation and dispossessed even of the commodity labour power. Here is a subject "negatively rather than positively determined by capitalism," as Carolyn Lesjak writes.[15] Even Negri's networked multitude of singularities appears overly optimistic in this light. Drawing out the consequences of economic stagnation for representation, this chapter studies

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[14] Endnotes, "A History of Separation: The Rise and Fall of the Workers' Movement, 1883-1982," *Endnotes* 4 (2015): 180.

[15] Carolyn Lesjak, "Reading Dialectically," *Criticism* 55, no. 2 (2013): 262.

rising precarity in two examples of visual culture from the post-2008 moment, Ashley McKenzie's debut feature-length film, *Werewolf* (2016) and the BBC television series, *The Fall* (2013-).[16] My argument proceeds through three interrelated concepts tied to the onset of winter: stagnation, separation, and nonreproduction. Stagnation provides both the political-economic context and the affective register in which the two cultural objects I examine intervene. I develop the second concept, separation, as a social form and cultural logic of the deindustrialized present in McKenzie's film, drawing on the work of the Endnotes collective. The final term, nonreproduction, names both the conditions of the contemporary crisis of futurity and the horizon of a politics of abolition, a contradiction I unpack in my analysis of *The Fall*. Although both *Werewolf* and *The Fall* are set in locations outside the US—in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, and Belfast, Northern Ireland, respectively—the hemispheric character of American hegemony means that the arc of American decline unfolds beyond its national borders. In what follows, then, I offer accounts of the aesthetics of stagnation and the politics of nonreproduction as they take shape in the context of collective decline.

The Aesthetics of Stagnation

Ashley McKenzie's bleak and starkly beautiful film *Werewolf* would appear to tell a story about opioid addiction. The film's protagonists, Vanessa (Bhreagh MacNeil) and Blaise (Andrew Gillis), are both recovering addicts on a methadone treatment program, frequenting pharmacies for their medicine and conversing with government bureaucrats and clinic doctors about their progress and mental health. And yet McKenzie's feature debut avoids the tragic excess of conventional junkie movies. There are no thrilling scenes of the characters getting high, stealing,

[16] *Werewolf*, dir. Ashley McKenzie, prod. Nelson MacDonald (New Waterford: Grassfire Films, 2016); *The Fall*, dir. Allan Cubitt (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 2013-).

or performing sex work, as one might typically expect to find in a film about drug addiction. As McKenzie says in an interview, "I talked to different people in the methadone program, but I'm not trying to make some sort of exposé."[17] In fact, *Werewolf* is hardly a story at all, at least not in the conventional sense of a clearly defined structure. And while the departure from linear narrative has long been an avant-garde mainstay, the film's recursive structure and oblique close-ups suggest a suffocating constriction instead of some sense of freedom from the dictates of a commercial film industry that we might associate with earlier avant-garde cinema like the French *nouvelle vague*. This is because *Werewolf*, as I hope to show, is first and foremost a cinematic meditation on precarity as a social experience of economic stagnation, one that attends to the gendered forms precarity assumes in an era of deindustrialization.

Werewolf dwells in the everyday reality of recovery and its banal routines, but the opioid epidemic—which has spread throughout both rural and deindustrialized regions across North America—appears in the film not as the primary cause of the characters' suffering, but as a particularly pronounced symptom of their precarity. Viewers might be forgiven for not recognizing the film's setting in present-day Cape Breton, an island in the Atlantic Canadian province of Nova Scotia that was once a hub of industrial activity. While Cape Breton Island has come to be known for its natural beauty through the promotional work of its tourism industry in an attempt to fill the considerable gap left by the flight of manufacture and extractive trades, *Werewolf* captures the hardscrabble existence of life in the postindustrial region in its depiction of two homeless addicts scraping by with a rusty lawnmower in the former mining town of New Waterford. United in their isolation and abstraction from social life, Blaise and Nessa seem to have little left to do but wander the blasted wastelands of capitalist ruin, mowing lawns and

[17] Stephen Cooke, "McKenzie's Feature Debut *Werewolf* Shows Struggle of Young Cape Bretoners," *LocalXpress.ca*, September 17, 2016, https://www.localxpress.ca/local-arts-and-life/mckenzies-feature-debut-werewolf-shows-struggle-of-young-cape-bretoners-414506 (site discontinued).

killing time between methadone doses, until the tensions of the couple-form push them apart. Drawing out the consequences of economic stagnation for the aesthetics of cinematic realism—a relationship that I began to unravel through the lens of a "cinematics of downturn" in Chapter Three—the present argument explores the relationships between precarity and stagnation in McKenzie's film through a Marxian account of the figure of separation.

In the conclusion to *Postmodernism*, Fredric Jameson writes, "Marx's fundamental figure for social development and dynamics (a figure that runs through the *Grundrisse*, connecting the 1844 manuscripts in an unbroken line to *Capital* itself)…is the fundamental notion of *separation* (as when Marx describes the production of the proletariat in terms of their separation from the means of production—i.e., enclosure, the exclusion of the peasants from their land). There has not yet, I think, been a Marxism based on this particular figure."[18] Jameson refers here to the process of proletarianization whereby the peasantry become formally "free" to sell their labour through their forcible release from serfdom. Marx describes this state of affairs as the "separation of labour, capital and landed property" in the 1844 manuscripts, and as "the separation of free labour from the objective conditions of its realization" in the *Grundrisse*, and argues in *Capital* that such separation "is clearly the result of a past historical development, the product of many economic revolutions, of the extinction of a whole series of older formations of social production."[19] This process of separation—which deprives workers of the means of reproduction and renders them dependent on wage labour for their survival—establishes the historical specificity of the modern proletariat and constitutes its functional distinction from that of earlier

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[18] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 398-399.

[19] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), 71; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 471; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), 273.

exploited classes. From this, everything follows. The drive to extract ever more surplus value from the labour process spurs the development of the productive forces and a rising demand for labour, leading to a growing concentration of workers, increased productive capacity, and rising output rates. But at certain point in the historical unfolding of capitalist social development this dynamic shifts, and workers are expelled from the production process *en masse* while productivity tapers off and output declines. The outcome of these developments is endless winter: the total realization of the separated society.

Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* stands as a conspicuous exception to the general absence in Marxist theory of a sustained investigation into the figure of separation that Jameson identifies. According to Debord, "*Separation* is the alpha and the omega of the spectacle."[20] The spectacle reduces lived experience to mere representation, isolating individuals only to reunite them through the mediation of images. While *Society of the Spectacle* might appear to depart from Marx's understanding of separation, Debord in fact posits the dominance of spectacle in terms of a lost unity that follows from the universal realization of the capitalist class relation.[21] In the opening chapter, "Separation Perfected," Debord writes, "The success of the economic system of separation is the proletarianization of the world."[22] Modern industrialization rendered increasing numbers of people dependent on the wage, but it also enabled the mass accumulation of capital, such that society in the postwar period confronted existence as a matter not of scarcity but abundance. While Debord was critical of traditional Marxism's affirmation of labour, he nevertheless saw the seeds of a new society in the productive capacity of factory machinery and

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[20] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1977), §25. See also Debord's experimental film, *Critique de la Séparation* (Paris: Dansk-Fransk Experimentalfilm Kompagni, 1961).

[21] Perhaps Jameson would file Debord's work under concepts such as reification, alienation, or commodification, which he lists as similar but distinct figures in Marxian thought, and which are of course central to the philosophy of Debord and the Situationist International.

[22] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, §26.

the growing power of the working class.[23] What he could not have foreseen was that "the extension of capitalist social relations gave birth not to the collective worker, but rather to the separated society."[24] This latter point forms the crux of the essay "A History of Separation" by the Endnotes discussion group, which situates the rise and fall of the workers' movement against the backdrop of the development of the productive forces and the long transition to full proletarianization over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While the Endnotes group acknowledges Debord's contribution to a theory of capitalist separation, their approach takes as its point of departure the declining demand for labour after 1973.[25]

In what follows, I trace the logic of separation through the film's engagement with deindustrialization, precarity and gender. Although popular cinema can be thought of as a spectacular commodity, *Werewolf* distinguishes itself from pure spectacle by virtue of its status as an experimental film. When thinking about the temporality of spectacle, Debord certainly had in mind the mass culture of a popular cinema and its "pseudo-cyclical" movement between labour-time and leisure-time.[26] In an era in which the distinction between work and non-work has all but disappeared, avant-garde cinema has deliberately refashioned the temporal rhythms of filmic representation in order to critique not only the commodified images of the modern culture industry, but also the fantasies of historical continuity and reproductive futurity that underpin narrative representation as such. Cinema is never merely spectacle, but is always also an

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[23] According to Debord, liberation would not come about solely through the development of the productive forces, but would require that the workers councils take control of and fundamentally reorganize production themselves. Debord writes, "Thus the present 'liberation from labor,' the increase of leisure, is in no way a liberation within labor, nor a liberation from the world shaped by this labor. None of the activity lost in labor can be regained in the submission to its result." See Debord, *Society of the Spectacle,* §27.

[24] Endnotes, "A History of Separation," 161-162.

[25] They write, "For all its inadequacies, Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* intuited at least this sad reality: the extension of capitalist social relations was reflected in the increasing separation of workers from one another, even as they became increasingly dependent on one another for their survival." See Endnotes, "A History of Separation," 162.

[26] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, §151.

aesthetic form, and at its best it participates in experiments in sensorial perception that open a window onto the hidden structures propping up the surfaces of reality. For Nicolas Bourriaud, "*realist* describes works that lift the ideological veils which apparatuses of power drape over the mechanism of expulsion and its refuse."[27] *Werewolf* is a case in point, depicting a kind of fractured present in which the historical impasse generated by a stagnant economy becomes an inertia against which its protagonists incessantly struggle to gain traction. Instead of offering ways out of the precarious present, however, *Werewolf* ruminates on the experience of being *stuck*. In doing so, McKenzie's film offers a poignant example of what I call the aesthetics of stagnation.

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Consider the protagonists of *Werewolf*. Excluded from a formal economy in the throes of downturn, Blaise and Nessa scrape together what little money they can, mowing lawns in order to cover their methadone treatments and syphoning gas from parked cars to run a rusty mower on its last legs. Shunned by members of a property-owning class who distrust them around their homes, Blaise and Nessa are separated not only from the world of gainful employment, but also from the wide range of affective relations that more financially stable families enjoy, despite the fact that, as Blaise says, they only want the same "peace of mind" and "security" as anyone else.[28] Early in the film they meet with a state representative to apply for low-income housing, but are told that there are no vacancies and that the waiting list is long. And so they move into an abandoned trailer in the woods, dragging the lawnmower up the steep incline of a long gravel road at the end of each day. This isolation figures in the film as an epistemological gap separating them from the normative world of capitalist society, which Blaise makes plain when

[27] Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Exform*, trans. Erik Butler (New York: Verso, 2016), x.

[28] McKenzie, *Werewolf*, 0:13:31.

he tells a clinic doctor, "You don't understand how a person like me lives."[29] Blaise and Nessa are also, in large part, deprived of familial networks of support. Later in the film, when Blaise relapses and a friend asks him if he needs to call someone, Blaise tells him, "I don't have anybody to call."[30] And while Nessa has an aunt who allows them to stay with her temporarily, Blaise and Nessa are for the most part on their own. They have aspirations to escape their situation and move "out west," presumably to the lucrative oil fields of Alberta, but have little capacity for upward mobility.[31] Besides, Nessa cannot transfer her methadone treatment plan out of province until she clears her balance, which at over a hundred and fifty dollars is out of reach without a steady income. Such is life for two homeless addicts in post-industrial Cape Breton.

The stakes of McKenzie's critical perspective become clearer when we consider the title originally proposed for the film, *The Train Whistle Does Not Blow*. Infamous for having the highest rates of unemployment and youth outward-migration in Canada, Cape Breton Island was once a booming industrial center during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in mining and steel production.[32] In the early twentieth century, the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation was the largest employer in Canada. By Friday 13th, 1967—a day that became known locally as "Black Friday"—Hawker Siddeley Canada was struggling to keep afloat and announced it would be closing the Sydney Steel Plant. Both the steel and coal industries continued under government ownership for the rest of the twentieth century, but by the early

[29] McKenzie, *Werewolf*, 0:35:42.

[30] McKenzie, *Werewolf*, 0:55:09.

[31] McKenzie, *Werewolf*, 00:53:19.

[32] For an account of these industries in Cape Breton through the Marxian framework of combined and uneven development, see David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation," *Acadiensis* 7, no. 1 (1977): 3-34.

1990s, both industries were in trouble again and were permanently closed by the end of 2001.[33] The downward trajectory of the Atlantic Canadian economy at the end of the twentieth century followed a global wave of deindustrialization, as the capitalist world-system underwent a sweeping process of financialization after 1973. The island also used to be home to a militant labour movement that lives on primarily through its memorialization in observances such as Davis Day, an annual day of remembrance that commemorates the life of William Davis, a striking miner gunned down by coal company police during a rally near New Waterford in 1925.[34] The final throes of labour militancy saw union members chain themselves to VIA Rail train carriages after the Crown corporation decided to terminate its rail service to Cape Breton in the 1990s, which labour leaders feared would further separate the population from the national economy and put a final nail in the coffin of industrial employment on the island.[35]

Sure enough, not long after the train whistles fell silent, the Cape Breton Development Corporation that had taken over the mines in 1968 closed its doors for good following the decommissioning of all its mines in 2001, and the company's former headquarters in Glace Bay became a call center.[36] Service work is now one of the biggest sectors of employment on the

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[33] For a history of the decline of steel production in Sydney, see Lachlan MacKinnon, "Deindustrialization on the Periphery: An Oral History of Sydney Steel, 1945-2001" (PhD diss., Concordia University, 2016), https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/981882/1/MacKinnon_PhD_S2017.pdf.

[34] The protest during which Davis was shot was a response to a decision by the mining company, British Empire Steel and Coal Company, to shut off the drinking water and electrical power supplies to the town of New Waterford following a series of escalating miners' strikes. At the time, nearly a quarter of Canada's entire military was in Cape Breton to suppress labour militancy.

[35] For a detailed study of labour militancy in Cape Breton in the early twentieth century, see Michael Earle, "Radicalism in Decline: Labour and Politics in Industrial Cape Breton, 1930-1950" (PhD diss., Dalhousie University, 1990), http://dalspace.library.dal.ca:8080/bitstream/handle/10222/55122/NN15866.PDF?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. For an analysis of the radical politics of the coalminers' union in Nova Scotia in the 1930s, see Michael Earle, "The Coalminers and Their 'Red' Union: The Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia, 1932-1936," *Labour/Le Travail* 22 (1988): 99-137.

[36] Terry Gibbs and Garry Leech have done significant work to tie the decline of the coal industry in Cape Breton to the rise of call centres throughout the postindustrial region of the island. See Terry Gibbs and Garry Leech, *The*

island. But deindustrialization has not only led to rising unemployment rates and the growth of service sector work. Vast numbers of young people from Cape Breton Island now work in and around the oil sands project in Alberta.[37] Sydney, the largest city on the Island, had a population of over 30,000 in the decades following World War II. That number began to drop in the 1970s, and by the turn of the new millennium had declined by a third. Or consider the fact that cancer rates in Cape Breton County are significantly higher than the national average.[38] Or that youth are at increased risk of drug addiction. The opioid epidemic of "hillbilly heroin" that swept across the island in the early years of the new millennium continues to take its toll on communities.[39] Despite this public health emergency, the Canadian Federal government cut funding for the only safe needle exchange program on the Island in the fall of 2016.[40]

Offering their lawn mowing services on the black market, Blaise and Nessa exemplify the precarious workers of an informal economy that has taken on new significance in the era of deindustrialization. Mowing lawns is the only work either of them can find for much of the film until Nessa manages to get a job selling soft serve at an ice cream parlor. Informal work or service work: these are the options on offer in a stagnant economy. The increase of investment in fixed capital that Marx argues pushes labour out of the production process does not only raise

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Failure of Global Capitalism: From Cape Breton to Columbia and Beyond (Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press, 2009).

[37] For a discussion of labour migration from Cape Breton to the oil sands of Alberta, see Nelson Ferguson, "From Coal Pits to Tar Sands: Labour Migration Between an Atlantic Canadian Region and the Athabasca Oil Sands," *Just Labour: A Canadian Journal of Work and Society* 17 and 18 (2011): 106-118.

[38] Department of Health, "Moving to Address High Cancer Rates in Cape Breton," Nova Scotia, Canada (provincial government website), April 21, 1999, https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=19990421003.

[39] Shawna Richer, "'Hillbilly Heroin' Hits Cape Breton," *The Globe and Mail*, March 10, 2003, https://beta.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/hillbilly-heroin-hits-cape-breton/article4127611/.

[40] The Ally Centre has since has its funded restored for a year, but will need to secure alternative means to keep the centre running once the funding runs out. See George Mortimer, "Sydney's Ally Centre has Funding Restored for One Year," *The Cape Breton Post*, November 10, 2016, http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/ally-centre-sydney-funding-eyking-hiv-needle-1.3843798.

unemployment rates, but also produces a ballooning service sector. As Jason E. Smith notes, "some ninety-four percent of new employment in the U.S. since 2000 [has] been in education, healthcare, social assistance, bars, restaurants, and retail, that is, in the vast, motley, and above all technologically stagnant service sector."[41] Consider the biscuit grinder at the ice cream parlor, which the film lingers on time and again. Metallic and rudimentary, the grinder resembles a scaled-down piece of machinery from an industrial-era factory, yet it appears as part of the minimal fixed capital needed to run a service-based business. What is more, the biscuit grinder in the film requires manual rotation, making it seem out of date at the same time that it reminds us there is little room for automation in the service sector.

Indeed, the service sector by definition resists technological innovation and development, which is why it has been the primary site for absorbing surplus labour and why it tends toward low productivity and low wages. But the explosive growth of service work in the wake of deindustrialization also signals the solidification of the separated society. As Endnotes puts it, "Everywhere, the working class is less homogeneous—it is stratified across high- and low-income occupations; its work is more precarious; and it switches jobs more frequently. More and more workers feel like work has no purpose; for more and more are employed in dead-end service jobs, or are unemployed or unemployable."[42] The image of the biscuit grinder not only represents capital pulverizing human labour. It also operates as a basic heuristic for the capitalist logic of separation, as capital accumulation itself inevitably tends to grind down. The biscuit grinder is in this sense the perfect object to represent the tendential displacement of industrial labour by service work, and the rising precarity that characterizes a post-industrial workforce

[41] Jason E. Smith, "Nowhere to Go: Automation, Then and Now," *Brooklyn Rail*, March 1, 2017, http://brooklynrail.org/2017/03/field-notes/Nowhere-to-Go.

[42] Endnotes, "A History of Separation," 159.

excluded from production, "littered across innumerable shops" and spread among "an endless differentiation of tasks."[43]

Encoding the logics and affects of stagnation at the level of aesthetic form, *Werewolf* suggests that contemporary forms of precarity in the deindustrialized West are tied to a crisis of reproductive futurity that follows from the persistence of economic decline. Minimalist dialogue, an often stationary camera, scenes shot at close vantage: life in the diegetic world of the film has been pared down. Shot almost entirely in close-ups, the camera restricts the viewer's perception to the claustrophobic universe of the two leads. Generating a mood of apprehension that stubbornly lingers without ever amounting to any sort of rupture, *Werewolf* favors an affective space somewhere between reservation and suffocating constriction. The film opens with a shot of a piece of old fishing rope, affixed as a clothesline between a tree and a rusted-out trailer, and with the sounds of birds chirping. The rope sits taut for a moment before it is pulled in by the shaking hands of a young junkie wearing a hospital bracelet, who we will later learn is Blaise. In the next shot, the camera cuts to a pair of bare feet gently swaying in the breeze, the rope creaking. Opening with Blaise's suicide, *Werewolf* offers no way forward—his fate is sealed from the beginning. At the end of the film, we return to the opening moment, the timeline of events having caught up with its inevitable outcome. The film affirms this recursive narrative structure in the cyclical regularity of the methadone treatment program, producing an overwhelming sensation of confinement and constraint. The weight of history bears down on the form, in a foreclosure that the grinding-down of capital accumulation announces. The departure from linearity signals the exhaustion of a progressively developing modernity and its accompanying narrative *telos*, casting constriction in terms of an impasse in historical time.

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[43] Endnotes, "A History of Separation," 157.

The film's realism might thus be understood as a version of what was known in the mid-twentieth century as "kitchen-sink realism" or "kitchen-sink drama," updated for the era of deindustrialization. Kitchen-sink realism was part of the British New Wave, a cultural movement that emerged in the early postwar years in the United Kingdom alongside the more renowned *nouvelle vague* in France, and that centered on the domestic life of working-class Britons. The moniker derives from an expressionist painting of a kitchen sink by John Bratby, an artist whose work took everyday objects like trash cans and toilets as its subject matter.[44] As a term, kitchen-sink realism was used by critics to describe theater, visual art, literature, television, and film that portrayed "angry young men" disillusioned with modern society in the harsh style of social realism.[45] Typically set in industrial areas of Northern England, kitchen-sink realism regularly featured shots of cramped rentals and grimy pubs, and addressed social and political issues of the day such as homelessness and racism. The legacy of kitchen-sink realism tends to find its expression in British soap operas like *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*, or in the "deserving poor" of the latest Ken Loach film,[46] but McKenzie's indie film also shares many of the conventions of the genre: a realist representation of individuals from the poorer classes and their everyday lives, disaffected protagonists at odds with the modern world, and a keen awareness of the pressing social and political issues at stake in contemporary society. Rather than concentrate on the everyday lives of an industrial working class, however, *Werewolf* brings the genre up to date to wallow in the dregs of unemployment against a post-industrial landscape. But the film

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[44] John A. Walker, "Kitchen Sink School," in *Glossary of Art, Architecture and Design since 1945*, 3rd ed. (Boston: G.K. Hall, 2002), 374.

[45] For an overview of the Angry Young Men movement of film and theatre directors, see Colin Wilson, *The Angry Years: The Rise and Fall of the Angry Young Men* (London: Robson Books, 2007).

[46] *Coronation Street*, writ. Tony Warren (Manchester, UK: Granada Television, 1960-); *EastEnders*, writ. Tony Holland and Julia Smith (London: The British Broadcasting Corporation, 1985-); Phil McDuff, "*I, Daniel Blake* Shows Us the Virtuous 'Deserving Poor' – How Conservative," *The Guardian*, November 2, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/02/i-daniel-blake-poor-conservative-ken-loach-welfare-system.

distinguishes itself, as well, in its choice of protagonists. Instead of primarily focusing on men, *Werewolf* examines the gender politics of the couple form in an age of deindustrialization, emphasizing that it is Nessa who in many ways bears the brunt of a shared precarity.

The film also pays particular attention to the way the couple-form becomes a refuge from the insecurity and unemployment that mark a stagnant economy, especially for those who lack access to familial wealth. Blaise's machismo, for example—which is expressed in how much space he takes up and tracked by his aggression and tendency to dominate the dialogue—can be read as a desperate attempt on the part of unemployed men to restore masculinity to its former place of privileged access to social security in the "Golden Age" of the Fordist family wage. The film reproduces this gendered unevenness in the framing of shots in which Blaise fills the screen while Nessa stands off to the side or behind him. Despite consistently sidelining Nessa, however, Blaise also effectively casts her as his caretaker, manipulating her into enabling his patterns of behaviour. In a suggestive scene, he hides in her hair: she is his shield, which is to say he instrumentalizes her so as to protect himself from the world. Although both Blaise and Nessa admit to having suicidal thoughts in their meetings with clinic doctors, she feels responsible for keeping him alive, while he appears quite happy to use her for his own benefit. When their lawnmower breaks down, he even suggests half jokingly that she will "have to suck somebody's dick" in order to pay for their next methadone dosage.[47] The film thus implies that the couple-form is no refuge at all, but only supports the characters' mutual decline. It might appear that, in order to escape this fate, Nessa must break free of the couple form, and in the end she does just that. But even after she leaves Blaise, she still has no real freedom: her job at the ice cream

[47] McKenzie, *Werewolf*, 00:22:02.

parlor merely provides enough money to maintain her methadone treatment program, and the final shot of her hunched over at work prefigures her shouldering the burden of his suicide.

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More might be said about the representation of gendered precarity in *Werewolf*, but it will suffice for the moment to note here that gender appears in the film as yet another instance of separation. As the Endnotes group writes, "The workers' movement rested on a vision of the future that turned out to be a dream. In the second half of the twentieth century workers awoke from this dream to discover that all that was supposed to bring them together had actually separated them."[48] The productive forces had turned out to be an enemy after all:

> The development of large-scale industry expresses itself, finally, in the extrusion of workers from the factory—deindustrialisation. Beyond the factory gates, workers find themselves wandering in an immense infrastructure, that of modern life, which reflects back to them not their growing power, but rather, their impotence. They see not a world of their making, but rather a runaway world, a world beyond their control, perhaps beyond anyone's control.[49]

So much for optimism. In the wretched lives of Blaise and Nessa, we see the consequences of deindustrialization for a labour movement that staked its claim on the future on the assumption that capitalist development would create a society of abundance, and necessitate the growth of a working class increasing in both strength and number. In this sense, the film is not about class politics but their absence: *Werewolf* reminds us that anti-capitalist politics today needs to confront the growing distance between the working class and the proletariat, as the declining demand for labour continues apace and the figure of the waged worker withdraws from the world

[48] Endnotes, "A History of Separation," 159-160.

[49] Endnotes, "A History of Separation," 184.

stage. In the meantime, the millions who live in the separated society will continue to burn out, butting up against the barriers of a stagnant economy. And while it may have seemed for a time that all non-class identities—including gender—would dissolve in the homogenous mass of semi-skilled factory workers, deindustrialization has meant that, if anything, the abstraction of gender has become ever more entangled with "the organization of the character of social production and the division of labour."[50] But if gender represents one of the many forms of separation specific to capitalist reproduction, *The Fall* suggests that the contemporary crisis of social reproduction constitutes a form of continuity and stasis in an era of secular stagnation that relies precisely on the gendered maintenance of those separations.

The Politics of Nonreproduction

The BBC Two series *The Fall*, starring Gillian Anderson as Detective Super Intendant Stella Gibson and Jamie Dornan as serial killer Paul Spector, registers rising precarity in its representation of a crisis of social reproduction, by which I mean to refer to a crisis in the systematic reproduction of the totality of capitalist social relations.[51] Broadly conceived, this would include the state apparatus and its various institutions, as well as the operations of those feminized reproductive activities particular to the gendered division of labour under capitalism. These crises, I want to argue, are themselves expressions of a crisis in the reproduction of the capital-labour relation, indexed in the series by the state's off-loading of the labour of social reproduction through austerity measures. *The Fall* establishes its concern with reproductive

[50] Maya Gonzalez and Jeanne Neton, "The Logic of Gender: On the Separation of Spheres and the Process of Abjection," in *Contemporary Marxist Theory: A Reader*, eds. Andrew Pendakis, Jeff Diamanti, Nicholas Brown, Josh Robinson and Imre Szeman (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 166.

[51] Special thanks to Megan Farnel and Natasha Hurley for their keen insights into and generous conversations about *The Fall* and questions of representation, gender, labour, affect, value, reproduction and the figure of the child.

crises through the primary characters we meet in the pilot, all of whom work in some facet of social reproduction that is in one way or another dealing with financial strain: Paul is a bereavement counselor whose current patients are struggling with their son's death, which should have been prevented but was missed by tired and overworked medical staff; his wife Sally Ann (Bronagh Waugh) is a neonatal nurse working extended hours through the night; his third victim Sarah Kay (Laura Donnelly) is a divorce and custody lawyer whose caseload spills over into the weekend; and Stella is a law enforcement official brought in to assist a financially and politically beleaguered police department. My discussion of *The Fall* begins, then, with representations of gender in the first episode—considered within the context of a stagnant global economy—which I tie to the function of policing in the series, two interrelated lines of inquiry that provide useful points of departure for examining precarity as nonreproduction in the series.

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The opening scene of the pilot, "Dark Descent," casts Stella and Paul as inverted images of each other; the first shot depicts Stella in an image of feminine domesticity, cleaning the bathroom in a red polka-dot hairband reminiscent of a 1950s-era housewife and wearing a facial mask, which she then washes off as she looks at herself in the mirror. In the following scene, Paul breaks into a house by climbing through a window—a violent image of penetration—and cases the joint in a disguise before he also unmasks before the mirror. But while the series examines the violence inherent in the gender-relation, it is quick to complicate conventional oppositions between male and female that might operate in terms of a distinction between, for example, the public and the private, which while not exactly exhausted nevertheless fails to capture the experience of gendered labour in the series. After the opening shots, we see Stella looking over case files, indicating that she is a professional woman whose gendered relation to reproductive labour

endures beyond her entry into the formal economy. Indeed, Stella is a successful woman, single and without kids, who takes no shit from men and sleeps with whomever she pleases—what critics might call a "strong female lead"—while Paul targets independent women with promising careers, acting out his misogynistic fantasies on successful young professionals. Seeming to lead a double life, Paul is also a family man. A series of overhead shots depicting the domestic interior of the Spector home situates the visceral horrors of patriarchy squarely within the familiar space of domestic life, and registers an affective dimension of gendered violence as his daughter's proximity to Paul's stash of "trophies" hidden above her bed trigger a series of night terrors like a contagion. Housing itself has been emptied of the workers it was built to reproduce: Paul undertakes his ritual preparation before a murder in abandoned tenement housing. Hiding in plain site, Paul is also part of the same vast state apparatus that is struggling through austerity-era Northern Ireland having seen none of the economic growth of the Celtic Tiger, which had been established in part through growing stability brought about by the Good Friday Agreement.

Set in Belfast, the series evokes "The Troubles" immediately upon Stella's arrival, as Assistant Chief Constable Jim Burns (Jon Lynch) announces to her that "policing is political here."[52] Stella has been seconded from The Metropolitan Police Service in London by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to review the high profile murder of Alice Monroe (Gemma McCorry), the daughter of a Unionist Member of Parliament. Setting the scene with images of graffiti for peace and abandoned stately buildings, the PSNI appears as a struggling colonial apparatus, its walls decorated with a memorial plaque dedicated to "Our Murdered Colleagues" and pictures of Queen Elizabeth. Political tensions are never far from the surface, occasionally bursting into view as when Paul's protestant patient, in a fit of anger, decries the idea that his

[52] Cubitt, "Dark Descent," *The Fall*, 00:17:15.

dead son's heart is now "beating in some Taig's chest."[53] Within this political climate, Stella would appear to represent the imperial order, dispatched to the periphery to reestablish colonial rule in times of economic uncertainty. In "Objects of Derision," Evan Calder Williams argues that police procedurals work to legitimize policing by situating protagonist cops at a degree of remove from the institution, so that, through those "flawed" (which is to say, non-normative, and thus *more human*) characters, we come to see cops as subjects, when in fact police are actually objects to which we cannot relate and with which we cannot communicate, such that there is a certain incommensurability between cops and all other bodies in space.[54] These are the rogues, traditionally, who flaunt the rules to get the bad guys, like Detective Jimmy McNulty (Dominic West) in David Simon's *The Wire* (2002-2008) or any other of the countless rebel cops of popular representation.[55] But they also, and increasingly, work representationally through the appropriation of feminism and queerness, in a version of "pink-washing" or what Jasbir Puar calls "homonationalism," by which she means to designate the tendency of states to incorporate queer subjects into their nation-building projects.[56] In this light, Stella's character—who is bisexual—functions as a veiled attempt to validate the ongoing colonial imposition of English rule in Northern Ireland.

The second episode of *The Fall*, "Darkness Visible," further explores this crisis of social reproduction–what I want to call nonreproduction—through the proximal relationship between the figure of the child and death. There's a lot more to be said about nonreproduction in the series, to be sure, but *The Fall* appears immediately concerned with at least three not-easily-

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[53] Cubitt, "Dark Descent," 00:23:49.

[54] Evan Calder Williams, "Objects of Derision," *The New Inquiry*, August 13, 2012, https://thenewinquiry.com/objects-of-derision/.

[55] *The Wire*, writ. David Simon (New York: Home Box Office, 2002-2008).

[56] See Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

disarticulated valences of the concept: crisis, politics, and labour. In working through the second episode with these ideas in mind, then, and in the course of making some remarks about the serial form, I want to consider what recent conversations in queer theory, communisation theory, and Marxist feminism might bring to bear on questions of futurity and negativity in the series. If the pilot episode of *The Fall* indexes a crisis in the reproduction of the capitalist class relation through austerity and social unrest in post-industrial Northern Ireland, the second episode only confirms what the first indicated: the cash-strapped PSNI are struggling to hit "performance targets" in light of "increased economic cutbacks and increased threats against officers."[57] The conversation between the emergency operator and Sarah Kay's sister, Marian (Lis Hogg), is telling in this regard: intensely personal for Marion, Sarah's death is, while taxing, a matter of routine for the operator, a representative of the state whose feminized affective labour is always just-in-time to take the next emergency call. Importantly, the emergency operator's initial concern is with the health of the baby she can hear crying over the phone, so we can draw a line here between gender, reproduction, and violence that hinges on the life of the child. The figure of the child, though, occupies a contradictory position in this context: on the one hand, as conventional agents of futurity, children in the series appear instead in close proximity to death, while on the other, although they work to facilitate a kind of historical erasure (their own and others), their unwitting concealment of violence infects them affectively, so that they are at once figures both of disappearance and residue.

What I want to suggest, following these associations between austerity, affect, children and death, is that the labour of the child paradoxically represents the labour of the negative in the series. As noted in the previous chapter, nonreproduction is perhaps most immediately associated

[57] Cubitt, "Darkness Visible," *The Fall*, 00:15:26.

with queer theorist Lee Edelman, for whom the figure of the child represents the conservative tendencies of "reproductive futurism," or the ongoing reproduction of the existing social order in all its misery, such that the refusal to reproduce constitutes a potentially radical act.[58] Despite Edelman's deep distrust of the political, which he sees as always-already based on a reproductive *telos*, the refusal of reproduction here might align the negativity of the queer project with a politics of negation as it is outlined in the theory of communisation, insofar as the latter figures revolution as "the direct non-reproduction of the class relation."[59] Edelman's contention is that "politics, however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to affirm a structure."[60] But the political, understood broadly, covers a array of possible positions between affirmation and abolition, including a radical project that aligns itself with what Marx and Engels call "the real movement which abolishes the present state of things."[61] If there is no necessary correlation between the political and affirmation, then, might a politics of nonreproduction counter-intuitively find its representative in the series in the figure of the child?

I want to pause and consider the manner in which nonreproduction emerges in the series as a crisis of social reproduction, with the state off-loading reproductive labour, primarily onto women. Given Jack Halberstam's concerns regarding a queer politics that "always lines up against women, domesticity and reproduction,"[62] we might note that a politics of nonreproduction shares certain key contradictions with the more familiar notion of a politics of

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[58] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3.

[59] Endnotes, "Crisis in the Class Relation," *Endnotes* 2 (2010): 11.

[60] Edelman, *No Future*, 2-3.

[61] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_German_Ideology.pdf.

[62] Jack Halberstam, "The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies," *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 5, no. 2 (2008): 154.

reproduction advocated by Sylvia Federici, Peter Linebaugh, and other theorists of the reproductive commons.[63] As Maya Gonzalez, Marina Vishmidt and others have pointed out, in positing the self-organization of reproductive activities as a terrain on which to mount a feminist and anti-capitalist politics, a politics of reproduction risks naturalizing the externally imposed relationship between gender and reproductive labour (and the existence of gender itself).[64] *The Fall* poses a similar problem for nonreproductive politics, only inverted: while the concept of nonreproduction might hold open political possibilities, it also names the condition of contemporary immiseration. This is to ask, as Nina Power does, what it might "mean to live in a culture where the image and symbolism of childhood and youth is celebrated, but the provision for caring for children and for those who care for them is so limited," at the same time that "to have children is also to generate workers, and to generate work."[65]

To further explore the place of contradiction in a politics of nonreproduction, I want to turn to the opening scene of the second episode, which like the pilot positions Stella and Paul as mirror images of each other, but with important distinctions. "Darkness Visible" opens by juxtaposing Stella and Paul in terms of intimacy, coupling and control: Stella takes the lead throughout the sex scene with Detective Sergeant James Olson (Ben Peel), while Paul enacts his misogynist fantasy in total control of Sarah's lifeless body. And yet we quickly see that the scenes are not simple mirror images of each other. For one, Paul is meticulous in cleaning Sarah's body and her apartment, while Stella asks DS Olson not to shower because "she likes it,"

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[63] See, for example, Silvia Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons in an Era of Primitive Accumulation," in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 138-148; and Peter Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014).

[64] Gonzalez and Neton, "Logic of Gender," 171; Marina Vishmidt, "Permanent Reproductive Crises: An Interview with Silvia Federici," *Mute*, March 7, 2013, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/permanent-reproductive-crisis-interview-silvia-federici.

[65] Nina Power, "Brief Notes towards a Non-Nihilistic Theory of Non-Reproduction," *Studies in the Maternal* 6, no. 1 (2014): 2.

and by the end of the opening scene Stella is juxtaposed not with Paul but with Sarah, as they both appear lying across the bed before the two men leave their respective settings. And while Paul is able to move relatively freely in the world, Stella faces constant resistance to her agency: sexually, socially, and professionally, men appear threatened by her, and repeatedly question her authority and motivations. Can we think here about the implications of Paul's cleanliness in terms of sterility, considering the series' concern with nonreproduction? Stella's nonreproductive activities are positioned in terms of empowerment, while Paul's are associated with violence and death. What might this mean for the figure of the child, given the fact that Stella is childless while Paul's children are called into service to provide his cover story? And if nonreproduction paradoxically names both the condition of immiseration under contemporary capitalism, and the horizon of a feminist, queer and anti-capitalist politics, how might we think about nonreproduction as itself a form of work or labour?

In "the time of the desert of unemployment," Fredric Jameson argues, "the power of the negative turns out to be postmodernity after all: it is not … the motor power of history Hegel celebrated. Rather, it is history's breakdown, an ominous perpetual present in which no one knows what's coming…and indeed no one knows whether anything is coming at all. This is truly the realization of queer theory's master slogan 'no future'."[66] I wonder, then, what it might mean to "fight the future," as Gillian Anderson does in another series, *The X-Files*, as Dana Scully (where she also plays a law enforcement official) while trapped in a perpetual present.[67] This brings me, finally, to the serial form, and the relationship between narrative and futurity. On the one hand, the serial form would seem to inaugurate a developmental narrative *telos*, reminiscent as it is of the assembly line, unfolding with the steady, durational rhythms of Fordist temporality,

[66] Fredric Jameson, "On the Power of the Negative," *Mediations* 28, no. 1 (2014): 71-73.

[67] *The X-Files*, writ. Chris Carter (Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox Television, 1993-).

building toward its climax over a series of episodes that together comprise the finished product. On the other hand, however, in its very seriality, time in *The Fall* seems to stretch out indefinitely to the point of temporal saturation where nothing ever gets resolved, such that temporal progression itself seems to vanish. If a breakdown in the historical reproduction of the class relation prompts a crisis in narrative possibility, might the contradictory presence of the child—as representative of nonreproduction and the labour of the negative—represent the absent future in the present, and the possibility of a radically different world over the horizon? Or might it simply be the possibility of a renewed cycle of accumulation that remains over the horizon of our current age of finance capital? In order to further explore these questions, I want to address a series of concerns threaded throughout the series as they emerge in episode three, "Insolence & Wine," namely, the relationship between the figure of the child and the question of labour, the matter of Stella's subjectivity, and the connections between value, crisis and the family form. Like the hitherto adjacent worlds of Stella and Paul—as well as storylines, acoustics, bodies, affects, and sensitive information—these topics bleed across their ostensible boundaries in the episode (and the series more broadly as it continues its own bloody unfolding), but for the sake of clarity I will address them as interrelated but distinct points of inquiry.

In capitalist societies, children conventionally feature as the labour force of the future (if they are not already conscripted into the work force), but what happens to labour power after labour? What happens to bodies destined for a future of wage-labour when there is no future, or at least no future for labour, which under current conditions amounts to the same thing? Dispossessed of the means of their own reproduction save selling their labour, proletarians—as a class in transition—tendentially come to face dispossession of even the commodity labour power, as capital pushes labour out of production. This process leaves only empty vessels,

deprived of their social contents. As such, the children in the series might also index—along with the other logics and concepts they represent—the emergence of a global condition of superfluity: the consolidation of a surplus population exemplary of a form of disposable life particular to capital's current expulsion of living labour on a global scale. Their labour, then, figures at least in part in the negative, as the labour of erasure. Although it might seem a stretch, we might think of the Tyler family's recently deceased son's organs being harvested for transplant as suggestive, at least, of what Melinda Cooper calls "life as surplus," that is, the folding of organic materials of biological reproduction into capital accumulation across geopolitical boundaries, which Kevin Floyd has also identified as part of the vast industry of organ trafficking facilitating the biotechnological transfer of reproductive tissues from the global south to the global north.[68] The Tyler's son, terminally ill and thus unsuited for waged work, that is, bereft of the commodity labour power in life, finds his use—assumes social utility, or acquires use-value—only in death. And if the children refuse to disappear entirely, appearing at once as disposable and necessary, they nevertheless often appear through their absence, especially for Liz Tyler who has lost her child but who also used to be a child minder, her backyard—once full of children—now yet another empty container. The signs of nonreproduction loom large here.

This also helps clarify the stakes of form in the series more generally. There is no developmental narrative to be found here, which would suggest that, if post-Fordism retains any use for an analysis of precarity in the post-1973 period, it is only through an emphasis on its status as *post*, i.e. as a period of capitalist history that unfolds *after growth* (or post-*bildung*), a condition of generalized stagnation tied to what Brenner calls the "long downturn" rather than a

[68] Melinda Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008); Kevin Floyd, "Gendered Labor and Abstract Life" (plenary talk, annual Historical Materialism Conference, New York, NY, April 25, 2015).

positive concept naming a new regime of capital accumulation.[69] Post-Fordism is itself a negative term, acquiring meaning in relation to that which it is not—Fordism, shorthand for an era of unprecedented capitalist expansion that has long been exhausted—and as a strategy of capitalist innovation, it is perhaps best understood as a part of the scramble for profitability symptomatic of our current era of financialization. Here, I am using financialization in the Arrighian sense—as the coming to a close of a cycle of accumulation that has been systemic and global in scope, suggesting that the leap into liquidity that Stella makes into the pool mirrors capital's leap into finance—but in the context of a moment in which a renewed cycle of accumulation remains elusive.[70] This is ultimately a question of value, then, insofar as it is also a question about a crisis in the reproduction of the capital-labour relation, and so in order to consider futurity and narrative possibility (or even the possibility of narrative), I want to move from this scale of the world-system to the level of reproduction and the body, or what we might call, following Stella, the level of intimate detail. As Stella says when briefing her new task force, "the devil—quite literally, ladies and gentlemen—is in the detail. Detail, detail, and detail again."[71] Stella reminds us that it is in the concrete that we can discern the violence of abstraction, for, as she says later, "What could be more intimate than squeezing the life from another human being, having their dead body at your disposal?"[72]

This brings my discussion of the series to the matter of Stella's subjectivity, since it is in the context of her expanding authority that DCI Eastwood makes a series of comments regarding her sexual activity which occasions her brilliant retort regarding gender and the subject-object

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[69] Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1956-2005* (New York: Verso, 2006).

[70] See Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (New York: Verso, 2010).

[71] Cubitt, "Insolence & Wine," *The Fall*, 00:18:00.

[72] Cubitt, "Insolence & Wine," 00:55:40.

relation: "Man fucks woman. Subject man, verb fucks, object woman. That's OK. Woman fucks man. Woman subject, man object. That's not so comfortable for you, is it?"[73] There is a line of continuity that runs through this episode regarding the objectification of women, connecting this exchange between Stella and Eastwood with the male violence against sex workers that occurs under the watch of corrupt police officers running a prostitution ring on the side (one of whom dismisses this violence with the sentiment, typical of men in these situations, that "she must've said something, done something"[74]), but also with domestic abuse in the Tyler household, and ultimately with Paul's misogynist murder of women—women Stella refuses to qualify using the term "professional," instead insisting on "something that's less of a value judgment" like "highly qualified"[75] (though the press end up using the term "professional" anyway)—in a logic made explicit by Paul's use of the feminized mannequin in planning his next attack. Indeed, as Stella says, "after they're dead, they're playthings to him, he treats them like *objects*, paints their nails, uses them like dolls."[76] This logic remains apparent throughout the mundane operations of the police force, as when a female police officer theorizes over dinner break that the killer "hates women who occupy powerful positions," and a male police officer quips, "don't we all."[77]

Capitalist reproduction, with its regime of differential inclusion, selectively bestows subjectivity through the wage, as it is the social validation of labour that provides the basis for citizenship and participation in the public sphere, those realms of activity vital to liberal subjecthood. This has traditionally, of course, been the purview of masculinity. Stella's position in the PSNI troubles this logic and the male police officers, who are embarrassed talking about

[73] Cubitt, "Insolence & Wine," 00:51:27.

[74] Cubitt, "Insolence & Wine," 00:10:41.

[75] Cubitt, "Insolence & Wine," 00:28:35.

[76] Cubitt, "Insolence & Wine," 00:57:04.

[77] Cubitt, "Insolence & Wine," 00:53:18.

sex with Stella and become defensive, smug and condescending (DCI Eastwood sneaks a quick peek at Stella's backside when she's leaning over her desk before chastising her for having a one night stand). Against the repeated attempts to objectify her, Stella asserts herself as a subject with agency: an *agent*, as it were, of the police force. Here I am struck by the resonance of this logical movement with Williams' arguments regarding the police procedural and the subject-object relation. Stella certainly encounters resistance from all angles, which we can think of in relation to the reification of her nonreproductive labour, but how do we reconcile this with a series that distinguishes between corrupt cops and the honorable police agent? In considering this question, I think it's important to note that Stella herself demonstrates an explicit concern with the politics of representation, dismissing a series of possible names for the police operation—"Eden," for example—based on how they signify, before deciding on Operation Musicman. She also asks the media liaison officer, and ACC Jim Burns, "not refer to them as innocent…What if he kills a prostitute next, or a woman walking home drunk, late at night, in a short skirt? Will they be in some way less innocent, therefore less deserving? Culpable? The media love to divide women into virgins and vamps, angels or whores. Let's not encourage them."[78] Stella is acutely aware of the relationship between representation and vulnerability, but her investment in representational politics is a response less to the idea that the police face a legitimacy crisis (although this question will remain an open one for the time being) than to the persistence of patriarchal defamation, both inside the police and without. If the police are ironically recast here as the victims of surveillance, operating "under the glare of media lights,"[79] then Stella lives under a different gaze, a "brighter spotlight," evidenced by the import attached to her "wardrobe malfunction" when she comes under scrutiny after a button of her blouse comes unfastened

[78] Cubitt, "Insolence & Wine," 00:29:28.

[79] Cubitt, "Insolence & Wine," 00:17:45.

during a press conference.[80]

The trope of feminine objectification in the show also points to the relationship between value, crisis, and the family form. The place where Paul aims to reconstitute the conditions of his labour, which is to say the foundation on which to continue his misogynist killing spree, is an abandoned home, a former site of domesticity and family life, now empty, forgotten and forlorn, a site of labour and affect after the family form (which sits in close proximity to Sally's parents house—a site of lineage, genealogy and reproduction—drawing their affective circuitries together in a further bleeding of bounded worlds). If, following Angela Mitropoulos, the Fordist family wage operated as the contractual organization of gendered reproductive labour, that is, the performative gesture underlying the oikonomic order of reproduction in that period,[81] might Paul's fantasy be the restoration of the patriarchal order of Fordism? We've talked about how Paul targets women who upset that order in both their professional ambitions and their nonreproductive status, and how Stella embodies this logic by which Paul chooses his victims. I want to suggest, in relation to crisis, value and the family, that Paul's place in this opposition can be understood as a kind of will to accumulation on the part of capital. As Stella describes Paul's killing spree, "There's a law of diminishing returns" that underwrites any attempt to return to a moment of glory, an attempt that is inevitably "doomed to fail."[82] This sounds an awful lot like the current crisis of value playing out on the world stage.

Paul thus figures as a character mask, scrambling to reconstitute the conditions of reproduction—which is to say the conditions of capitalist profitability—in an era of financial and social crisis. Finance exemplifies the logic of affective circulation, and, like contagion, liquidates

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[80] Cubitt, "Insolence & Wine," 00:33:31.

[81] Angela Mitropoulos, *Contract & Contagion: From Biopolitics to Oikonomia* (Brooklyn: Minor Compositions, 2012).

[82] Cubitt, "Insolence & Wine," *The Fall*, 00:15:58.

the contractual foundations of cohesive narrative order (which is also to say the *polis*), as Mitropoulos argues, and which I want to read alongside Arrighi's model of periodicity above.[83] Paul has his own take on rupture, narrative and futurity: "I don't subscribe to that model of grief. I don't see bereavement as ever being absolved or accepted. There's no closure, no recovery, but you can learn to live a life without the physical presence of your son."[84] Paul reproduces the fantasy of finance capital: that its futurity is possible without the valorization of labour. And the delay, "the sexual release [that] comes afterwards when he's on his own" and is "all part of the fantasy, the fantasy that sustains him between killings,"[85] is indicative of a temporal drag—formalized in shots throughout this episode—that registers an interruption in the circuit of valorization. When Paul finds out that Sarah Kay was pregnant when he killed her, he upset at the fact that he committed "child destruction" would suggest that his investments, so to speak, are indeed a warped reflection of capital's own. Unable to jumpstart its next period of expansion, to reestablish the organizational forms and foundations upon which to launch a renewed cycle of accumulation, the logic splits in two: children are at once disposable and necessary. The family, then, can never be a refuge, since it names the gendered formation through which capital exerts its force over labour, only to dissolve that relationship according to its own internal laws of motion. Another way to consider the fate of labour power after labour would be to ask what happens to what Sianne Ngai, following Marx, calls the "residue" of abstract labour that is never realized as money capital,[86] but where what remains as residue is the objectivity of the body

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[83] Coincidentally, as Mitropoulos notes, Spinoza develops his theory of affect during the period of financialization that brought the Dutch regime of accumulation to a close, and had familiar connections to finance through a family owned joint-stock company. See Angela Mitropoulos, "Archipelago of Risk: Uncertainty, Borders and Migration Detention Systems," *New Formations* 84-85 (2015): 168.

[84] Cubitt, "Insolence & Wine," *The Fall*, 00:23:10.

[85] Cubitt, "Insolence & Wine," 00:54:44.

[86] Sianne Ngai, "Visceral Abstractions," *GLQ* 21, no. 1 (2015): 42.

deprived of the commodity labour power, and what is realized as money capital is always the contractual promise of *future labour*. This is a repeatedly projected image of futurity that stubbornly resists realization, and, with each crash and subsequent "jobless recovery," recedes ever further into the distance.

I want to pause once again here and consider the relationship between gender and maintenance work in the context of nonreproduction. The opening scene of the fourth episode, "My Adventurous Song," continues to play with character doubling, revisiting the crosscutting device used in previous episodes to establish parallel action between Stella and Paul. If episode three saw Stella and Paul reconstituting the conditions of their work—its own peculiar form of reproductive labour—then episode four begins with the two protagonists performing another kind of reproductive labour: maintenance work, made explicit through the daily labour of "keeping fit." "Fitness" seems an apt term for both Stella and Paul: as in "physically fit"—here understood to mean also mentally and emotionally "fit"—and thus able to continue their work, but also "fit for duty" in Stella's case—as one of the few uncorrupted police officers in the series—or "fit to kill" in Paul's—literally, as Paul's modus operandi involves an elaborate series of ritualistic violences that require a great deal of brute strength, and in the more figurative sense of an extreme or elaborate example of a more pervasive logic of misogyny in the show.

What I find compelling here is the way in which the reproductive logic of maintenance seems to expand through labour ties and affective attachments throughout the social field, revealing an otherwise hidden series of relations threading the lives of seemingly disparate characters: lineaments of a total system of social reproduction. The connection made in the opening scene between Stella and Paul's respective fitness regimes surfaces a concern with maintenance work that links Stella to Sally in terms of the gendered labour of care. Both women

are tasked with managing a crisis involving a death at work: when Rob Breedlove's suicide in DCI Eastwood's office causes panic, Stella takes swift command of the situation, while Sally remains at work after her shift to look after the young mother as the hospital withdraws Baby Girl Mitchell's intensive care. Although Stella's crisis management episode is certainly less routine than Sally's, as Sally does this kind of work for a living in a more explicit sense as a neonatal nurse, the way Stella excels at "handling things so calmly [and] efficiently"—that is, keeps things operating smoothly during times of crisis—codes her as a maternal figure, as her male colleagues continuously remind her afterwards in an attempt to reconstitute their own senses of gendered and professional identities.[87] The logic of mothering is here abstracted into a broad institutional structure of gendered social reproduction through the logic of feminized care work as maintenance.

Baby Girl Mitchell's tragic story arc shares a startling fate with Paul's victims: after death, they are washed, dressed and photographed in life-like poses as part of the reproduction of a fantasy. In his letter to Sarah Kay's father, Ian, Paul says babies are innocent, implying that his victims are guilty of something. Paul, of course, considers himself to be above the law, at least in terms of the "petty rules and regulations" he flouts at work.[88] But in his letter to Ian Kay, Paul makes an appeal to natural law via philosophy, as we learn that he thinks of himself as Nietzsche's "last man," the brute force of history figured as the heroic triumphalism of unfettered masculinity.[89] If the postmortem photography of the deceased registers as a fantasy of stop-loss, on the one hand, it is also—at least for Paul, presumably—a return to innocence, on the other. Like gendering, this innocence figures for patriarchy as both natural and something

[87] Cubitt, "My Adventurous Song," *The Fall*, 00:23:19.

[88] Cubitt, "My Adventurous Song," 00:26:23.

[89] Cubitt, "My Adventurous Song," 00:40:20.

that must be taught, and by force if necessary, in order to restore a "natural balance." Consider the bathroom scene in which ACC Jim Burns assumes the news that Breedlove had been having an affair with DS James Olson's wife would assuage any guilt Stella might be feeling regarding her one-night stand with Jimmy—what she calls a "sweet night"[90]—only to discover she feels none. Burns loses his composure, blurting out: "Do you realize the effect you have on men?"[91] Under the pretext of thanking Stella for handling things calmly, Burns instead presents another moment of crisis in which he appeals to Stella for consolation, and Stella, at once withholding and performing affective labour, tells him coolly, "that would have been a mistake."[92] Paul also has to manage a crisis while "on the job," so to speak, as his latest victim is not alone when she returns home and Paul is forced to improvise. Tellingly, her home is rendered particularly vulnerable to forced entry because it is undergoing maintenance, and Paul uses the scaffolding surrounding her front terrace to enter her house.

The Fall tracks a persistent sense of ongoingness that never amounts to any sort of actual optimism or renewal: nonreproduction as a structuring contradiction. This "holding pattern" involves the reproduction of a particularly violent patriarchal fantasy alongside the gendered labour of maintenance work.[93] In recent work by Jocelyn Cohn and Eve Mitchell, they argue that

> Patriarchy is a total social relation, meaning it is an amalgamation of many varying social relationships that humans create and recreate on a daily basis. It transcends our current moment, our ways of doing things, to before and beyond where we are now, and what we do as individuals. But patriarchy can only be understood through the form of organization

[90] Cubitt, "My Adventurous Song," 00:11:03.

[91] Cubitt, "My Adventurous Song," 00:22:36.

[92] Cubitt, "My Adventurous Song," 00:22:51.

[93] "Holding Pattern" is a term Endnotes uses to describe a world trapped between class struggle and the calcification of economic crisis, a form of stasis maintained in the present moment primarily through austerity. See Endnotes, "The Holding Pattern: The Ongoing Crisis and the Class Struggles of 2011-2013," *Endnotes* 3 (2013): 12-55.

> of our labor; it is historically and logically developed, rooted in the capitalist division of labor. As a total social relation, it is a process that contains many elements, moments, and forms, many of which appear to contradict one another. Patriarchy is part of the production and reproduction of current society, and cannot be abolished separate from the abolition of capitalism itself.[94]

If Paul functions as a character mask for capital—or, at least for Fordist capital, and an *oikos* contractually organized around the Fordist family wage—scrambling to reconstitute the conditions of its profitability after a fall, he is also a symbol for patriarchy. *The Fall*, with its characters whose lives are thoroughly mediated (if not entirely dominated) by violent abstractions, also proposes that these two systems—capital and patriarchy—cannot be approached separately but must be confronted as a single entity. What this means for a discussion of precarity in the series thus becomes a question of reproductive futurity, as the emergence of nonreproduction in the class relation confronts a revanchist patriarchy desperate to ensure its own future. The frame of "doubling" in the season finale, "The Vast Abyss," seems precisely the place to start in attempting to answer this question, given its centrality to the thematic and formal stakes of *The Fall*, and, as I want to suggest here, to the representational logic of nonreproduction with which the series grapples so explicitly from its pilot episode.

Doubling is the necessary fiction (which is to say the ideology) of the series. If Dr. Reed Smith's experience of self-partitioning casts the base violence of what Gilles Deleuze, following James Joyce, calls the "chaosmos"[95] as separate from the affective labour of reproductive care work with all its tenderness and love—which is to say, wants to uphold a distinction between the

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[94] Jocelyn Cohn and Eve Mitchell, "No Lamps, No Candles, No More Light: Patriarchy on the Left," Part 1 of 4, *Unity and Struggle*, October 27, 2015, http://unityandstruggle.org/2015/10/27/patriarchyontheleftpart1/.

[95] Gilles Deleuze, *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). 208.

profane and the sacred—Stella's explanation of "doubling" is a highly dubious one, since what could be more quotidian than the daily work of social reproduction in the household economy. Certainly, Paul wants to believe that existence is fundamentally chaotic—fancying himself the Nietzschean Last Man who forces a society of deluded children to face the "vast abyss" of the Real—as opposed to an ordered world of social reproduction that care work makes possible. But this "half-baked philosophy" simply provides a rationale for his "age old male violence against women," as Stella points out.[96] Noting what the truth will do to his family, Stella repositions herself as the agent of the Real, figured here as feminist vengeance in the name of Paul's victims. More to the point, Paul's entire modus operandi admittedly involves the imposition of aesthetic order upon the matter of the world: "a desire to control everything and everyone," whether he is "driven by a will to power," as he would have it, or "a slave to [his] desires" with "no control at all," as Stella says.[97] So if "art is a lie" that "gives the chaos of the world an order that doesn't exist,"[98] then Paul is by his own account one of those "evil people" that Ian Kay calls "people of the lie."[99]

But doubling has functioned throughout this series to both connect and separate, drawing relations between characters even as it abstracts and isolates them. I have tracked the way the show works to sketch an image of totality, to insist upon the inseparability of various social phenomena across a field of relations. The logic of doubling constitutes an attempt to maintain a fiction of separation, say between daily life and extreme violence, or between patriarchy and capital, even as the show insists on interconnectivity, placing horror and violence squarely in the

[96] Cubitt, "The Vast Abyss," *The Fall*, 00:53.16.

[97] Cubitt, "The Vast Abyss," 00:52:58.

[98] Cubitt, "The Vast Abyss," 00:53:11.

[99] Cubitt, "The Vast Abyss," 00:17:51.

realm of the quotidian. The series thus documents a form of what the Endnotes collective call "the unity-in-separation of market society,"[100] as characters exist in isolation and depend entirely on market-mediated social institutions for their reproduction and futurity. Take Sally Ann, who is pregnant and feels she has no choice but to participate in the reproduction of the couple form and the nuclear family despite her obvious reticence, as the family unit offers some financial shelter from precarity. Sally Ann makes her "choice" to give Paul another chance *under coercion*, and not only in a direct and personal form from Paul: she is effectively forced to go along with things in order to secure her children's longevity for material reasons—her financial stability depends upon it—and so we are reminded that these characters are ruled by abstractions. She knows that Paul is untrustworthy, but this knowledge cannot help her; knowing the difference does not seem to make any. As Stella says to Ian Kay when he does not want to lie to Paul, "That's the way it has to be."[101]

This is the terrible truth of doubling: that people must work to maintain these fictions—even as they know them to be false—or risk it all, and who can afford such a risk? As Lauren Berlant writes, "When politics is serious, it risks a loss of the ground of living in which people have come to know their competencies and their desires: fantasy, in contrast, is a zone of stop-loss, a demand for the ongoing present to be the scene of lived fulfillment."[102] The series suggests that, however terrible social systems may be, society depends upon them for its survival, even as these systems appear increasingly hollow, untrustworthy and ineffectual. This is indeed a matter of maintenance under austerity, which the episode foregrounds from its opening scene: both Paul and Stella are again unable to secure the conditions of their labour, as

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[100] Endnotes, "A History of Separation," 85.

[101] Cubitt, "The Vast Abyss," *The Fall*, 00:19:16.

[102] Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 12.

external forces disrupt their attempts to work. And so the series encourages a critique of reproductive futurity, but it also returns again and again to the contradictions inherent in a politics of nonreproduction as they might unfold within the context of reproductive crises. People may not like the nuclear family, the police, or the colonial state, but, as far as *The Fall* is concerned, if society is to reproduce itself it needs those institutions since they reproduce society. It is tautological. *The Fall* equates capitalist nonreproduction with nonreproduction *tout court*—a notion that the dissolution of these social forms entails social dissolution as such—and suggests that in order to survive society must secure its institutions. Reproductive futurism therefore appears as a form of "policing the crisis," to use a phrase from Stuart Hall,[103] which the episode presents in its opening scene as a geopolitical tension between the PSNI and Catholic working class kids that threatens to erupt into chaos.

The series is right to suggest this ultimately shared fate. If it seems that the characters in the series cannot afford to let these forms dissolve—that their reproductive futurity depends upon it—then it truly is all or nothing. And when the direct nonreproduction of the whole is at stake, then Williams' arguments about the rogue officer take on additional significance, as the police procedural in this case inspires sympathy with state violence not simply to legitimize policing but to encourage identification with the given world in all its misery. And so Stella's sex positivism, while biologically nonreproductive, arguably affirms what the anonymous C.E. in "Undoing Sex: Against Sexual Optimism" describes as "the broader production of sex and gender." C.E.'s position, it is worth noting, "is not that optimism is simply ineffective, that it has been appropriated and de-fanged by a system of repression and may thus be saved, but rather that it exists alongside shame and silence, each playing their part." Again, Sally Ann's example is

[103] Stuart Hall, Brian Roberts, John Clarke, Tony Jefferson, and Chas Critcher, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

instructive, as she and Paul come to some sort of reconciliation over and through sex. As C.E. says, "it is the optimism that insistently, cruelly returns us to the work of fucking."[104]

The take away for an analysis of precarity is that reproductive futurity and reproductive labour (including the work of sex, especially if, as Federici argues, "for women, *sex is work*"[105]) are entangled not only at the structural level of social institutions but also at the molecular level of the subject. To quote C.E. a final time, "Non-procreative sex is allowed and fostered not because of society having moved any closer towards freedom, but because the reproductive labour demanded by modern capital is not merely that of population growth, but of the creation of the self, the individual, and consequently the identity."[106] Any attempt to disrupt this process of social reproduction is figured in the series as a sure path to duplicity and death, epitomized in Paul and his apparent lack of social situatedness. As Sally Ann says,

> I look at you and I don't know who you are. When you first meet someone—when you first *get to know them*—there comes a time when you get to know their friends and family, and you get to learn all about them through those others, through their closest relationships: their mother, father, brothers, sisters. With you, there's nothing.[107]

Paul appears outside social relations here, while we know he and his misogynistic violence are entirely circumscribed within them. But what this scene also suggests is that Paul in all his horror is a direct product of the failure to maintain the very social structures that the show insists reproduce that same horror. Lacking the conventional frameworks of knowability, Paul-the-monster-child is the result of an absence not simply of care work or networks of support, but of

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[104] C.E., "Undoing Sex: Against Sexual Optimism," *LIES* 1 (2012): 16.

[105] Silvia Federici, "Why Sexuality Is Work," in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 25.

[106] C.E., "Undoing Sex," 33.

[107] Cubitt, "The Vast Abyss," *The Fall*, 00:37:35.

the traditional institutions of the nuclear family and the couple form. In the show, it seems, to enjoy the former one must secure the latter. Nothing less than the reproduction of the self is at stake. This is why precarity poses a problem for representation: any positive instantiation of a precarious subject appears inexorably as a contradiction, threatened by the very foundations of its social constitution. The precarious subject resists representation because it occupies a position of antagonism with respect to the categories of its own identity.

* * *

This chapter has explored some of the forms and experiences of precarity that have developed since the 2008 financial crisis through the interlocking concepts of stagnation, separation and nonreproduction as they feature in Ashley McKenzie's film *Werewolf* and the BBC series *The Fall*. Opening with an outline of the stagnant state of the capitalist economy in the post-1973 period, the chapter then moved to consider these two examples of post-2008 visual culture. I turned to twenty-first-century cinematic and televisual works from outside the US context to demonstrate the global nature of downturn and the transnational echoes of American decline. In my discussion of *Werewolf*, I developed a theory of what I call the aesthetics of stagnation, drawing on the work of the Endnotes collective on the separated society. The aesthetics of stagnation concerns itself not only with representations of the separated society at the level of content, but encodes the logic of separation in its formal structures. I then examined the politics of nonreproduction in *The Fall*, a series that appears entirely preoccupied with a crisis of social reproduction. Over the course of my analysis of the series, it became clear that a politics of nonreproduction necessarily confronts a paradox insofar as it must recognize itself in inverted form in the shape of the current crisis. My final wager is that this paradox constitutes the primary

structuring contradiction of any anti-capitalist politics in the precarious present, the consequences of which remain an urgent question.

CONCLUSION

"Une Autre Fin du Monde Est Possible"

> The permanent present means that no one can remember what the catastrophe was, and that therefore there can be no thematic agreement about where we are now, and certainly no plausible forecast about futures, except to the degree that in that sense we don't have one.
>
> — Fredric Jameson, "On the Power of the Negative"

On March 31, 2016, as millions participated in a national day of strike actions across France, a few hundred activists gathered under a rainy sky in Paris's Place de la République to participate in the protests against then-president François Hollande's proposed changes to the labour laws, known as the El Khomri bill. After four years in government, Hollande's Socialist Party had failed to deliver on its progressive campaign promises. Not that everyone was surprised. But as the state of emergency that had been declared following the November 2015 terror attacks entered its fifth month, and amid significant mobilizations for open borders in Nantes and Calais, the situation in France was coming to a head. The national economy was still reeling from the global financial crash that had begun in the American housing sector with the subprime mortgage crisis and had shaken the Eurozone to its core.[1] Unemployment rates in the country were at a twenty-year high. Then came the El Khomri bill, which sought to loosen or suspend national labour regulations in the name of fiscal stimulus.[2] On February 23 a meeting was held at the Labour Exchange. The participants decided that on March 31 they would take the square and

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[1] Several astute commentators have traced the roots of the current economic crisis in France back to the global capitalist restructuring of the 1960s and 1970s. See, for example, Davide Gallo Lassere, "The Extreme Center and Social Struggles in France: From the Labor Law to the Presidential Elections," *Viewpoint*, June 15, 2017, https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/06/15/the-extreme-center-and-social-struggles-in-france-from-the-labor-law-to-the-presidential-elections/.

[2] For a discussion on Nuit Debout's emergence out of the protests against Hollande's proposed changes to the French labour code (*code du travail*), see Jonah Birch, "A French Spring," *Jacobin*, April 28, 2016, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/04/france-labor-code-hollande-nuit-debout/.

there they would stay.[3] For several weeks, Nuit Debout—which means "arise at night," and which has been likened to the Occupy movement and the *indignados* in Spain—occupied the square, held general assemblies, set up bookstores and nursing stations and child care services.[4]

Each morning police would clear out the camp, and each evening the tents would reappear. As nocturnal gatherings and direct confrontations with riot police spread across the country, cropping up in cities such as Toulouse, Nantes, and Lyon, it seemed like militancy was finally back in the streets of France after several years of retreat.[5] Taking up a "convergence of struggles" in a manner reminiscent of EuroMayDay and the movement of the precarious, Nuit Debout declared itself to be "Against the Labour Law and its world," developing a totalizing critique that called for nothing less than *la fin du monde* (the end of the world).[6] The horizon of this critique was summed up in a piece of graffiti that appeared on the walls of the Faculty of Nanterre during the mobilization against the Labour Law: "another end of the world is possible." Its sentiment marks a departure from the particular brand of optimism offered by the anti-globalization movement, whose slogan was "another world is possible." The enigmatic graffiti certainly conjures a vision removed from the promise of a beach beneath the paving stones.

After an initial burst of momentum, however, Nuit Debout quickly confronted a series of impasses. Protestors were split on questions of violence, the relationship to the police, and the

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[3] At the meeting, participants declared that, after the demonstration on March 31, "We don't go home!" For an account of the meeting and the initial organization of the occupation, see Denis Godard, "Up All Night," *Jacobin*, May 3, 2016, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/05/nuit-debout-labor-law-valls-france-paris/; and Stathis Kouvelakis, "Overturning a World: An Interview with Frédéric Lordon," *Jacobin*, May 4, 2016, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/05/nuit-debout-france-el-khomri-labor-law/.

[4] See Angelique Chrisafis, "Nuit Debout Protesters Occupy French Cities in Revolutionary Call for Change," *The Guardian*, April 8, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/08/nuit-debout-protesters-occupy-french-cities-in-a-revolutionary-call-for-change.

[5] The last major uprising the country had seen was in 2010, during anti-austerity mobilizations across France.

[6] For an account of the struggles in France that unfolded over those four months in 2016 as a movement not only against the labour law but also "against its world," see Asja Crise, "République Absurd: Récit of the Spring 2016 Uprising," *Endnotes*, 2016, https://endnotes.org.uk/other_texts/en/asja-crise-republique-absurd.

issue of "direct democracy."[7] Some participants wanted to work with police to secure a better seat at the table of government. Others proposed drafting a new constitution. Discussion focused on "a desire to affirm, by anonymous citizens, the right to publicly speak, and convey, more or less explicitly, a demand for immediate democracy."[8] It became increasingly difficult for the demonstrators to gain ground. Militants left to take the fight to the police. Members of the political right turned up demanding the freedom to speak in the name of democracy. Meanwhile, then-French Prime Minster Manuel Valls declared he would force through the controversial legislation by invoking France's "Article 49.3," which allows the government to bypass parliament. As a national election loomed, the movement faltered. The abstracted voice of the citizen-subject had offered protestors an affirmative image of their identity as a collective. Nuit Debout's inability to overcome the limits of direct democracy without decomposing into factions reflects the ongoing decline of the modern citizen-subject and its political project of collective self-affirmation. What goes up, as the saying goes, must come down.

This dissertation has argued that the language of precarity describes this descent and the experience of living through it, and that its cultural history relates a growing awareness of the ground rushing up from somewhere below. It has thus offered a theory of the present as decline, but also a model through which to understand events like those that unfolded in France during the spring of 2016. My central claims are these: a set of circumstances existed for some time, during a period in which capital was expanding—a period we might call simply capitalist modernity—and in which particular political and aesthetic possibilities and practices existed in forms appropriate to expansion and growth. But those conditions no longer obtain, no longer

[7] For a discussion of "direct democracy" and its pitfalls in the context of the Nuit Debout movement, see Léon de Mattis, "On Direct Democracy," *ediciones inéditos*, July 14, 2017, https://ediciones-ineditos.com/2017/07/14/on-direct-democracy/.

[8] de Mattis, "On Direct Democracy."

adequately describe the situation at hand, and thus new political and aesthetic possibilities and practices must emerge in this transition. I have found, however, that a sense of foreclosure continues to weigh heavily over the culture of the present, and I am reminded of Antonio Gramsci's lament that "the old is dying and the new cannot be born."[9] In the chapters of this dissertation, I have charted a movement from integration to expulsion in terms of a secular decline in capital accumulation that becomes a kind of social and political *rigor mortis*, like mud baking dry in the sun. On the one hand, postwar American culture expresses this sense of exhaustion as early as the 1950s. On the other, the novels, poems, films and television series that I study encounter the decline of capital accumulation as an impasse, and remain stuck on the problem to this day.

Chapter One, "Spring Fever," argued that the late industrial novel anticipates this transition from integration to expulsion due to developments already unfolding in the early 1950s, particularly the automation of the labour process. I read Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* against the backdrop of rising US hegemony to argue that a breakdown in narrative form anticipates the exhaustion of twentieth-century political possibilities. In Chapter Two, "Long Hot Summer," I developed a theory of riot poetics through a study of poetry by Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka and Diane di Prima written during the tumultuous years of the late 1960s and early 1970s. I argued that poets in this moment of seasonal transition increasingly turn to direct address and apostrophe to conjure a collective subject from capitalist crisis that might weather the gathering storm. Chapter Three, "Signs of Autumn," advanced a new interpretive framework that I call the cinematics of downturn, looking at avant-garde realist films that emerge with the onset of hegemonic decline and economic

[9] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 276.

stagnation. Examining Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* and Harmony Korine's *Gummo*, I identified spatialized narratives, surplus populations, and a politics of seasonal torpor as the primary characteristics of cinematic realism for an age of value in crisis. Lastly Chapter Four, "Endless Winter," considered Ashley McKenzie's Atlantic Canadian film *Werewolf* alongside the BBC police procedural *The Fall* in order to demonstrate the global character of downturn and the transnational reverberations of American decline.

In my readings of *Gummo* and *Werewolf*, I developed a theory of the aesthetics of stagnation, and it seems reasonable to claim that post-2008 American culture has been the site of a sustained investigation into the conditions and consequences of secular stagnation. As I continue to pursue this line of inquiry into the protean relationship between capitalist crisis and contemporary culture, I plan to develop my research on American culture in an age of stagnation. Having constructed a chronological account of aesthetic engagements with rising precarity after 1945, I want to examine in greater detail the various ways in which contemporary American culture grapples with the global consequences of secular stagnation in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. The concept of secular stagnation has already inspired a growing body of work in the humanities and social sciences, from analyses of reproductive discourse in Keynesian thought and the rise of right-wing populism to the decline of global literacy rates and the contradictions of orthodox economic theory.[10] But scholarship has yet to address secular stagnation's impact on cultural production in the US, or to explore what literary texts and visual media can tell us about the changing social landscape of a stagnant global economy. *Precarity*

[10] See Sarah Brouillette, "On the African Literary Hustle," *Blind Field: A Journal of Cultural Inquiry*, August 14, 2017, https://blindfieldjournal.com/2017/08/14/on-the-african-literary-hustle/; Melinda Cooper, "Secular Stagnation: Fear of a Non-Reproductive Future," *Postmodern Culture* 27, no. 1 (2016), https://muse.jhu.edu/article/668356; Annie McClanahan, "Secular Stagnation and the Discourse of Reproductive Limit," *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Economics*, eds. Michelle Chihara and Matt Seybold (New York: Routledge, forthcoming); David Thomas, David. "The End of History, In Memoriam," *Boundary 2 Online*, February 27, 2017, http://www.boundary2.org/2017/02/david-thomas-the-end-of-history-in-memoriam/.

and the Historicity of the Present suggests that further analysis into the cultures of secular stagnation would prove a productive way to develop this line of inquiry.

Building on the analysis of American decline developed in this dissertation, I want to expand the scholarly conversation around world-systems theory and American culture. As US hegemony wanes, several critics in American studies have sought to reconceive of American literature as world literature, and to situate it in relation to the nation's shifting position in the capitalist world-system.[11] In a related move, new theories of a literary world-system have radically remapped global literary space.[12] Exemplary in this regard is the work of the Warwick Research Collective, whose collaborative study reads the modernist novel of the semi-periphery—newly industrializing countries such as Brazil, China and India—through the Marxian lens of combined and uneven development. Following their theory of a "world literary system," which posits that "world literature be conceived precisely through its mediation by and registration of the modern world-system," we might explore the ways in which American culture sheds light on a historical present defined by the long diminishment of American economic and cultural influence in the capitalist world-system.[13] While their study focuses on the modernist novel of the semi-periphery, I intend to push the theory of a cultural world-system beyond fiction to consider a diverse array of contemporary aesthetic objects from the stagnant core.

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[11] See Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell, eds. *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Jernej Habjan, "From Cultural Third-Worldism to the Literary World-System," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 15, no. 5 (2013), https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2346; and Jed Etsy, "Realism Wars." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 49, no. 2 (2016): 316-342.

[12] See Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Michael Niblett, "World Economy, World Ecology, World Literature," *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* 16, no. 1 (2012): 15-30.

[13] Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World- Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

"Accumulation of capital" has certainly meant "multiplication of the proletariat," as Marx predicted.[14] More of the world's population must sell their labour to reproduce themselves than ever before in human history. And yet despite early indications, this has not entailed an expansion of the industrial working class or the arrival on the world stage of the collective worker whose destiny it was to usher in a new world on the back of the development of the productive forces. Instead of being integrated into industrial production and concentrated into a great mass of semi-skilled factory workers, the vast majority of the world's proletarians find themselves in low-paid service work if they are included in the formal economy at all. Relatively low unemployment figures increasingly mask a growing rate at which people drop out of the labour market altogether. Meanwhile, in its scramble to secure profitability, capital accumulation has returned to forms of absolute surplus value extraction, with the rise of zero-hours contracts and the monetization of care work. Rising precarity appears in many forms, including austerity, financial crises and mounting debt, all of which can be understood as part and parcel of a slowdown in capital accumulation. Since the 2008 credit crash, productivity rates, output figures and real wages have all stagnated, and stagnant economies breed right wing populisms. A world free from the crushing weight of the value-form may seem impossibly far away, but the future for capital accumulation looks very bleak indeed.

Still, no crisis lasts forever, and if this project holds an optimistic sentiment with which to close, it is this: another end of the world *is* possible.

[14] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), 764.

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